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To: Ryan Rindone <ryan.rindone@gulfcouncil.org>; Luiz Barbieri (luiz.barbieri@myfwc.com) <luiz.barbieri@myfwc.com>

Subject: Tilefish

Hello Gentlemen,

I was listening to the SSC discussion on tilefish this morning (8-10) and I emailed Ryan to see if I could weigh in with some comments, and he said yes. I hope this email might be passed to all members of the SSC.

I have some comments regarding tilefish on both the commercial and recreational harvest side.

On the commercial side:

I believe it was 2002 at a Council meeting in Sarasota Florida with Mr. Roy Williams as Council Chair that the tilefish quota was established. That lumped blueline and golden tiles together into one complex. As was mentioned today, these 2 fishes are part of the complex but live in separate areas. I catch blueline, or as we call them, gray tiles as shallow as 400 feet of water, generally on hard substrate bottom in the Eastern GOM. They like the harder bottom. The goldens like sloping bottom, deeper water and mud/sand habitat, generally beyond 700 feet out to 1200. They burrow into the bottom and dig holes. Longlining and drift fishing by vertical line commercial fishers is the only way to catch these fish as they are opportune fish waiting for something to drift by. The bluelines will aggregate around coral outcroppings.

Several longline vessels in 2000-2003 out of Madeira beach started targeting golden tiles up in the DeSoto Canyon. This was a period of time when red grouper harvests were very good but the industry was seeing a quota closure, so fishers switched over to target golden tilefish. I watched several boats unload 10-15,000 pounds of goldens per trip at Madeira Beach Seafood during that period of time. That was a very chaotic time in the commercial fishery as we saw three years straight of an early season closure of the grouper fishery which brought about discussions of a possible

buyout program for vessels and then eventually, an IFQ program.

What was overlooked in this "lumping together" of the tilefish complex, was the overall abundance of the blueline, or gray tilefish. I have been fishing for 38 years, and while gray tilefish are tremendous table fare, they were never desirable at the market. In the 1990's we never really received anything more than 1.00 a pound ex-vessel price for them. The yield on a gray tile is very poor, they have a set of pinbones which run the entire length of their fillet which cause the fillet to basically be cut in half longitudinally.

Because the ex-vessel price has historically been so low on the blueline tiles, many commercial fishermen used to cut them up and use them for bait before it was illegal to use reef fish for bait. 30 years ago, I think I got about .70 cents a pound for grays over 7 pounds.

Today, with the IFQ program in place, fishers are paying about 1.25 a pound for a lease on tilefish, regardless of species. So, if you look at commercial tilefish landings, they will likely be majority golden tiles with a few bluelines. No one is going to lease several thousands of pounds of tilefish quota at 1.25 a pound to catch a fish worth maybe 2.00,

Recreational landings-

What the Council and the SSC members need to recognize is that this deep dropping technique along the Western Coast of Florida is more widespread than you think. Look at the results of last weekend's Sarasota Slam tournament. 2 warsaw grouper were landed, one 320 pounds, one at 400 pounds. I believe I read that 1500 people a day are moving to Florida. Look at the wait times now for builds on new boats. Yellowfin, Freeman and Invincible, just to name a few, are on a 4 year wait. Used boat prices are as sky high as are homes in Florida. I run a lot of these private boats for clients, if you have a 36 yellowfin, or a 42 Freeman, you have a 10-15,000 dollar electronics package. Now you have companies out there like Strikeline or C-Mor offering up side scan sonar imaging to customers that buy a chip. Recreational anglers now get a commercial fishing history to accountants, lawyers and bankers that pay the 400 bucks for the chip.

I don't know about the rest of the Gulf, but here out of SWFL, we have a large number of boats that are now deep dropping. And not all are private boats that only tie up behind their houses, several come through the ramp process. Especially at Punta Rassa.

20 years ago, no one, except a few of us knew Pulley Ridge, prior it to being closed.. We called it the Cabbage Patch commercial fishing. Now I have 30 year olds telling me they have Pulley Ridge "dialed in" God bless ya. They do catch a lot of blueline tilefish.

You can go to Facebook- Florida Deep Drop Fishing, they have a page. This type of fishing is becoming more popular because there are no seasonal or size limit closures and people want to be able to keep and cook their catch. I love the 30 year olds that catch a fish on that site and say I checked that off my bucketlist. Guess I'm falling behind. I didn't have a 700,000 dollar boat when I was 30 years old.

Regardless, the fact of the matter is that blueline and golden tile landings by the recreational sector

are expanding in my region. I don't know how you capture that in landings data but I see it first hand. I might be anecdotal but I see what I see and I see alot more than the intercepts at the ramps.

Regards

Capt. Eric Schmidt