

Grouper (family:Epinephelidae) fishery on the Hambantota coast, Sri Lanka

A.A.S.H. Athukoorala*, S.S.K. Haputhantri, M. Jayathilaka, R. Jayawardana, S.S. Vitharana, A. Fernando, L. Ranawaka, W. Palitha and W.C.S. Perera

National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency (NARA), Crow Island, Colombo15, Sri Lanka

Grouper (Epinephelidae) are highly prioritized and prone to overfishing, due to longevity, late maturation, and spawning aggregation behaviour resulting in a high risk of extinction for several species. The present study was conducted from January to March 2020 by weekly to study the grouper landings in the Hambantota fisheries district. A total of 97 fishers were interviewed at three landing sites (Hambantota, Tangalle, and Kalamatiya) to obtain information about grouper catch, total catch, and true fishing time. The data gathered were entered into Microsoft Excel for analysis. The commonly used fishing gears were the bottom set longline and the bottom set gillnet. Nine species of groupers were recorded belonging to the genus *Cephalopholis* (*Cephalopholis formosa*, *C. sonnerati*) and *Epinephelus* (*Epinephelus bleekeri*, *E. chlorostigma*, *E. coioides*, *E. faveatus*, *E. longispinis*, *E. malabaricus*, *E. undulosus*). The highest ($p < 0.005$) average catch per unit effort was recorded in March (1.54 ± 0.62 kg/hr). In January and February average catch per unit efforts were 0.62 ± 0.11 and 0.91 ± 0.13 kg/hr. Therefore, March was recognized as the best grouper-catching month in the study period for the Hambantota district. Relatively smaller catch per unit effort values apparently indicate that the resource is currently at risk. Strengthening the catch monitoring programs and applying stronger management measures to grouper fisheries are recommended.

Keywords: catch per unit effort, catch statistics, fishers, grouper

* Corresponding author – email: sujeewahemanthi@gmail.com