

Vermilion Snapper, *Rhomboplites aurorubens*

Vermilion snapper occur in the Western Atlantic, from North Carolina to Rio de Janeiro. It is most abundant off the southeastern United States and in the Gulf of Campeche (Hood and Johnson 1999). The vermilion snapper is demersal, commonly found over rock, gravel, or sand bottoms near the edge of the continental and island shelves (Froese and Pauly 2003). It occurs at depths from 18 to 122 m (59 to 400 ft), but is most abundant at depths less than 76 m (250 ft). Individuals often form large schools. This fish is not believed to exhibit extensive long range or local movement (SEDAR2 2003). The maximum size of a male vermilion snapper, reported by Allen (1985), in Froese and Pauly (2003), was 60.0 cm (23.8 in) TL and 3.2 kg (7.1 lbs). Maximum reported age in the South Atlantic Bight was 14 years (Zhao et al. 1997; Potts et al. 1998b). SEDAR 2- SAR2 (2003) recommends that natural mortality (M) be defined as 0.25/yr, with a range of 0.2-0.3/yr. This species spawns in aggregations (Lindeman et al. 2000) from April through late September in the southeastern United States (Cuellar et al. 1996). Zhao et al. (1997) indicated that most spawning in the South Atlantic Bight occurs from June through August. Eggs and larvae are pelagic. Vermilion snapper are gonochorists meaning that all vermilion snapper are mature at 2 years of age and 20.0 cm (7.9 in) (SEDAR 2 2003b). Cuellar et al. (1996) collected vermilion snapper off the southeastern United States and found that all were mature. The smallest female was 16.5 cm (6.5 in) FL and the smallest male was 17.9 cm (7.1 in) FL (Cuellar et al. 1996). Zhao and McGovern (1997) reported that 100% of males that were collected after 1982 along the southeastern United States were mature at 14.0 cm (5.6 in) TL and age 1. All females collected after 1988 were mature at 18.0 cm (7.1 in) TL and age 1. This species preys on fishes, shrimp, crabs, polychaetes, and other benthic invertebrates, as well as cephalopods and planktonic organisms (Allen 1985). Sedberry and Cuellar (1993) reported that small crustaceans (especially copepods), sergestid decapods, barnacle larvae, stomatopods, and decapods dominated the diets of small (< 50 mm (2 in) SOUTH ATLANTIC SNAPPER GROUPER AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AMENDMENT 16 3-12 SL) vermilion snapper off the Southeastern United States. Larger decapods, fishes, and cephalopods are more important in the diet of larger vermilion snapper.

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