

Review of: "Estimates of Atlantic Goliath Grouper (*Epinephelus Itajara*) Bycatch Mortality in Commercial Fisheries of the Southeastern Us From 2002 to 2022"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this manuscript. The presented data is of significant importance, shedding light on the alarming impact of bycatch on species recovery and survival. This is particularly critical given the fishing practices in the area, which are emblematic of global fishing challenges. However, several adjustments are necessary prior to publication to address potential copyright issues, particularly regarding the use of images. While the authors may have authorization to use the images at the beginning of the manuscript, it's essential to ensure compliance with journal embargo policies, especially concerning figures sourced from other publications. Therefore, I recommend creating new figures, explicitly attributing their basis to prior works. Addressing this issue is paramount before publication.

Furthermore, the paper's estimates appear speculative, potentially undermining the strength of the presented data. Many conclusions rely on limited data, leading to uncertainty. However, the manuscript still contains ample robust data, particularly regarding barotrauma as a leading cause of mortality, with depth correlating with mortality rates. Rather than including uncertain estimates, I suggest focusing on statistically sound data and introducing a new section addressing the challenges posed by insufficient data. For instance, highlighting the absence of capture depth data for a significant portion of individuals underscores the need for improved data collection and management. Similarly, discussing the lack of release versus discard data and the success rates of venting procedures provides valuable context. By segregating data suitable for analysis from 'poor' data, the manuscript gains clarity and emphasizes the improvements necessary in both management strategies and data collection methodologies, such as logbooks.

I encourage the authors to consider these suggestions. I am available to review the manuscript again following any revisions.