

19 REPORT ON MEETING OF THE TASK GROUP ON SNAPPER FISHERIES OF THE BRAZIL-GUIANAS SHELF

Participants: J. Alio (Venezuela), M. Asano Filho (Brazil), B. Chakalall (FAO), A. Charuau (French Guiana), P. Charlier (Suriname), K. Cochrane (FAO), R. da Silva Furtado Cutrim (Brazil), A. Hackett (Guyana), L. Marcano (Venezuela), T. Phillips (CFRAMP), S. Soomai (Trinidad), Mario IJspol (Suriname). Observers (FAO): A. Booth, D. Die and J. Prado

Brief reports were presented by a participant from each coastal state on the status of fisheries for snapper in their country and the primary management issues.

Table 19.1 The incidence of legal cross-border fishing for snapper in the EEZs of the Brazil-Guianas shelf. X = fishing currently taking place; Q = requests for the right to fish in that country have been made by the Fishing Nation

Nation where fishing occurs	FISHING NATION						
	Brazil	French Guiana	Suriname	Guyana	Venezuela	Trinidad and Tobago	Others
Brazil	X			Q			
French Guiana					X		X
Suriname			X		X		X
Guyana				X	X*	Q	
Venezuela					X		
Trinidad						X	

*Venezuela-owned vessels being used by local companies.

French Guiana

At present, there are 41 vessels from Venezuela which have licences to fish for snapper in French Guiana and normally 25-26 of these are fishing at any one time. In addition, 5 licences are reserved for vessels from Barbados, but these 5 licences have never been used. A condition of the licences is that 75% of production must be landed in Cayenne. *Lutjanus purpureus* is the target species for the snapper fishery. In 1998, total landings in French Guiana were approximately 1 800 t (nominal weight). In addition, there is a trap fishery with important bycatch of *Rhomboplites aurorubens* undertaken by vessels from some French Lesser Antilles islands.

The greatest problem confronting management of the fishery is a lack of knowledge on the landings made outside French Guiana, which occur mainly in Lesser Antilles, Suriname and Venezuela. The other discrepancy is the bycatch in the shrimp fisheries, which is largely unknown. Surveys with typical shrimp trawlers gave yearly figures as high as 1.0 to 1.5 million individuals, of which 75% were discarded.

Brazil

The fishery for snapper in northern Brazil started about 10 years ago. In 1995, production was approximately 500 t but it had risen to 3 000 t by 1998. Fishing was initially only by handline, but in 1997 new vessels entered the fishery making use of traps with 8 cm square mesh panels. Genetic studies have suggested that there could be two stocks, one centred on NE Brazil and the other on northern Brazil, separated by the Amazon River. Landings from

both stocks take place in the same four cities and up until now, the stocks have not been analysed separately. It should be possible to separate them, by identifying the fishing area from which data originate. The fishery consists of Brazilian vessels, but there has been a request from Guyana-based interests to fish for snapper in Brazil.

Guyana

There were 6 vessels in the Guyana snapper fishery in the 1980s, but the number has now risen to 28. Of these, 10 vessels are Venezuelan owned, but are fishing on behalf of a local company and 18 vessels represent the Guyana fleet which has now expanded from 6. Both traps and hook and lines are used in the fishery. An upper limit of 33 vessels has been set by the government. The Trinidad and Tobago government is currently negotiating a fisheries agreement with Guyana to obtain licences for their snapper fleet of 16 vessels to fish in Guyana's EEZ. These vessels would be using traps with 2.5-inch square mesh. If an agreement can be reached, the vessels would be required to operate from a base in Guyana. A local company, Noble House Seafoods, proposed to enter into arrangement with 25 Venezuelan boat owners for these vessels to deliver fish to its new processing plant.

Suriname

The fishery for *L. purpureus* in Suriname has been in existence for many years and is undertaken by Venezuelan vessels. Initially all landings were taken back to Venezuela, but there have been on-going attempts to get more of the catch landed in Suriname. There are good data on the amount landed in Suriname, which used to be around a few hundred tonnes, reaching 500 t in the 1970s and 1500 t in 1997. An agreement between the two governments establishes the fee for licences, the local prices and puts a limit on the number of vessels allowed to fish. However, there is no control on what happens at sea, the actual fishing effort is not known and there is no data on what is sold outside Suriname. *R. aurorubens* and other non-snapper species are taken as a bycatch in this fishery.

Landings of *L. synagris* have become more important since a midwater trawl fleet began to target the species in 1993 and the yields have arisen to approximately 1 000 t per year. The fleet has two components, a Dutch fleet that targets *L. synagris* and a Korean fleet that targets *Cynoscion virescens*. There is also pressure from other fishing groups who wish to enter the fishery, but existing participants have complained of declining catches.

Trinidad

Since there is no formal sampling or data collection programme in place, there is little information on catches of snapper in Trinidad and landings are not separated by species but grouped as "snapper". Three snapper species are important in the landings: *L. purpureus*, *L. synagris* and *R. aurorubens*. They are caught by the artisanal fishery, which uses a range of gear types involving trawling, nets, handlines and pots. In addition, a multigear fleet, estimated at seven vessels, use pots to catch snappers in the shelf area off the east coast. These are industrial vessels, which have a capacity for an average of 50 traps per vessel. Research on the biology of the lane snapper was conducted by the Institute of Marine Affairs in 1987.

Venezuela

Six species of snapper are caught in Venezuela, from the Gulf of Venezuela in the west to the Atlantic Zone. There is a fleet of approximately 300 vessels of which about 150 operate in the EEZ of most countries of the region, with licences granted by the corresponding governments. Over the last 10 years, considerable order has been brought into this fishery, including the licensing of all vessels. Landings of *L. purpureus* from Venezuelan waters have ranged from 500 to 2 000 t per annum in the last decade, while landings from foreign waters are usually in the vicinity of 3 000 t. A major problem in attempts to assess the fishery and resources is that there is very little information on catches in foreign waters as only a small

fraction of these are landed in Venezuela. The biology of some species is being studied at present.

Discussion

The Task Group agreed that the fisheries for snapper in the Brazil-Guianas region were in particular need of a regional approach to management for the following reasons:

1. The extent of foreign interests in the region, with landings occurring both within the nation being fished and the port state and sometimes in third countries as well, mean that close cooperation and sharing of information on landings, catches, effort and distribution of effort are essential, if the resources and fisheries are to be assessed and monitored accurately.
2. The artisanal nature of the fisheries makes monitoring and control particularly difficult, again requiring close cooperation to ensure accuracy and completeness.
3. While the stock structure of the snapper species in the region is unknown, it is likely that stocks are separated by the major rivers, which could lead to shared stocks north of the Orinoco delta and between the Orinoco and Amazon deltas.

Such cooperation should include open and transparent sharing of all data and information on snapper fishery operations between coastal states and interested parties, as well as cooperation in scientific research, assessments, monitoring, control and surveillance of the fishery. To facilitate cooperation in monitoring, research and assessment, it was agreed that an informal Task Group should be formed. This informal Task Group could normally communicate by means of email or fax, but it should be coordinated by an appointed co-ordinator and enjoy the support of all coastal states.

It was agreed that, as a first step in regional cooperation and possibly in the formation of the Task Group, an inventory on fishing activities, available information and data currently available and being collected would be compiled by a regional *Ad hoc* Snapper Group. The inventory would consist of the following sections:

- Brief but comprehensive description of existing fisheries for snapper in each country, including discussion of current management approaches and management issues (approximately 2 pages per country).
- Outline, with references, of assessments already undertaken on snapper fisheries in the region.
- Inventory on data available in and currently being collected by each country and research on snapper currently being undertaken in each country.
- Inventory on current knowledge of the incidence of snapper in bycatch and discards of other fisheries in the region.
- Full bibliography on snapper species in the region and snapper fisheries.
- Conclusions and recommendations for future work.

Subject to approval from their relevant authorities, the following agreed to contribute to the Inventory:

Brazil	M. Asano Filho and R. da Silva Furtado Cutrim	Trinidad and Tobago	S. Soomai
French Guiana	A. Charuau	Venezuela	Asdrubal Larez (Co-ordinator), J. Alio and L. Marcano
Guyana	A. Hackett		
Suriname	M. IJspol and P. Charlier		