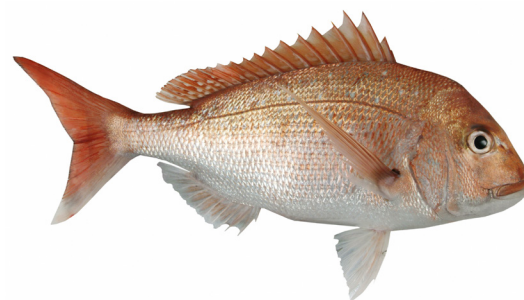




NEW INFORMATION ON THE SNAPPER 1 (SNA1) FISHERY

Reporting of undersize snapper



INTRODUCTION

Following the 2013 review of the management of SNA1, the Minister for Primary Industries, with the support of the commercial fishing industry, introduced a suite of measures to improve information gathering in SNA1. One of these measures was a requirement for commercial fishers in SNA1 to report the amount of undersize snapper that they catch and return to the sea. This is unique to SNA1 and applies to the three main commercial fishing methods; Danish seine, trawl and bottom long line.

The requirement has been in place since 1 March 2014 and a full year of compiled data is now available. This information is providing a valuable insight into the total commercial catch of snapper in SNA1.

HOW WAS THE INFORMATION COLLECTED?

Commercial fishers are required to include an estimate of their undersize snapper catch in their existing catch effort reporting documentation, using the reporting code SNX. An SNX estimate is required to be entered for every fishing event. If no undersize snapper is caught fishers are still required to include a 0 entry on their catch effort forms.

RESULTS

For the year period from 1 March 2014-28 February 2015:

- » The estimated catch of legal-sized snapper (code SNA) reported was: 4089 tonnes.
- » The estimated catch of undersize snapper (code SNX) reported was: 136 tonnes. These fish were released back to sea. The associated mortality is unknown but will vary by fishing method.
- » The overall percentage of SNX from total SNA1 catch was 3.2 percent (by weight).

Based on an estimated average weight of undersize snapper caught, it is expected that 136 tonnes constitutes around 500 000 individual fish. To provide context, the population of legal-sized snapper in SNA1 was most recently

estimated in the order of 74 000 000

fish. While the number of undersize snapper is unknown recent modelling work suggests that they may make up 40-50 percent of the total population by number. The number of undersize snapper could therefore be up to the same number as the number of legal-sized snapper.

BREAKDOWN OF UNDERSIZE SNAPPER CATCH BY FISHERY

FISHING METHOD	NO. OF VESSELS	SNA CATCH (t)	SNX CATCH (t)	PERCENTAGE SNX OF TOTAL CATCH*
Bottom Long Line	62	1681.7	21.2	1.2%
Danish seine	12	871.8	20.5	2.3%
Trawl	26	1535.5	94.3	5.8%
Totals	101	4089.0	136.0	3.2%

BREAKDOWN OF UNDERSIZE SNAPPER CATCH BY MONTH

MONTH	SNA CATCH (t)	SNX CATCH (t)	PERCENTAGE SNX OF TOTAL CATCH*
March	311.3	12.6	3.9%
April	354.8	15.1	4.1%
May	320.6	12.2	3.7%
June	284.6	11.5	3.9%
July	321.6	12.1	3.6%
August	306.5	12.8	4.0%
September	311.6	11.7	3.6%
October	407.9	10.4	2.5%
November	383.7	11.8	3.6%
December	446.9	8.9	2.0%
January	309.1	8.5	2.7%
February	330.4	8.7	2.5%
Totals	4089.0	136.0	3.2%

* Total Catch = SNA + SNX

December 2015

OTHER IMPORTANT POINTS

- » These summary statistics are based on fisher reported estimations, supported by some verification through electronic monitoring and observer coverage.
- » The total estimated legal-sized snapper catch in this period is 4089 tonnes, which is 411 lower than the Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC). A primary reason for this is because minor methods such as set net are not included. Also events using the experimental fishing method 'precision seafood harvesting' is excluded. At-sea estimates of legal catch may also be lower than the final weights of catch which are measured again once landed.
- » Spatial analysis of the data is currently being undertaken to further support management outcomes.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Why was this reporting requirement put in place?

The reporting requirement increases the information available on the amount of undersize snapper being caught and released in the SNA1 fishery.

Why don't all fishing methods have to report their undersize snapper catch?

The methods which are required to report (Danish seine, bottom long line and trawl) make up more than 98 percent of the SNA1 landed catch. Set netting is the only other relevant method. It is not included because a large number of vessels catch a proportionally very small amount of snapper (70 t out of a 4500 t TACC). The logistical challenges of implementing the requirement across this large and diverse fleet could have delayed the reporting initiative. This could be revisited in the future if needed.

Is this an ongoing requirement or was it just for one year?

The collection of information on undersize snapper catch in SNA1 has been introduced as a legislative requirement and will be ongoing. This will support greater analysis of trends over time.

Why has MPI not produced a report to the public sooner?

It was considered important to have a full year of compiled data available before reporting back to stakeholders and the public. MPI wanted to present a full picture which captured any seasonal effects and prevented undue inferences being drawn.

Is 136 tonnes/500 000 fish a good result?

This is the first year of reporting undersize snapper caught and returned in the SNA1 commercial fishery. The data is most valuable as a baseline from which to gauge the performance of the fishery in relation to undersize catch. This can be used to drive continuous improvement in fishing practices, a common goal held by all sectors.

What will the data be used for?

The data will provide a basis for considering one aspect of how to improve productivity from the SNA1 fishery. It will help to drive the development of innovations in commercial fishing and support discussions about how to reduce overall mortality across all sectors. It will also support the work of the SNA1 Strategy Group, a collaborative group established by the Minister and charged with developing an integrated, ongoing management strategy for the SNA1 fishery.

Does this new information indicate a problem with the catch of undersize snapper in the SNA1 fishery?

MPI accounts for incidental mortality, including from the catch and return of undersize snapper, by allocating an allowance for "Other Sources of Fishing-Related Mortality" (OSFRM) within the Total Allowable Catch (TAC). The total reported undersize commercial snapper catch of 136 tonnes is far less than the current 450 tonnes OSFRM allowance under the SNA1 TAC. However, that allowance also includes incidental mortality from other sectors. Both MPI and the fishing industry are committed to the continued development of fishing gear, methods and practices to reduce incidental mortality and improve the productivity of the fishery.