

Subject: Don't Delist Goliath Grouper

Date: Wednesday, July 23, 2014 at 1:24:33 PM Eastern Daylight Time

From: Tomena Scholze

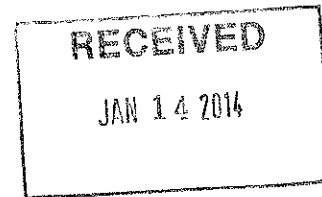
To: Gulf Council

As a marine biologist, experienced diver and angler, I oppose the possible lifting of the moratorium on Goliath grouper.

During my many dives off the Florida coast, I have only seen a Goliath grouper a once or twice and never have I seen one over ~100 lbs; they are still recovering from severe overfishing in the 20th century. These iconic marine megafauna deserve continued protection as an endangered species. They are long-lived and slow to mature, making their population vulnerable to overfishing and slow to recover. If they are not protected, the largest and most fecund Goliaths will be harvested purely for sport - their flesh discarded due to the high mercury concentrations found in large predatory fish. This would be a devastating loss to this recovering species and the divers who like to see this gentle giant on the reef. As an apex predator, Goliath groupers are a key part of reef ecosystems. Predation by an increasing number of Goliath groupers numbers is not the cause of declining spiny lobster stocks; over-harvesting is. Since it's been shown groupers are learning to eat lionfish, more Goliaths could actually benefit Florida's reefs by controlling this invasive species.

Again, please do NOT lift the moratorium on Goliath grouper - preserve them for future divers and the health of our reefs.

Tomena Scholze
PADI rescue diver
Florida Institute of Technology,
B.S. Marine Biology



January 6, 2014

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
2203 North Lois Avenue, Ste 1100
Tampa, FL 33607

Via Email to: gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org

Dear Sirs:

The Diving Equipment and Marketing Association (DEMA) is the international trade association for the recreational scuba diving and snorkeling industry. DEMA has more than 1,400 business members worldwide, and represents the interests of diving manufacturers, diver training organizations, diving-related magazines and media, diving retailers, dive-related travel and dive charter operators. DEMA's mission is to promote the sustained growth of recreational scuba diving and snorkeling while protecting the underwater environment.

I am writing to express our concerns regarding the possible lifting of the current moratorium on harvesting Goliath Grouper and to ask that the moratorium remain in place.

DEMA applauds the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council for its continuing effort to assess stocks of Goliath Grouper. DEMA supports such periodic stock assessments when they include sound scientific inquiry and input from all user groups affected by any change in the current harvesting status, and we look forward to reviewing the latest data. However, any such assessment should also include economic data on the effects of the moratorium as well as the economic impact of changing the harvesting status of the Goliath Grouper.

We believe that the current moratorium on Goliath Grouper should remain in effect; that is, harvest and possession should be prohibited.

DEMA's position is taken in recognition of several key issues:

1. The 2011 stock appraisals of Goliath Grouper made by FWC included data gaps preventing the use of detailed assessment methods, as well as the use of unverified assumptions. Without solid scientific evidence of recovery, Goliath Grouper remain vulnerable to overfishing due to (among a variety of reasons) late maturity and slow growth.
2. DEMA is also concerned with the opinions of dive-related businesses regarding the current harvesting status of goliath grouper. With FWC's previous study indicating that 49% of dive centers favor continuing protection, and only 25% of dive centers indicating that allowing the harvest of goliath grouper would help their business, DEMA strongly recommends maintaining the current prohibition on harvesting.

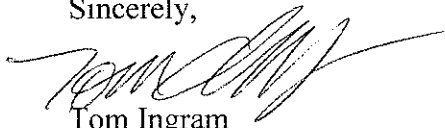


3. Over the last two decades, during which harvesting was prohibited Goliath Grouper encounters have become extremely popular and are mentioned frequently by visiting/tourist divers who greatly enjoy watching these remarkable creatures roam the ocean floor. The interest and draw the Goliath Grouper generates for this local diving community plays an integral part in generating revenue for many small Florida-based diving businesses, tax revenue for the State of Florida and many jobs. In fact, during the four month spawning season (July to October), accounting for occasional weather conditions which prevent diving and dive boats which may not run to full capacity, a single operator can generate as much as \$300,000 to \$600,000 in direct revenue, and as much as \$39,000 in tax revenue. With as few as 3,000 diver-days for each dive operator during the spawning season (when Goliath Grouper are visible in large groups) and several hundred operators around Florida, the opportunity to see Goliath Grouper can also generate several hundred full time equivalent jobs for dive operations as well as nearby restaurants, hotels and service businesses.

For these reasons we strongly recommend that the current moratorium on the harvest of Goliath grouper remain in effect at this time.

Thank you for your careful consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,



Tom Ingram
Executive Director

cc: Jessica McCawley, FWC Staff, Tallahassee
Bob L. Harris, Esq., Tallahassee
DEMA Board of Directors
Douglass Boyd, Chair of the Council: douglassboyd@yahoo.com
Kevin Anson, Vice Chair, Kevin.Anson@dcnr.alabama.gov

Subject: goliath grouper

Date: Wednesday, January 8, 2014 10:36:38 AM Eastern Standard Time

From: Al Jeffrey

To: Gulf Council

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Al Jeffrey and I own Scuba Quest, a chain of 6 dive centers in Florida. I am strongly in favor of a limited harvest (permit tags/lottery) of Goliath Grouper on our Gulf coast.

On nearly each & every dive we observe several Goliaths on the natural & artificial reefs from 30' to 100' deep.

They EAT just about everything on the reef & leave very little marine life to enjoy.

In my opinion, a limited managed harvest would help the reefs, fishermen, divers & other aquatic life establishing its life cycle on the reefs. Also, the money raised could help in reef management!

Thank you, Al Jeffrey...941-350-7156

Subject: Moratorium on Goliath Groupers

Date: Wednesday, January 8, 2014 6:39:22 PM Eastern Standard Time

From: Mike

To: Gulf Council, Jessica McCawley

To those people addressing this issue,

I am a PADI (Professional Association of Dive Instructors) professional dive instructor and I'd like to serve notice that I oppose the possible lifting of the moratorium on Goliath grouper.

Lifting the ban against hunting this slow to grow animal is a big mistake. It's only been a short number of years that any of us have been able to see these animals. I still tell friends and all of my students about how lucky we are to be able to see these animals now. While I don't remember ever hearing about them as a kid growing up in Colorado, once I started learning to scuba dive (in Colorado), one of the first things I remember learning about was how 'in the old days' you could see Goliath's on almost any dive, yet I quickly came to understand that I would probably never get to see a real one in the wild. I remember reading all about the days when Goliaths were abundant but just as the plains Buffalo of old were almost wiped out, so went the Goliath Grouper. The moratorium is what saved them and why they are 'coming' back (they're not truly back just as many other endangered animals are still endangered).

I would request that the people in charge keep the moratorium in place.

The idea that Goliaths are eating too many other fish is ludicrous. Nature will balance itself just fine, it's man that doing all the damage and depleting the fish stocks.

Goliath Groupers may very well be the one species that does save our other fish populations by learning to eat the invasive Lionfish. The lionfish, which is very well known to be a truly dangerous element to the reefs and fish populations, has done much more damage to our reefs than even man has and yet other than making it OK for the relatively small number of divers (compared to the number of people in the state) to go after and hunt this dangerous invasive fish even w/o a regular fishing license, you haven't done anything to help that problem. Yet here you are there thinking about allowing people to go hunt Goliaths which do more good (increase dive tourism, more tax money, better reputation for the state and state gov't, etc) than harm (Goliaths become scarce again or extinct, thus less dive tourism and more lionfish to destroy the juvenile fish populations, etc).

I also happen to be an Underwater Hunter Instructor, and yet I still say leave the moratorium in place. A fish this big will have higher than safe mercury levels and thus is not a good food fish. That leaves only hunting for sport and that is never a valid reason for killing an animal. If someone wants a Goliath hanging on their wall, they can have one made (many of the big fish you see hanging on walls in seafood restaurants are not real).

Goliaths are slow, big easy targets and will more often than not, try to hide in places that makes them even easier targets now that they are cornered or trapped in a wreck or under a reef ledge. Do the right thing and don't give in to fringe groups and boisterous fishing/hunting people. Continue to protect this animal that has only recently moved from something you could only read about and once become a reality for all to enjoy.

The moratorium is why they are here again! Don't change that.

Sincerely,
Mike Deffenbaugh

PADI Master Scuba Diver Trainer 51579
Merritt Island, FL
321-458-3312

Subject: FW: Jewfish

Date: Thursday, January 9, 2014 2:56:36 PM Eastern Standard Time

From: Al Jeffrey

To: Gulf Council

-----Original Message-----

From: Bradenton Scuba Quest [mailto:bradenton@scubaquestusa.com]

Sent: Thursday, January 09, 2014 9:04 AM

To: Al Jeffrey

Subject: Jewfish

Subject: I support the moratorium on goliath grouper
Date: Tuesday, January 7, 2014 3:30:14 PM Eastern Standard Time
From: George Hatcher
To: Jessica McCawley, Gulf Council

To whom it may concern,

There is no evidence that goliath grouper are responsible for the decline in lobster, snapper and grouper populations in Florida waters. These animals represent a strong and sustainable source of income for the state of Florida in the form of diving tourism. Any meat harvested from giant groupers is likely to have mercury content that exceeds human consumption standards. There is no reason to allow the killing of these giants of the deep. Please extend the moratorium indefinitely.

http://dema.org/associations/1017/files/Goliath%20Grouper%20Comments%20Questions%20and%20Answers.pdf?utm_source=Urgent+Legislative+Alert%3A+Goliath+Grouper+in+Florida+2014&utm_campaign=2014-01-03-Leg+Alert&utm_medium=email

Thank you,

George Hatcher, Florida resident and diver

Subject: Moratorium on Goliath Grouper

Date: Wednesday, January 8, 2014 10:21:56 AM Eastern Standard Time

From: Oenbrink.Regina

To: Gulf Council

As a Florida native and experienced diver I beg that you not lift the moratorium on Goliath Groupers. It is only the last couple of years that we have seen the wonderful creatures coming back in numbers. Lifting the ban would surely decimate the population of grouper that was almost eliminated years ago.

Regina A. Oenbrink

Tel: 321-637-9203 Cell: 321-482-2725

100 Delannoy Ave

Cocoa, FL 32922

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Palm Beach County
REEF RESCUE

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(561) 699-8559
Email: etichscuba@aol.com
www.reef-rescue.org

January 6, 2014

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
2203 North Lois Avenue, Ste 1100, Tampa, FL 33607
Via email: gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org

Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission
Via email: jessica.mccawley@myfwc.com

Re: Public Comment
Joint Council Committee on South Florida Management Issues and
Ad Hoc Goliath Grouper Joint Council Steering Committee
Meeting, January 7, 8 & 9, 2014, Key Largo, Florida

The purpose of this correspondence is to provide public comment regarding the management of the Goliath Grouper stock in Florida waters. For the last 20 years the Florida Goliath Grouper has been protected from take. During that period the population has recovered from the brink of extinction to levels which have prompted consideration to reopening the fishery. While the Florida population has made a limited recovery, Goliath Groupers remain absent from their historical range throughout the Caribbean.

Beginning in 2001, local divers in Palm Beach County (PBC) witnessed the reappearance of Goliath Grouper in local waters. In September 2005, divers began to observe adult Goliath Grouper congregating around offshore PBC wrecks. In that year as many as 30 adult Goliath's were counted on the M/V Castor wreck offshore of Delray Beach. The number of individuals in these PBC autumnal aggregations has continued to increase and in 2013 as many as 100 adult Goliaths were counted around the M/V Castor wreck. This last year photographers diving on the Castor captured images of eggs and milt providing evidence that these congregations are indeed spawning aggregations. In addition, there is now a resident population of Goliaths found year-round on PBC reefs.

This success story should not be construed as an argument to allow "take" of the species, rather it should provide documentation that the PBC aggregations are vital to the survival of the species and warrant the highest level of protection.

The rarity of the PBC aggregations has resulted in creating a tourist attraction for the PBC SCUBA industry. Not only do the trips generate 100's of thousands of dollars for the dive operators, ancillary tourist expenditures for food, travel and lodging add to the

Palm Beach County REEF RESCUE

south Florida economy. PBC is the only diving destination in the world where this autumn Goliath spectacle can be witnessed.

Consideration should be given to making Palm Beach County waters a Goliath Grouper World Heritage Site, rather than an easily exploited, unsustainable fishery.

Regarding the whole of the Florida Goliath population, there is insufficient data to consider the species recovered to the point of allowing “take”. Just a few of the data gaps are listed below:

- Insufficient data on genetic diversity, what populations are represented in the PBC spawning aggregations. Are these fish from the Gulf of Mexico, Atlantic or the Caribbean?
- What impact does the Lionfish “invasion” have on the survival of Goliaths?
- What impact has the BP oil spill had on the Goliaths?
- What impact has the loss of mangrove habitat had?
- What impact has the collapse of the Indian River Lagoon ecosystem had on juvenile Goliath survival?

These are all questions which must be answered before any further consideration is given to reopening any form of a Goliath Grouper fishery.

Sincerely,
Ed Tichenor, Director
Palm Beach County Reef Rescue



PADI AMERICAS and LATIN AMERICA

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Goliath Grouper Position Statement

PADI (The Professional Association of Diving Instructors) is the world's largest recreational scuba diving training organization. Around the world, PADI's 6,000 member dive stores and resorts, and 135,000 professional instructors and divemasters train over 900,000 scuba divers each year.

Florida is of utmost important to the recreational dive industry. It is the number one State both in terms of residents who scuba dive and as the destination for consumers from other States for both scuba training and dive vacations. The quality the diving experience in Florida fuels tourism and is the lynchpin for the health of all the State's scuba diving businesses and professionals.

The goliath grouper is an important and iconic species that draws a huge number of recreational divers into the dive shops and onto the dive boats. Many consumers and dive shops throughout the U.S. and Canada come to Florida specifically for the experience of diving with adult goliath groupers.

In order to quantify the importance of the goliath grouper as an eco-tourism attraction for the State of Florida, PADI surveyed all of its members (dive stores, resorts, divemasters and instructors) in the U.S. and Canada, as well as posting the survey on PADI's consumer social media sites (Facebook, Twitter and MySpace).

In less than 48 hours, 1,700 responses were received. The results of the survey indicated 1,570 (90.8%) support maintaining the status quo – no harvest & manage for high ecotourism values.

Clearly, viewing goliath grouper is an important asset for the Florida tourism industry and the overwhelming majority of dive professionals and consumers wish the most conservative action be taken in order to ensure the health of this species.

In consideration of the importance of the goliath grouper to Florida's scuba diving tourism, the PADI organization urges maintaining the current "no-take" status quo as the action most beneficial to the State of Florida.

Sincerely,

Jeff Nadler
Industry & Governmental Relations Executive

Subject: Goliath Grouper Moratorium - please do not lift
Date: Monday, January 6, 2014 12:37:42 PM Eastern Standard Time
From: susan0725@me.com
To: Gulf Council

Good afternoon,

I will not be able to attend the Meeting of the Joint Council Committee on South Florida Management Issues and Ad Hoc Goliath Grouper Joint Council Steering Committee tomorrow nor Wednesday but I urge you to PLEASE ***NOT*** LIFT THE CURRENT MORATORIUM ON HARVESTING GOLIATH GROUPEP.

Thank you.

- Susan Steinhauser
Coconut Creek, FL

Subject: Goliath Grouper

Date: Monday, January 6, 2014 2:08:03 PM Eastern Standard Time

From: jsuw@aol.com

To: Jessica McCawley, Gulf Council

Dear Sir and Madam:

Let me please register my concern about the proposal to begin allowing fishing of Goliath Grouper. These magnificent animals are still too rare a sight and too easy to predate on during their annual spawning. I think that the ban on fishing these creatures should be continued indefinitely. At a minimum, fishing at the spawning sites should not be permitted under any circumstances now or in the future.

Janet Sitchin
NAUI, PADI, GUE Scuba instructor, Avid scuba diver, and concerned citizen
5337 NW 113th PL
Doral, FL 33178

January 6, 2014

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
2203 North Lois Avenue, Ste 1100
Tampa, FL 33607

Via Email to: gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org

Dear Sirs:

The Diving Equipment and Marketing Association (DEMA) is the international trade association for the recreational scuba diving and snorkeling industry. DEMA has more than 1,400 business members worldwide, and represents the interests of diving manufacturers, diver training organizations, diving-related magazines and media, diving retailers, dive-related travel and dive charter operators. DEMA's mission is to promote the sustained growth of recreational scuba diving and snorkeling while protecting the underwater environment.

I am writing to express our concerns regarding the possible lifting of the current moratorium on harvesting Goliath Grouper and to ask that the moratorium remain in place.

DEMA applauds the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council for its continuing effort to assess stocks of Goliath Grouper. DEMA supports such periodic stock assessments when they include sound scientific inquiry and input from all user groups affected by any change in the current harvesting status, and we look forward to reviewing the latest data. However, any such assessment should also include economic data on the effects of the moratorium as well as the economic impact of changing the harvesting status of the Goliath Grouper.

We believe that the current moratorium on Goliath Grouper should remain in effect; that is, harvest and possession should be prohibited.

DEMA's position is taken in recognition of several key issues:

1. The 2011 stock appraisals of Goliath Grouper made by FWC included data gaps preventing the use of detailed assessment methods, as well as the use of unverified assumptions. Without solid scientific evidence of recovery, Goliath Grouper remain vulnerable to overfishing due to (among a variety of reasons) late maturity and slow growth.
2. DEMA is also concerned with the opinions of dive-related businesses regarding the current harvesting status of goliath grouper. With FWC's previous study indicating that 49% of dive centers favor continuing protection, and only 25% of dive centers indicating that allowing the harvest of goliath grouper would help their business, DEMA strongly recommends maintaining the current prohibition on harvesting.

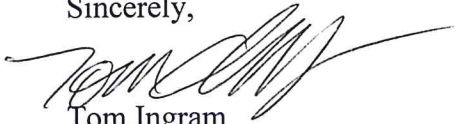


3. Over the last two decades, during which harvesting was prohibited Goliath Grouper encounters have become extremely popular and are mentioned frequently by visiting/tourist divers who greatly enjoy watching these remarkable creatures roam the ocean floor. The interest and draw the Goliath Grouper generates for this local diving community plays an integral part in generating revenue for many small Florida-based diving businesses, tax revenue for the State of Florida and many jobs. In fact, during the four month spawning season (July to October), accounting for occasional weather conditions which prevent diving and dive boats which may not run to full capacity, a single operator can generate as much as \$300,000 to \$600,000 in direct revenue, and as much as \$39,000 in tax revenue. With as few as 3,000 diver-days for each dive operator during the spawning season (when Goliath Grouper are visible in large groups) and several hundred operators around Florida, the opportunity to see Goliath Grouper can also generate several hundred full time equivalent jobs for dive operations as well as nearby restaurants, hotels and service businesses.

For these reasons we strongly recommend that the current moratorium on the harvest of Goliath grouper remain in effect at this time.

Thank you for your careful consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,



Tom Ingram
Executive Director

cc: Jessica McCawley, FWC Staff, Tallahassee
Bob L. Harris, Esq., Tallahassee
DEMA Board of Directors
Douglass Boyd, Chair of the Council: douglassboyd@yahoo.com
Kevin Anson, Vice Chair, Kevin.Anson@dcnr.alabama.gov

Subject: Re: Public Comment for the Goliath Grouper Joint Council Steering Committee meeting
Date: Monday, January 6, 2014 10:35:29 PM Eastern Standard Time
From: Angela Smith
To: Gulf Council

Dear Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

I would like to submit a public comment for the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils and the Ad Hoc Goliath Grouper Joint Council Steering Committee meetings starting tomorrow in Key Largo.

I work with a number of nonprofit groups and scuba diving organizations in South Florida. Many of us including myself, strongly believe that the state needs to keep the current moratorium on the harvest of the Goliath Grouper.

Goliath Groupers pose no threat to the lobster, snapper and other grouper species populations and create much needed revenue streams for dive operators in South Florida who run spawning aggregation dive trips during what would usually be their down season in July through October.

It also appears that the Goliath Grouper are potential predators of the invasive Indo-Pacific Red Lionfish.

Assessment for the stock of Goliath Grouper remains difficult and given the animal's vulnerability to over harvesting due to its biology and behavior, it seems prudent to continue the moratorium.

Diving eco-tourism is more sustainable than the harvest of the Goliath Grouper. One summer spawning period could be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars to local dive operators and the South Florida economy.

Thanks very much for your consideration for keeping the moratorium on Goliath Groupers in place.

All the Best,
Angela Smith

Shark Savers/WildAid - Fundraising Event Organizer
South Florida Underwater Photography Society - Board of Directors
Sea Turtle Oversight Protection (STOP) - FWC Marine Turtle Rescue Permit Holder
Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative (SEFCRI) - NGO Working Group Member

Angela Smith
Fundraising Event Organizer
[SHARK SAVERS/WildAid](#)
Ft. Lauderdale, FL
angelasmith@rcn.com
(954) 789 0762 (Mobile)

Subject: Goliath Grouper Protection

Date: Tuesday, January 7, 2014 8:41:13 AM Eastern Standard Time

From: Jeff Trotta

To: Gulf Council

I have been a south Florida SCUBA diver since 1961, and I still dive on a regular basis. Here are a few observations that might be of some interest to you, in relation to the proposal of opening up the "taking" of goliath groupers in the future.

- 1) I have not seen any credible research that states the population of this species has rebounded to the maximum carrying capacity of the current marine ecosystem in Florida. I would posit, if a season is to be opened on these fish, more credible studies must be done before that decision is made. Only after the population stabilizes, should the process of management of the taking of these fish then be considered. We almost lost them once due to overharvesting; there should be no rush to repeat that mistake again.
- 2) The amount of money generated by sport divers, who desire to see these animals, is no doubt substantial. I personally dive very frequently with goliath groupers during their spawning aggregations off Palm Beach County, Florida. The dives cost me about \$100 for two tanks, breathing gas about \$20, dive boat crew tip another \$20, or \$140 minimum per two tank dive. I will not bother to factor fuel and transportation expenses which are quite high, since I drive from Fort Lauderdale to Jupiter to do these dives. Also not factored are dive equipment and food expenses. Conservatively, I do at least 20 dives a year that focus solely on goliath groupers. This totals approximately \$2,800. I have been on this same pattern for at least 15 years which equals \$42,000, plus Florida state sales tax of \$2,520. This figure does not include the fifty plus dives I do each year during the non - spawning months, when seeing goliath groupers is an important part of the reason to dive in south Florida.

As an aside, I bring people to dive with goliath groupers when they are not spawning. Last year I brought my great nephew from Arkansas, two marine scientists from Europe, and a diver from the United Kingdom to see them over several days of diving. Goliath groupers are one of the three iconic Palm Beach species most divers want to see. The other two groups are sharks and sea turtles.

- 3) The goliath grouper's partial recovery from the brink of extinction has been one of this nation's and particularly one of Florida's greatest conservation achievements. Looking back to the 1960s I could see "jewfish" even in shallow dive sites close to public beaches. By the 1970s I watched as their population plummeted to a point where seeing even one of these fish a year was a treat. In the 1980s I only saw one during the entire decade. Moving forward into the 1990s after protection, they began to make a comeback. In the 2000s their number began to increase slowly. Starting about 2010 I began see them with some consistency. While I still do not observe them in great numbers, they are viewable on some dives at certain locations. This is a huge improvement. I believe this change of events is due to the forward looking employees in the state of Florida and the United States governments, who had the foresight, courage and intelligence to recognize the possibility of this fish's demise, and took the appropriate and considered steps to keep this magnificent animal from vanishing from the earth. Please do not let this situation revert to its former state. Please continue studying the goliath groupers, and most importantly, keep goliath groupers fully protected, as they are

now.

Thank you for your consideration,

Jeffery Trotta

Subject: RE: Goliath Grouper Moratorium

Date: Tuesday, January 7, 2014 9:56:22 AM Eastern Standard Time

From: Speed, Welmon V. (KSC-GPL10)

To: Gulf Council

Please maintain the moratorium on this wonderful animal. I have been diving for over 15 years and am still amazed when I see this specimen.

Blessings and Prosperity to You and Yours in the coming year.



Subject: Moratorium on the harvest of Goliath Groupers

Date: Tuesday, January 7, 2014 10:35:32 AM Eastern Standard Time

From: dwhuthwa@rockwellcollins.com

To: Gulf Council

To Whom it May Concern:

I would like to voice my opinion about the upcoming discussion regarding the possible lifting of the present ban on the harvesting of Goliath Groupers. I would like to ask that the regulatory agencies keep the present moratorium in place. Even though this ban has been in place since the 90s, the species has not become a nuisance or, by any means, prolific, in Florida waters. I've been diving the Florida Keys, from Key Largo to Key West, for over 10 years and in all of that time, I have only seen two of these creatures in the wild. They are definitely not one of the more abundant species in the Keys. Some of the arguments for lifting the ban have been proven false (predatory influence on other harvested species, sustainability of harvesting vs tourism, etc.) and the majority of the diving industry in the Keys favors keeping the ban in place. The diving industry appears to profit more from the display of these majestic creatures in the wild than from removing them. It appears that the biggest concern seems to focus on depleted or decreasing fishery stock but this has been documented to stem from over fishing rather than from the predatory action of the Goliath Grouper or any other fish for that matter. It has also been proven that the mercury levels in the Goliath Grouper are at dangerously high levels; too high for human consumption, so any harvesting of this magnificent, slow growing and still sparsely populated animal, will be simply for sport. I'd much rather see these creatures swimming around the wrecks off the Florida coast than mounted on a wall in a restaurant, bar or private home in the Keys. There are plenty of other game fish to go after that are much more sustainable.

I respectfully request that the law for the moratorium on the harvesting of the Goliath Grouper be maintained.

Sincerely,

Daniel W. Huthwaite
PSA Master Scuba Diver
Great Falls, VA

Subject: Goliath Grouper

Date: Friday, January 3, 2014 7:00:19 PM Eastern Standard Time

From: sean@rhategan.com

To: Gulf Council

As a dive operator it would be a shame to see our local friendly grouper gone and on the dinner table. This would be like spearing your pet and eating it - just because you can.

Sean Rhategan
PADI IDCS 68143

Subject: Goliath Grouper

Date: Friday, January 3, 2014 8:30:40 PM Eastern Standard Time

From: Alan

To: Gulf Council

CC: Jessica McCawley

Good evening,

I understand that there is a meeting coming up in reference to lifting the ban on hunting or fishing for the above... and further that dive industry groups such as DEMA oppose the lifting of the moratorium. As an avid boater, fisherman, diver and spear fisherman in Florida, I must respectfully disagree with DEMA on this issue. I have witnessed fellow divers nearly seriously injured or even killed as some of the larger fish attempted to take Black or Gag grouper from their spear gun, stringer or both. As with all interactive, predatory creatures which are completely protected, they have completely lost their fear of man (or woman).

Secondly I would point out that when we had that cold winter in Florida a few years back, the following spiny lobster season in the keys (off Marathon) where I dive was exceptional even though it had been in decline for over 5 years. One thing that my friends and I noticed was the absence of juvenile Goliath Grouper on the Gulf side where we snorkel for the bugs. Unscientific as it may be, the observation is accurate as is the fact that up until that cold year we saw juvenile GGs on almost every spot (small coral area, structure etc... of which we have hundreds). This observation causes me to think that the DEMA position may be a somewhat narrow view of the subject. From a purely economic standpoint, we should not fail to factor in things like the impact a large predatory species has on other equally viable or even more economically substantial resource(s).

In closing, I would like to point out that history shows that protecting large predatory species such as the Alligator cannot be sustained indefinitely. Regardless if this council decides to act or not someone eventually will. In my opinion, some limited management approach will eventually be enacted to cull both the adult and juvenile population of the Goliath Grouper to, the benefit of all. Why wait? Good luck in your deliberations.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Alan Buchanan

Private Investigator

Detective Online, Inc.

(813)814-0808 - phone

(813)814-0708 - fax

ab@detectiveonline.com

Subject: Status of Goliath Grouper

Date: Saturday, January 4, 2014 10:55:04 AM Eastern Standard Time

From: Ann Pennywitt

To: Gulf Council

Consideration of revoking the current status of this marine inhabitant is going to cost Florida millions of dollars in tourism revenue. It is one of the major draws to the Florida Keys for divers. Are you guys really willing to have divers head back to the Bahamas to view these creatures?

Decimate this population AGAIN, and we will continue to see decline of the underwater ecosystem. I have lived in SE Asian countries where hardly anything is left underwater-dive tourism stops and fishermen are without a profession.

Ann P

Subject: (none)

Date: Saturday, January 4, 2014 12:05:27 PM Eastern Standard Time

From: Carol Schurtz

To: Gulf Council

The fishing ban on Goliath Groupers has been successful

And to recend it will send their numbers plummeting again. Experience

Has proven without protection the fisherman will decimltate any unprotected species. The lionfish invasion is threatening every species in this area please please please do not lift the ban on the Goliath grouper!

Carol Schurtz

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HAPPY BUBBLES, CAROL

Subject: Goliath Grouper - oppose ending the moratorium o the East Coast of Florida

Date: Saturday, January 4, 2014 2:32:07 PM Eastern Standard Time

From: Force-E Scuba - Skip

To: Gulf Council, Jessica McCawley

East Coast Goliath Grouper aggregate around artificial reefs and large reef structures. These fish are easy to find and will be wiped out in less than one season.

It has taken decades to return these giant Florida natives to sustainable numbers. A live grouper has much more economic value to the State than a couple of hundred pounds of wormy fillets.

Gerald Commagere
6542 Contempo Lane
Boca Raton FL 33433

Subject: Lifting Ban on Goliath Grouper

Date: Monday, January 6, 2014 9:18:30 AM Eastern Standard Time

From: scott ames

To: Gulf Council

CC: Jessica McCawley

To Whom it may concern;

I am in favor of lifting the ban on Goliath Grouper. I do feel, despite what other parties may think, this population of fish are reducing the population of snapper and other game fish on our reefs.

Thank you.

Scott Ames naui # 55141