

Goliath Grouper – Common Perceptions, Questions and Answers

From DEMA

Q. Are Goliath Grouper decimating the Lobster, Snapper and Grouper Populations in Florida?

A. No. If this were true, during the time when populations of Goliath Grouper were too low to allow a continued harvest (a commercial “extinction” between 1970 and 1990), the aggregate take of lobster, snapper and grouper would have been on the rise. In fact, the commercial take of these other fisheries was also lower during this time.

There is no scientific evidence that Goliath Grouper are top predators of lobsters, snappers or groupers. Removing the current moratorium on Goliath Grouper in order to “cull” the Goliath population will not substantially affect these other populations at this time. In addition, the rationale for culling the recovering Goliath Grouper population as the solution to depleted or decreasing fisheries is questionable because of documented over fishing in Florida of these other species and the unpredictable consequences of culling a species that is slow to recover.

Q. What Do Goliath Grouper Eat?

A. Goliath Grouper eat invertebrates such as crabs, shrimp, worms, lobsters and snails, as well as slow, poisonous fish such as catfish, cowfish, puffer fish, stingrays and burr fish (sometimes called porcupine fish).

It also appears that Goliath Grouper are potential predators for the invasive Indo-Pacific Red Lionfish. Lionfish are known to consume juvenile snapper, grouper and other species in large numbers, impacting commercial fisheries.

Q. Which is Most Sustainable – Harvest of the Goliath or Diving Tourism to See Goliath?

A. Diving Tourism is more sustainable. Goliath Grouper are seen as a substantial draw for diving tourists.

The Goliath Groupers’ size, slow movement and visibility have helped generate sustainable business for diver operators wherever the Goliath can be found. Divers are particularly attracted to diving near Goliaths during the spawning season when the fish gather together in groups. Without the need of harvesting the Goliath, thousands of divers visit dive sites along Florida’s coasts to see these large animals in their native habitat.

Economic Contribution

Previous to the COVID-19 pandemic, during the Goliath spawning season, one Florida dive operator generated more than **\$600,000 in revenue and \$39,000 in tax revenue** – that’s a single operator in a single spawning period of four months; July to October.

Critically, this visitor-related attraction happens at a “low” point in the Florida tourist season, generating much needed tax revenue for the state and direct revenue for dive operators supporting their families during a time when fewer visitors come to Florida.