

## The Biology of Red and Gag Grouper

Both [gag](#) and [red](#) grouper are important species for North Carolina commercial and recreational fishermen. Adult gag grouper inhabit coastal waters from North Carolina to Brazil and are found in the Gulf of Mexico. Red grouper can be found as far north as Massachusetts to southeastern Brazil, including the eastern Gulf of Mexico. The average lifespan is 30 years and range in length at maturity from 49 inches (red grouper) to 58 inches (gag). Red grouper weight in at 51 pounds while gag grouper can weigh up to 81 pounds. Both begin life as females but change their sex to males as they mature. Gag grouper spawn from mid-January to early May in the South Atlantic and from late January to mid-April in the Gulf of Mexico; red grouper spawn February through June.

The upper body of a large gag grouper features dark brownish-gray coloration and is paler along the lower body with traces of dark, wavy, markings on the sides. Red grouper are characterized by a large mouth with a lower jaw protruding slightly beyond the upper jaw. The color of its head and body is dark reddish brown, shading pink or reddish along the lower portion of its body.

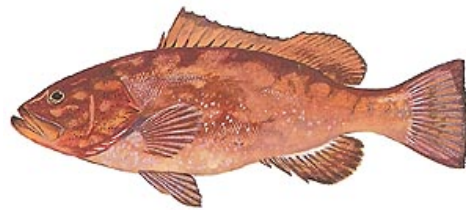
According to NOAA FishWatch, overfishing of gag grouper may be occurring in both the South Atlantic and the Gulf; however, the population of South Atlantic gag seems healthy but appears suboptimal in the Gulf. The population of Gulf red grouper appears healthy at this time while the number of red grouper in the South Atlantic remains unknown.

In July 2009, the director of the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (NCDMF) imposed a ban on the harvest of red and gag grouper from waters under the jurisdiction of NCDMF or the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council from January 1 through April 30, 2010. This ban applies to both commercial and recreational fishermen. For more information on this proclamation, go to <http://www.ncfisheries.net/procs/procs2k9/FF-48-2009.html>.

Contributed by Barry Nash



Gag Grouper



Red Grouper