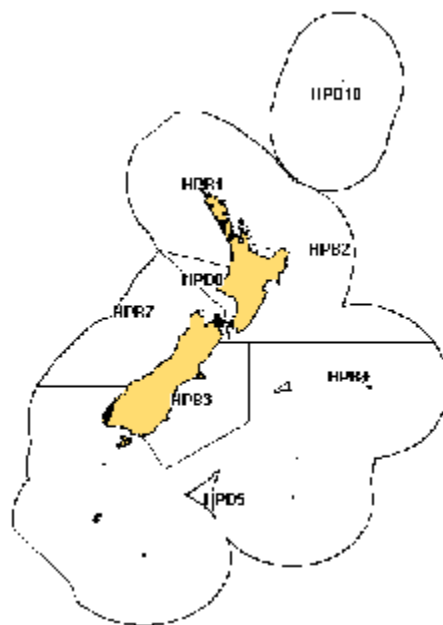


GROPER (HPB)

(*Polyprion oxygeneios*, *Polyprion americanus*)



1. FISHERY SUMMARY

(a) Commercial fisheries

Both groper species, *Polyprion oxygeneios* (hapuku) and *P. americanus* (bass), occur in shelf and slope waters of the New Zealand mainland and offshore islands, from the Kermadecs to the Auckland Islands. The groper fishery takes both species, but in different proportions by region, depth, fishing method and season, and these have changed over time. Reported catches generally do not distinguish between species, and published data combine them. In earlier years, bluenose (*Hyperoglyphe antarctica*) was sometimes also combined with groper.

The first recorded landings of about 1500 t in 1936 were generally typical of the range of catches (1000–2000 t) from then until 1978. After a decrease during the war years when effort was restricted, landings in the total fishery slowly declined from almost 2000 t in 1949 to about 1300 t in the mid 1970s. They then increased sharply to 2700 t in 1983–84 (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: Reported total New Zealand landings (t) of groper from 1948 to 1983.

Year	Landings	Year	Landings	Year	Landings	Year	Landings
1948	1665	1957	1368	1966	1222	1975	1422
1949	1969	1958	1532	1967	1314	1976	1512
1950	1709	1959	1310	1968	1073	1977	1942
1951	1396	1960	1223	1969	1122	1978	1488
1952	1430	1961	1203	1970	1499	1979	2078
1953	1403	1962	1173	1971	1346	1980	2435
1954	1364	1963	1194	1972	1120	1981	2379
1955	1305	1964	1370	1973	1312	1982	2218
1956	1399	1965	1249	1974	1393	1983	2511

Reported foreign catches are included from 1974.

Source: MAF data.

The main fishery comprises a number of domestic fishers working small to medium sized vessels – longliners, setnetters and trawlers, at a variety of depths (according to method) out to 500 m (Paul, 2002a). Over 90% of early (to 1950) total groper catches were taken by longline. Trawl catches rose from 5–10% during this period to 20–30% by the late 1970s. A setnet fishery developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s, mainly at Kaikoura, taking 14% in 1983 and then subsequently declining.

From 1950 to the mid 1980s, line-fishing took 70–80% of the catch. After the introduction of the QMS, the proportion of the catch taken by lines appeared to drop.

The Cook Strait region has always supported the main groper fishery, followed by the Canterbury Bight; both show the same slow decline from 1949 to 1986 (equivalent regional data from subsequent years are not available). Northland, Bay of Plenty and Hawke Bay fisheries developed at different rates during the 1960s and 1970s. In most other areas, the groper fishery has been small and/or variable.

Landings and TACCs for all Fishstocks are given in Table 2. Total landings of groper were relatively stable throughout the mid 1990s, remaining below 1500 t until 1998–99. From 1999–00 onwards catches have generally ranged between 1500 t and 1700 t. Although the TACC in HPB 3 has been exceeded in recent years, catches have generally remained within the quotas for individual Fishstocks, and total landings have not exceeded the TACC.

For the 1991–92 fishing year the conversion factor for headed and gutted groper was increased from 1.40 to 1.45. For fish landed in this state (about 75% of the total), this will result in a reduction in removals from the stock of 3.5% for the same nominal quota.

Table 2: Reported landings (t) of groper by Fishstock from 1983–84 to 2004–05 and actual TACs (t) from 1986–87 to 2004–05.

Fishstock QMA (s)	HPB 1 1 & 9		HPB 2 2		HPB 3 3		HPB 4 4		HPB 5 5 & 6	
	Landings	TAC	Landings	TAC	Landings	TAC	Landings	TAC	Landings	TAC
1983–84*	974	–	493	–	505	–	55	–	395	–
1984–85*	642	–	388	–	418	–	52	–	228	–
1985–86*	569	–	270	–	391	–	53	–	126	–
1986–87†	238	360	179	210	260	270	42	300	131	410
1987–88†	248	388	202	219	268	286	43	315	91	414
1988–89†	231	405	187	248	259	294	49	315	70	425
1989–90†	310	465	179	263	283	318	40	322	127	430
1990–91†	350	480	225	263	311	326	77	323	120	436
1991–92†	277	480	252	263	298	326	58	323	112	446
1992–93†	375	480	273	264	299	327	68	323	128	446
1993–94†	363	480	287	264	306	330	90	323	147	446
1994–95†	334	481	259	264	274	335	149	323	161	451
1995–96†	335	481	214	264	321	335	173	323	144	451
1996–97†	331	481	234	264	301	335	131	323	149	451
1997–98†	375	481	260	266	329	335	88	323	91	451
1998–99†	433	481	256	266	348	335	121	323	97	451
1999–00†	471	481	229	266	385	335	66	323	169	451
2000–01†	450	481	220	266	381	335	45	323	188	451
2001–02†	427	481	226	266	343	335	82	323	169	451
2002–03†	442	481	273	266	350	335	79	323	212	451
2003–04†	433	481	281	266	335	335	87	323	166	451
2004–05†	433	481	263	266	371	335	147	323	208	451

	HPB 7 7		HPB 8 8		HPB 10 10		Total	
	Landings	TAC	Landings	TAC	Landings	TAC	Landings	TAC
1983–84*	174	–	46	–	0	–	2 698	–
1984–85*	207	–	33	–	0	–	2 039	–
1985–86*	199	–	25	–	0	–	1 697	–
1986–87†	149	210	35	60	0	10	1 036	1 830
1987–88†	158	215	66	76	0	10	1 076	1 923
1988–89†	132	226	39	78	1	10	968	2 001
1989–90†	119	229	43	80	0	10	1 098	2 117
1990–91†	128	235	48	80	23 #	10	1 282	2 153
1991–92†	175	235	50	80	83 #	10	1 319	2 163
1992–93†	186	236	62	80	22 #	10	1 405	2 165
1993–94†	193	236	69	80	0	10	1 455	2 167
1994–95†	192	236	68	80	0	10	1 437	2 179
1995–96†	214	236	78	80	0	10	1 479	2 179
1996–97†	186	236	71	80	15	10	1 418	2 179
1997–98†	147	236	60	80	33 #	10	1 406	2 181
1998–99†	218	236	78	80	3 #	10	1 562	2 181
1999–00†	165	236	65	80	0 #	10	1 561	2 181
2000–01†	171	236	64	80	0 #	10	1 519	2 181

Table 2: (Continued)

	HPB 7		HPB 8		HPB 10		Total	
	Landings	TAC	Landings	TAC	Landings	TAC	Landings	TAC
2001–02†	204	236	62	80	<1	10	1 514	2 181
2002–03†	233	236	72	80	0	10	1 661	2 181
2003–04†	239	236	66	80	0	10	1 607	2 181
2004–05†	240	236	80	80	0	10	1 742	2 181

* FSU data.

† QMS data.

Values in HPB 10 included catches taken under exploratory permit.

(b) Recreational fisheries

Groper are taken by handline and setline, and to a lesser extent by setnets. Recreational catch estimates from surveys undertaken in the 1990s are given in Tables 3–5.

Table 3: Estimated number of groper harvested by recreational fishers by Fishstock and survey, the corresponding estimated survey harvest and the estimated Fishstock harvest. Surveys were carried out in different years in the Ministry of Fisheries regions: South in 1991–92, Central in 1992–93 and North in 1993–94 (Teirney et al., 1997).

Fishstock	Survey	Total		Survey harvest (t)
		Number	c.v. (%)	
HPB 1	North	22 000	17	190–220
HPB 2	North	1 000	–	5–10
HPB 2	Central	10 000	37	45–85
HPB 3	Central	3 000	–	10–30
HPB 3	South	4 000	40	10–30
HPB 5	Central	7 000	36	20–40
HPB 5	South	2 000	–	5–15
HPB 7	Central	12 000	40	45–115
HPB 8	Central	1 000	–	5–10

Table 4: Results of a national diary survey of recreational fishers in 1996, indicating estimated number of groper harvested by recreational fishers by Fishstock and the corresponding harvest tonnage. The mean weights used to convert numbers to catch weight are considered the best available estimates. Estimated harvest is also presented as a range to reflect the uncertainty in the estimates (from Bradford 1998).

Fishstock	Number caught	c.v. (%)	Harvest range (t)	Point estimate (t)
HPB 1	11 000	17	40–60]	49
HPB 2	23 000	22	75–125]	100
HPB 3	4 000	–	–]	–
HPB 5	2 000	–	–]	–
HPB 7	9 000	–	–]	–
HPB 8	<500	–	–]	–

Table 5: Results of the 1999/2000 national diary survey of recreational fishers (Dec 1999 – Nov 2000). Estimated number of groper harvested by recreational fishers by Fishstock, and the corresponding harvest tonnage. Estimated harvest is presented as a range to reflect the uncertainty in the estimates (Boyd and Reilly 2002).

Fishstock	Number caught	c.v. (%)	Harvest range (t)	Point estimate (t)
HPB 1	60 000	39	209–476	342
HPB 2	56 000	33	307–608	457
HPB 3	52 000	50	97–293	195
HPB 5	6 000	70	14–80	47
HPB 7	17 000	37	79–172	125
HPB 8	2000	67	6–32	19

A key component of the estimating recreational harvest from diary surveys is determining the proportion of the population that fish. The Recreational Working Group has concluded that the methodological framework used for telephone interviews produced incorrect eligibility figures for the 1996 and previous surveys. Consequently the harvest estimates derived from these surveys are considered to be considerably underestimated and not reliable. However relative comparisons can be made between stocks within these surveys. The Recreational Working Group considered that the 2000 survey using face-to-face interviews better estimated eligibility and that the derived recreational harvest estimates are believed to be more accurate. FMA2 catches are nevertheless considered to be over-

estimate, probably because of an unrepresentative diarist sample. The 1999/2000 Harvest estimates for each Fishstock should be evaluated with reference to the coefficient of variation.

Recreational harvest appears to have exceeded the commercial catch in HPB 2.

The last nationwide recreational survey was undertaken in 2001, but the results are still under review and are not currently available.

(c) **Maori customary fisheries**

Groper (hapuku and bass) were certainly taken by early Maori, and would have been available in greater numbers at shallower depths than is the case at present. Traditional groper grounds are known in several regions. Quantitative information on the current level of Maori customary catch is not available.

(d) **Illegal catch**

Quantitative information on the level of illegal catch is not available.

(e) **Other sources of mortality**

None are apparent.

2. BIOLOGY

Both hapuku and bass are widely distributed around New Zealand, generally over rough ground from the central shelf (about 100 m) to the shelf edge and down the upper slope. Their lower limits are ill-defined, but hapuku extends to at least 300 m and bass to 500 m.

Polyprion oxygeneios mature sexually between 10 and 13 years old and may live in excess of 60 years (Francis et al., 1999). Cook Strait groper mature over a wide size range, with 50% maturity at 80–85 cm total length (TL) for males and 85–90 cm TL for females (Paul, 2002d). Spawning occurs during winter, anecdotally earlier in the north of New Zealand than in the south, but running ripe fish are seldom caught and spawning grounds are unknown. The smallest juveniles are virtually unknown, but are mottled, pelagic and epi-pelagic, perhaps schooling in association with drifting weed.

The size range of commercially caught hapuku is 50–140 cm TL, with a broad mode between 70 and 100 cm TL. Bass are slightly larger at 60–150 cm TL, with a mode at 80–110 cm TL, but much bulkier and heavier at equivalent lengths.

There appear to be some regional differences in the size structure of populations. Trawl-caught hapuku on the Stewart-Snares Shelf are mainly 50–80 cm, modal length 60 cm, and therefore juveniles. Trawl-caught hapuku on the Chatham Rise are slightly larger, 50–100 cm, modal length 70 cm, with those on the shelf around the islands having their main mode at 60–75 cm; most of these fish are also juveniles. These offshore regions may be important nurseries.

Both groper species are assumed to be long-lived. Natural mortality in the past was assumed to be 0.2. However, a study of a South American (Juan Fernandez) population suggested that it may be lower (0.13–0.16) (Pavez and Oyarzun, 1985). Furthermore, preliminary unvalidated aging in New Zealand has indicated that maximum age may be greater than 40 years, and that *M* may be 0.1 or less (Francis et al., 1999). This value of *M* will be retained until clearer information becomes available from aging.

Migration patterns are also little known, but are probably related to spawning. Tagging of mostly immature fish in Cook Strait has shown a high level of local returns, but about 5% of these fish have moved up to 160 km north and south. Other information is largely anecdotal and speculative. It is known that good fishing grounds, particularly pinnacles and reefs or ledges, can be quickly fished out and take some time to recover, suggesting a high level of residency (except, perhaps, for the spawning

season). On the other hand, trawlers sometimes catch groper on the flat and clear seafloor, and it is not known whether this represents their normal habitat, whether they are simply dispersing by travelling from one rough ground to another, or whether they are on a purposeful spawning migration.

Groper prey on a wide variety of fish and invertebrates, including red cod, tarakihi, blue cod, hoki and squid. In Cook Strait, they are preyed upon by sperm whales, although probably neither heavily nor selectively.

Biological parameters relevant to stock assessment are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Estimates of biological parameters of groper.

Fishstock	Estimate	Source
1. Natural mortality (M)		
All	M = 0.1	Francis (1999)
2. Weight = a (length)^b (Weight in g, length in cm fork length)		
Both sexes combined		
BAS 1	a = 0.2734 b = 2.382	Johnston (1993)
HAP 1	a = 0.0142 b = 3.003	Johnston (1993)
HAP 2	a = 0.0242 b = 2.867	Johnston (1993)
HAP 7, 8	a = 0.01423 b = 2.998	Johnston (1983)

(HAP = hapuku, BAS = bass groper)

3. STOCKS AND AREAS

Current stock boundaries are based on QMAs and do not reflect natural stock boundaries. Existing data cannot describe the stock structure of New Zealand groper (Paul, 2002b). Electrophoretic studies suggest that separate stocks of hapuku could occur. However, the genetic heterogeneity of Cook Strait hapuku, seasonal movements of hapuku through this area, moderately long-distance movements of some tagged hapuku, the presence of both species on open ground and the eventual recovery of heavily exploited reefs, suggest that either each stock is moderately mobile or that there is essentially only one stock (of each species) with some small geographic or temporal genetic differences.

Tagging studies reveal considerable mixing of hapuku between Otago, South Canterbury and Cook Strait. Fishstock boundaries in Cook Strait separate Cook Strait hapuku into three separate "stocks" (HPB 2, HPB 7, and HPB 8), none of which include Otago-Canterbury fish (HPB 3). Current Fishstock boundaries appear inappropriate for the management of Cook Strait and South Island hapuku.

4. STOCK ASSESSMENT

Yield estimates for HPB 4 and HPB 5 have been removed because the previous method used is now considered obsolete. The yield estimates for the other Fishstocks have been revised based on a revision of the estimate of M.

(a) Estimates of fishery parameters and abundance

Estimates of fishery parameters and abundance are not available. Paul (2002c) found that CPUE indices could not be developed for hapuka and bass either separately or in combination.

(b) Biomass estimates

Estimates of current and reference biomass are not available.

(c) Estimation of Maximum Constant Yield (MCY)**(i) North and South Islands (all areas except HPB 4 and HPB 5)**

MCY was estimated using the equation $MCY = cY_{av}$ (Method 4). Y_{av} was the average of domestic and foreign landings for the period 1936–1986. The domestic catches for 1936–78 were fairly stable, with the decrease during the early 1940s being compensated for by the post-war rise to the 1949 peak. The foreign landings recorded for 1974–86 were less stable and undoubtedly under-reported, but are sufficiently large to require inclusion. No consistent change in effort for the domestic fleet, apart from the war and post-war effect, is known. The foreign fleet effort has varied but the extent of this variation is unknown. The mean of this catch series is 1474 t. The value of $c = 0.8$ used in previous assessments is changed to 0.9 in view of the lower M value now adopted.

$$MCY = 0.9 * 1474 \text{ t} = 1327 \text{ t (rounded to 1330 t)}$$

The level of risk to the stock of harvesting at the estimated MCY value cannot be determined.

(ii) Chatham Rise (HPB 4) and Subantarctic (HPB5)

Because the fisheries have been largely unexploited, MCY cannot be estimated.

(d) Estimation of Current Annual Yield (CAY)

Current biomass cannot be estimated, so CAY cannot be determined.

Yield estimates are summarised in Table 7.

Table 7: Yield estimates (t).

Parameter	Fishstock	Estimate
MCY	All except HPB 4 and HPB 5	1330
	HPB 4	Cannot be determined
	HPB 5	Cannot be determined
	Total	Cannot be determined
CAY	All	Cannot be determined

(e) Other yield estimates and stock assessment results

No information is available.

(f) Other factors

Although no distinct stocks of either groper species have been identified, results from trawl surveys suggest that there are reasonably large but dispersed populations over the Stewart - Snares Shelf and the Chatham Rise. The relationship between these "offshore" and the more traditionally fished "inshore" populations is not known due to the lack of information on groper movements. Little is known of the species composition and population structure of groper on the rough bottom shelf and ridges extending northwards from New Zealand.

The relative quantity of groper taken as target and non-target catch has not been investigated, but is likely to have varied both spatially and temporally. Groper have been taken by the foreign licensed, chartered and New Zealand-owned trawlers working offshore grounds; although regarded as a small bycatch they were not accurately reported before 1986. The MCY may therefore be under-estimated.

There are three regions where the groper catch has been substantially lower than the TACC.

HPB 1 – Three features of the fishery appear to explain the under-catch of the TACC. (i) A considerable part of the fishing effort which had generated the high catches in the early 1980s left the fishery. (ii) The allocated quota is widely distributed in small units among fishers who appear to use only a modest proportion of it to cover bycatch. (iii) The fishers who hold larger amounts of quota generally also use only a proportion of it to land high-quality fish (in contrast to the earlier bulk landings of lower-quality fish).

HPB 4 and 5 – The original yield estimates made before the introduction of the QMS and the original TAC were based on trawl surveys, not catch histories. The TACCs for these Fishstocks can only be economically targeted around the Chatham Islands in HPB 4, and a few localities in HPB 5. Elsewhere, it is used to cover small bycatches by trawlers. A moderate quantity of quota is held, unused, by companies which would require it should they resume target fishing for ling and associated species.

5. STATUS OF THE STOCKS

No estimates of current biomass are available. An estimate of B_{av} is available for HPB 5.

Recent catches are less than the MCY estimates, are considered sustainable, and are probably at levels that will allow the stocks to move towards a size that will support the maximum sustainable yield. Current TACCs are larger than the MCY estimates and it is not known if they are sustainable or at levels that will allow the stocks to move towards a size that will support the maximum sustainable yield.

Summary of yield estimates (t), TACCs (t), and reported landings (t) of groper for the most recent fishing year.

Fishstock	QMA		MCY Estimates	2004–05 Actual TACC	2004–05 Reported Landings
HPB 1	Auckland (East, West)	1 & 9	}	{481	433
HPB 2	Central (East)	2	}	{266	263
HPB 3	South-east (Coast)	3	{1 330	1 392 {335	371
HPB 4	South-east (Chatham)	4		323	147
HPB 5	Southland, Sub-antarctic	5 & 6		451	208
HPB 7	Challenger	7	}	{236	240
HPB 8	Central (West)	8	}	{ 80	80
HPB 10	Kermadec	10		10	0
Total				2 181	1 742

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