Island Grouper Status Review Report: ID 270

Peer Review Comments

We solicited review of the Island Grouper Status Review Report from six potential reviewers. Three people agreed to be reviewers and all three provided reviews. Reviewer comments are compiled below from comments on drafts of the manuscript and are not necessarily in the order of the reviewer identification list below.

Reviewers (listed alphabetically)

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Comments in Response to Peer Review Charge

1. In general, does the Status Review Report include and cite the best scientific and commercial information available on the species, its biology, stock structure, habitats, and threats?

Reviewer #1: Yes. In general the report included the most updated and scientific information available on the species. I'm sending two more references you should look at, namely: 1) Wirtz, P., 2007. The return of the yellow grouper-annual migration and return to the same site by a xanthistic Mycteroperca fusca (Pisces Serranidae). Aqua 13, 31–34; 2) Monteiro, P., et al. 2008. Ichthyofauna assemblages from two unexplored Atlantic seamounts: Northwest Bank and João Valente Bank (Cape Verde archipelago). Scientia Marina 72, 133–143.- You have cited this, but not in the abundance section to Cape Verde. There's Data on abundance category and frequency of occurrence of the species in the Cape Verde waters.

Reviewer #2: Yes. The report is very broad and covers all aspects adequately. The level of detail is rather compelling.

Reviewer #3: I've finished reading through this document which, in my opinion is next to perfect and should be accepted as it is. Only minor semantic English sentences may need further editing but the scientific content, accuracy, state-of-the-art references and adequacy are excellent.

2. Are the scientific conclusions factually supported, sound, and logical?

Reviewer #1: Yes. In general yes, but in distribution item I've pointed in a comment you should review and some minor information errors I've pointed throughout the report, regarding Madeira.

Reviewer #2: Yes, majorly. I'd polish off some aspects; for example, I don't think the island grouper is more sensitive to overfishing than E. marginatus (pp 51). Also, the pervasive effect of recreational fishing, particularly around the most populated islands, should be reinforced.

Reviewer #3: See response to question 1.

3. Where available, are opposing scientific studies or theories acknowledged and discussed?

Reviewer #1: No

Reviewer #2: Yes

Reviewer #3: See response to question 1.

4. Are uncertainties assessed and clearly stated?

Reviewer #1: Yes. Still the existing uncertainties about habitat destruction, modification although lacking for this species could be more emphasized through studies that have shown changes in habitat structure in coastal rocky reefs in Macaronesian islands (see Tuya papers).

Reviewer #2: Yes. A point that should be stressed is the fact that the lack of records of the species in the west African coast may be related to a lack of scientific expeditions there.

Reviewer #3: See response to question 1.

5. Other Comments

Reviewer #1:
a) Regarding an island grouper specimen caught in Mediterranean off Israel - According to Heemstra et al., 2010: "Mycteroperca fusca has been declared an endangered species by the IUCN (Rocha et al., 2010). The presence of a population of this species in the eastern Mediterranean and the possibility that the fish might occur along the entire southern Mediterranean, raises the need to reassess its status." Still to my knowledge there's no data confirming a M. fusca population in the Mediterranean. I think is wiser to point out the species was referred to the Mediterranean, but any other deductions should be avoided.

b) Regarding statement in report that small population size is likely a risk factor for island grouper - reviewer added “and which could be disproportionally affected by coastal development or a stochastic catastrophic event.”
c) Regarding paragraph discussing decline in algal cover within island grouper range – reviewer suggested seeing Bertocci et al., 2014 - Effects of loss of algal canopies along temperature and irradiation gradients in continental Portugal and the Canary Islands.
d) Regarding section on the escape of marine aquaculture fish species as a potential threat to the island grouper – Sea bream are also cultured in Madeira, see Alves & Alves, 2002 and Ten years of marine aquaculture in Madeira Archipelago. Pp. 30-32 in: Pham, C.K., R.M. Higgins, M. De Girolamo & E. Isidro (Eds). Proceedings of the International Workshop: Developing a Sustainable Aquaculture Industry in the Azores. Arquipélago. Life and Marine Sciences. Supplement 7: xiii + 81 pp. June 2008
e) Regarding difficulties associated with implementation of MPAs in Canary Islands - the same happens in Madeira, for several years it have been proposed the creation of the Marine Eco-Park of Funchal, but yet not created. https://repositorio.uac.pt/handle/10400.3/2043

Reviewer #2: As additional issues, I’d include more photographs of the species (e.g. including the varying color patterns). Also, I’d include the Spanish name somehow in the introduction.

Reviewer #3: None