

Explosive Removal of Structures: Fisheries Impacts Assessment



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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

Short Form	Long Form
ACL	allowable catch limit
APE	average percent error
ARA	Applied Research Associates, Inc.
BOEM	Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
BSEE	Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement
cm	centimeters
Comp B	Composition B (explosive material)
C4	Composition C-4 (explosive material)
dB	decibel
DO	dissolved oxygen
DOI	US Department of the Interior
ESPIS	Environmental Studies Program Information System
ESRI	Environmental Systems Research Institute
F	instantaneous fishing mortality rate
FL	fork length
fm	fathom
GA	Galveston BOEM Lease Area
GMFMC	Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
GNLMM	generalized non-linear mixed model
GOM	Gulf of Mexico
GLM	generalized linear model
GLMM	generalized linear mixed model
HBX-1	high blast explosive composition 1
HL	hook-and-line
in	inches
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
KDE	kernel density estimate
kg	kilograms
Knts	nautical miles per hour
LD50	lethal dose resulting in 50% mortality
LGL	LGL Ecological Researcher Associates, Inc.
LOA	letter of authorization
LSM	least square mean
m	meter
mm	millimeter
ML	mudline
MS-222	tricaine methanesulfonate

Short Form	Long Form
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
MMS	Minerals Management Service (now BOEM)
NE	northeast
NW	northwest
NMFS	National Marine Fishery Service
NOAA	US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
OCS	Outer Continental Shelf
ODO % sat	optical dissolved oxygen percent saturation
ODO mg/L	optical dissolved oxygen milligrams/liter
OTC	oxytetracycline dehydrate
ROV	remotely operated vehicle
SAIC	Science Applications International Corporation
SEDAR	Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review
SPL	sound pressure level
SPL _{peak}	peak sound pressure level
SRV	submerged rotating video
SW	southwest
TFA	total fish abundance
TL	total length
UWC	underwater calculator by Applied Research Associates, Inc.
VPS	VEMCO Positioning System
W	west
W-NW	west-northwest

1 Introduction

The US Department of the Interior’s Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) and Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) perceived the need for updated estimates of the impacts from explosive severance decommissioning activities on fish and fisheries. This study was funded with the overarching goal to estimate potential impacts on federally-managed commercial and recreational fish and fisheries resulting from explosive severance decommissioning activities on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). The study area includes the federal waters in the Western and Central Planning Areas from the limit of state waters to a water depth of 300 m. The results from this report will be used to guide BOEM and BSEE in authorizing appropriate decommissioning activities that will minimize impacts to fish and fisheries.

1.1 Study Approach

We implemented a phased approach described as follows. Our first step was to compile a comprehensive literature synthesis describing the history of offshore oil and gas development in the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf), the sampling approaches that have been used to sample platform habitat, results of previous studies describing the fish assemblages associated with offshore oil and gas structures, and the perceived impacts of offshore platform removal (LGL 2017a). The results of the literature synthesis guided the selection of the sampling methodologies (e.g., active hydroacoustics, acoustic telemetry, biological sampling and underwater video) and the overall sampling design (stratified random design using region and depth as the basis for strata). Once the approach and design were established, a Field Season 1, “proof of concept” reconnaissance study was conducted in the late 2016 and early 2017 (LGL 2017b). During this same period, GSI and LGL (2017) prepared an acoustics synthesis report that: 1) reviewed the effects on fish of explosive removal of offshore platforms in the Gulf ; 2) reviewed sound characteristics of underwater explosive events; and 3) identified widely accepted models used to predict lethal effects; and 4) provided a detailed description of the explosive propagation model we used to estimate effects of explosive platform removal on federally managed fish and fisheries based on the results of our studies.

The first comprehensive field survey (Field Season 2) was conducted during April–August 2017 (LGL 2017c). A total of 30 sites were sampled in 2017, each of which was randomly selected from the total pool of 1260 offshore platforms and well protectors (but not caissons) that were in place at the time. The study team (LGL, Auburn University, and University of Texas) obtained 100% of the planned samples as described by LGL (2017c). LGL et al. (2018) provided a description of the results obtained during the summer of 2017, including overall fish abundance and diversity by platform site and depth layer, and the distribution and abundance of selected federally managed species. Red snapper (*Lutjanus campechanus*) was the most abundant of the federally managed species. For this species, we not only described distribution and abundance, but also obtained site fidelity estimates based on telemetry, and estimated population sizes at some platforms based upon mark-recapture estimates. Red snapper sampling also enabled estimation of their catch rates, age composition, growth and condition at platforms.

Field Season 3 sampling was conducted during May–August, 2018 (LGL 2018). Once more, 100% of the planned samples were obtained. In 2018, 32 platforms were randomly selected for sampling from the overall pool of 1,171 platforms and well protectors. In total we sampled 62 platforms (30 in 2017; 32 in 2018). Of these 3 were sampled during both years. A total of 89 structures had been removed between field seasons. LGL et al. (2018b) characterized the results obtained during Field Season 3, essentially as described above for Field Season 2.

Based mainly on LGL et al. (2018a) and LGL et al. (2018b), a final assemblage characterization report was developed LGL (2019). This report described the species assemblages and abundance of each fish species present at an average platform within each of four depth zones, 10 to 17 m, 18 to 30 m, 31 to 90 m, and the 91 to 300 m deep. As will be described below, hydroacoustic surveys were used to estimate total fish abundance at each platform sampled and submerged rotating video (SRV) surveys were used to estimate assemblage composition at each platform. The SRV data were used to apportion the total abundance into species abundances. For red snapper, we also conducted mark recapture estimates at a subset of sites, acoustic-telemetry studies to determine the proportion of time this species was in the lethal blast radius and age, growth, and condition studies (LGL et al. 2018a, 2018b, and LGL 2019).

Conrad et al. (2019) used the distribution and abundance data for the selected federally-managed species in conjunction with the selected acoustic model to estimate mortality of these species due to the explosive severance of the offshore structures removed in 2017 and 2018. These were supplemented with the projected mortality that would be estimated if all structures were explosively removed in a single year, and the mortality that would be estimated if all platforms within a 100 mi radius of a major port were all removed in a single year.

1.2 Report Organization

Below we first describe the study area, methods, and results of the assemblage characterization studies (Section 2.0), followed by an assessment of effects based on acoustic modeling (Section 3.0). We then provide an evaluation of the significance of the estimated efforts (Section 4.0).

2 Assemblage Characterization Studies

Assemblage characterizations were based on a comprehensive database review (LGL 2017a) and three field studies (LGL 2017a, LGL 2017c, LGL 2018). It should be noted that the literature syntheses of Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) platform studies was compiled using Thomson Reuters EndNote™ version X7.7 bibliographic software which allows searching of any/all database fields as well as searching of the text of attached PDFs. All of the major reports produced by this study are also included in the EndNote™ database.

The initial literature synthesis methodology was summarized in LGL (2017). Briefly, various online sources were searched using key words related to platforms, acoustic impacts, fish habitat, and artificial reefs as well as the common and species names of the selected federally managed fish species. Additional references related to oil and gas platform ecology were identified by the Project Manager based on his professional experience, and all papers related to the relevant SEDAR stock assessment reports were also included. This resulted in 668 references that we grouped into eight categories based on those used in Versar (2008) (see Table 2.1 in LGL 2017) and compiled into an Endnote™ database. Throughout the study additional references were added to the EndNote™ database where relevant to the project work or as new references were published. The current version of the database (version 6.0) contains 895 references, which are provided as a bibliography at the end of this report (Appendix 1). We next describe the field studies.

2.1 Study Area

The study area included federal waters in the Central and Western planning areas from the limit of state waters to a water depth of 300 m (Figures 1 and 2). The distribution of total platforms and well protectors by depth zone during 2017 and 2018 is shown in Figure 1, while those selected for our surveys are given in Figure 2. The number of platforms by year, State management area and depth zone can be found in Table 1.

In Figures 1 and 2, we show the recently established State Management boundaries for red snapper. In April 2019, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC) delegated management authority of the private angling component for recreational red snapper fishing to each Gulf state; that is, each state now manages both federal and state waters for red snapper (GMFMC 2019). The GMFMC also delegated to each state the authority to establish or modify the bag limit, a minimum size limit within 14-18 inches total length, and to establish a maximum size limit.

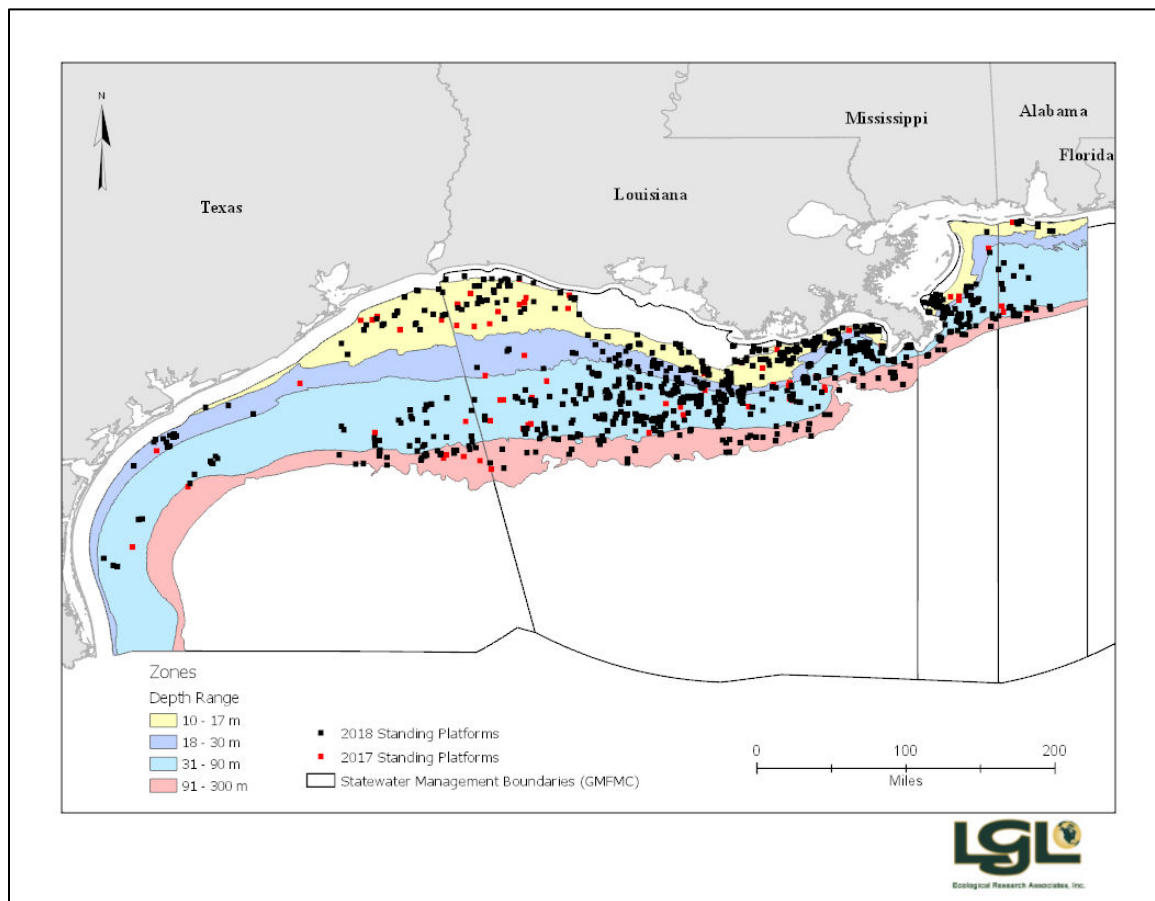


Figure 1. The distribution of standing platforms by year, private recreational red snapper state management area and depth zone.

All marked platforms were in place when the study commenced in 2017 and those marked in red were removed by 2018.

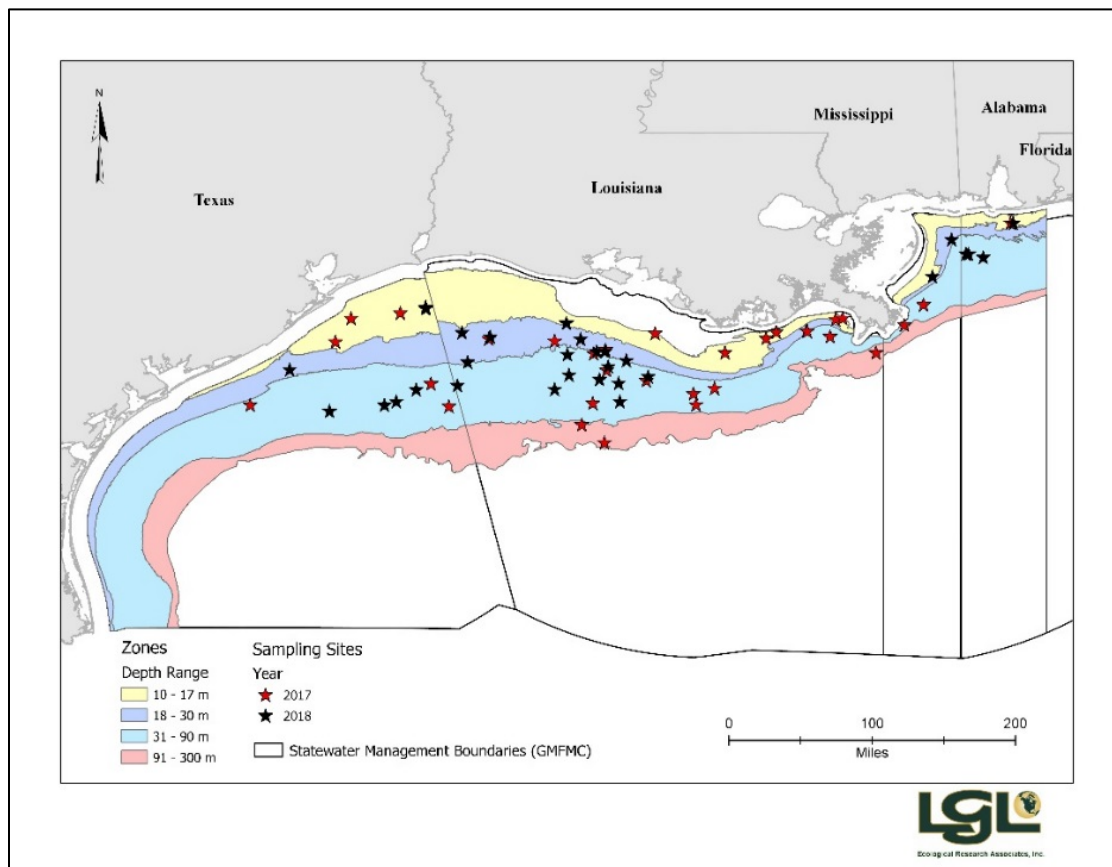


Figure 2. The distribution of randomly selected study platforms by year, private recreational red snapper state management area, and depth zone.

Table 1. Number of standing platforms in the study area by state and depth zone, 2017 and 2018

The data were obtained from the 2019 BOEM database.

2017									
Depth Zone (m)	Total		TX		LA		MS		AL
10–17	374		30		297		39		8
18–30	247		26		198		20		3
31–90	520		50		386		67		17
91–300	119		31		66		13		9
	1,260		137		947		139		37
2018									
Depth Zone (m)	Total		TX		LA		MS		AL
10–17	346		26		275		39		6
18–30	229		23		186		17		3
31–90	484		47		356		66		15
91–300	112		26		65		13		8
	1,171		122		882		135		32

2.2 Methods

Below we describe the basis for selecting key species, our analytical methods for modeling assemblage structure, and methods used to estimate age, growth, and condition of red snapper.

2.2.1 Key Species Selection

246 species of fish have been documented on petroleum platforms in the Gulf (Versar 2008). Assessing the impacts on all species is beyond the scope of this study. As specified in the contract, our focus is restricted to federally-managed species (Table 2) that are commercially and recreationally important, relatively abundant throughout the range of the study, known to be associated with platforms, and for which stock assessments are available for modeling purposes.

There are 39 federally managed fish species in the Gulf (GMFMC 2015). Only 25 of the federally managed species are known to occur on platforms in the Gulf, and, of those, stock assessments from SEDAR are available for only nine fish species (see Table 2). Since our study period corresponds to the May to October season, during which nearly all decommissioning activity takes place, we eliminated king mackerel (*Scomberomorus cavalla*), and Spanish mackerel (*Scomberomorus maculatus*) because they have only short-duration residence times during the summer months (Gallaway 1981). The yellowtail snapper (*Ocyurus chrysurus*) is not common in the Western Gulf, and the SEDAR stock assessment for this species is more than a decade old (SEDAR 3 2003). Very few groupers were observed in our study and they were not included as key species. Hence, we selected five key species for consideration: red snapper, gray triggerfish, vermilion snapper, greater amberjack, and cobia.

Stock assessments for the five focal species have been completed within the last 8 years and the total numbers at age 2+ for each species in the most recent year available (Table 3) serve as the basis for the

comparative analyses presented later in this report. Numbers at each age across all ages for each species are provided in Appendix 1 of LGL 2019. All 5 of the focal stocks were overfished at some point in the past and are therefore under rebuilding plans. These measures have helped all of the focal stocks to rebound. Four of the five focal species' stocks (red snapper, gray triggerfish, vermilion snapper and cobia), have recovered to the point that the most recent assessment concluded that the stocks were not overfished nor was overfishing occurring (Table 4). By contrast, greater amberjack was still considered overfished and undergoing overfishing at the time of the most recent assessment (SEDAR 33 Update 2016; Table 4).

Table 2. Federally-managed fish showing species observed on platforms, those with stock assessments and species initially chosen for study

Common name	Scientific name	Observed on Platforms	With Stock Assessments	Chosen for Impact Analysis
Almaco jack	<i>Seriola rivoliana</i>	Yes		
Banded rudderfish	<i>Seriola zonata</i>	Yes		
Black grouper	<i>Mycteroperca bonaci</i>			
Blackfin snapper	<i>Lutjanus buccanella</i>			
Bluefish	<i>Pomatomus saltatrix</i>	Yes		
Blueline tilefish	<i>Caulolatilus microps</i>			
Cero	<i>Scomberomorus regalis</i>			
Cobia	<i>Rachycentron canadum</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cubera snapper	<i>Lutjanus cyanopterus</i>			
Dolphinfish	<i>Coryphaena hippurus</i>	Yes		
Gag	<i>Mycteroperca microlepis</i>	Yes	Yes	
Goldface tilefish	<i>Caulolatilus chrysops</i>			
Goliath grouper	<i>Epinephelus itajara</i>	Yes		
Gray snapper	<i>Lutjanus griseus</i>	Yes		
Gray triggerfish	<i>Balistes capricus</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
Greater amberjack	<i>Seriola dumerili</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hogfish	<i>Lachnolaimus maximus</i>	Yes		
King mackerel	<i>Scomberomorus cavalla</i>	Yes	Yes	
Lane snapper	<i>Lutjanus synagris</i>	Yes		
Lesser amberjack	<i>Seriola fasciata</i>	Yes		
Little tunny	<i>Euthynnus alletteratus</i>	Yes		

Common name	Scientific name	Observed on Platforms	With Stock Assessments	Chosen for Impact Analysis
Mutton snapper	<i>Lutjanus analis</i>			
Queen snapper	<i>Etelis oculatus</i>			
Red drum	<i>Sciaenops ocellatus</i>	Yes		
Red grouper	<i>Epinephelus morio</i>	Yes		
Red snapper	<i>Lutjanus campechanus</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
Scamp	<i>Mycteroperca phenax</i>	Yes		
Silk snapper	<i>Lutjanus vivanus</i>	Yes		
Snowy grouper	<i>Hyporthodus niveatus</i>			
Spanish mackerel	<i>Scomberomorus maculatus</i>	Yes	Yes	
Speckled hind	<i>Epinephelus drummondhayi</i>			
Tilefish	<i>Lopholatilus chamaeleonticeps</i>			
vermilion snapper	<i>Rhomboplites aurorubens</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
Warsaw grouper	<i>Hyporthodus nigrilus</i>			
Wenchman	<i>Pristipomoides aquilonaris</i>	Yes		
Yellowedge grouper	<i>Hyporthodus flavolimbatus</i>			
Yellowfin grouper	<i>Mycteroperca venenosa</i>	Yes		
Yellowmouth grouper	<i>Mycteroperca interstitialis</i>			
Yellowtail snapper	<i>Ocyurus chrysurus</i>	Yes	Yes	
n = 39	n = 39	n = 25	n = 9	n = 5

Table 3. Gulf-wide numbers at age (0+ and 2+) for five focal species at the most recently assessed year

Eastern and Western Gulf data are also provided for red snapper

Species	Area	Total number of Age 2+	Total number of Age 0+	Year Estimated	Reference
Red snapper	Gulf-wide	36,738,000	256,277,000	2016	SEDAR 52, 2018
Red snapper	Eastern Gulf	13,095,000	72,231,000	2016	SEDAR 52, 2018
Red snapper	Western Gulf	23,643,000	184,046,000	2016	SEDAR 52, 2018
Vermilion snapper	Gulf-wide	30,184,024	63,736,924	2014	SEDAR 45, 2014
Gray triggerfish	Gulf-wide	2,822,750	10,872,330	2013	SEDAR 43, 2015
Greater amberjack	Gulf-wide	695,549	2,674,016	2015	SEDAR 33 Update, 2016
Cobia	Gulf-wide	423,955	2,054,265	2011	SEDAR 28 2013

Table 4. Stock status for the five focal species as reported in their most recent assessments

Species	Undergoing Overfishing (Y/N)	Overfished (Y/N)	Year Estimated	Reference
Red snapper	N	N	2016	SEDAR 52, 2018
Vermilion snapper	N	N	2014	SEDAR 45, 2014
Gray triggerfish	N	N	2013	SEDAR 43, 2015
Greater amberjack	Y	Y	2015	SEDAR 33 Update, 2016
Cobia	N	N	2011	SEDAR 28 2013

2.2.2 Species Abundances

Species abundances were estimated using hydroacoustic surveys coupled with submerged rotating video (SRV) camera surveys and measurement of physical properties of the water column. Additionally, weather conditions (wind strength, wind direction, wave height, current strength and direction) were recorded for each site. The detailed protocols for these surveys are described in LGL et al. (2018a, 2018b). At each site, hydroacoustic surveys were conducted first, followed by measurement of water column properties and SRV surveys. For convenience, a summary of these methods is provided in Appendix 2 of LGL (2019).

The abundance estimation approach using hydroacoustic and SRV data had to be carefully evaluated. For example, at a given site the estimation of red snapper abundance could be accomplished by combining total fish abundance estimated from the hydroacoustic survey with species relative abundances estimated concurrently with an SRV (Koenig and Stallings 2015). At some sites, bias was obvious when there was misalignment of the species being enumerated with each type of equipment. For instance, the hydroacoustic density estimate may have been 2,000 and was unknowingly comprised of 1,000 Atlantic

bumper (*Chloroscombrus chrysurus*) and 1,000 red snapper. However, if the SRV sample videoed only ten fish because of poor visibility, nine of which were Atlantic bumper and only one was a red snapper, then the red snapper abundance estimate would be biased low (i.e., 200 instead of 1,000). For this reason, site-specific estimates were not reported. Instead, we modeled the average assemblage structure for a given depth zone and vertical depth layer given average environmental variables and used this output to apportion the corresponding model output of average total fish abundance.

Variables quantifying the number of legs descending from the surface and categorizing a given platform as occupied or unoccupied were considered but were not used in the final model. The number of legs did not capture the number of total pipes descending to the ocean floor nor the complexity of cross structures beneath the surface. We reasoned that the fish assemblage on a occupied platform would be exposed more to fishing pressure. However, we observed instances where crew boats were tied to and actively fishing platforms designated as “unoccupied” in the BOEM database. For these reasons, these variables were considered poor descriptors and were ultimately dismissed as misleading.

Below we describe how assemblage structure and total fish abundance were modeled separately. For each depth zone-layer combination, predictions from both models were combined to provide species abundance estimates with confidence intervals. Species abundances are predicted for what we term an “average platform” within each depth zone. One could argue that given the variabilities in substrate type, physicochemical variables, bottom depth, platform complexity, distance from fishing ports, etc., that an average platform does not exist. Though our estimates may not apply to any single platform within a depth zone, we argue that our average platform estimates yield unbiased expanded abundances when multiplied by the total number of platforms within a given depth zone because they were based on random samples spanning the ranges of the variabilities just mentioned.

2.2.2.1 Assemblage Structure from Submerged Rotating Video (SRV) Surveys

At each site, a survey of assemblage structure was available from the SRV max count observations for each vertical depth layer. That is, the relative abundance of a given species was estimated as its max count divided by the sum of the max counts for all species. In essence, this response, Assemblage Structure, can be characterized as a nominal multinomial distribution, which we modeled using a generalized logit link function:

$$\log_e \left[\frac{Pr(y=j|x_i)}{Pr(y=k|x_i)} \right] = \alpha_{jk} + x_i \beta_{jk} \quad (1)$$

where, all jth nominal species categories were referenced to a particular species category k (we used the most numerically dominant species for k), x_i =the vector of fixed effects explanatory variables for the ith sample, and α_{jk} and β_{jk} were parameters specific to the jth category and referenced to k. Hence, we modeled the log odds of a fish in the Assemblage Structure being in the jth category rather than being in the reference category, k, and allowed this relationship to change with the explanatory variables. The likelihood (li) for each ith observation was given as:

$$l_i = \sum_{j=1}^J y_{ij} \log_e(\lambda_{ij}) \quad (2)$$

where, J=total number of species in the analysis, y_{ij} =observed number of individuals in the jth species and ith sample, and λ_{ij} =the predicted number of individuals in the jth species and ith sample. Fixed effect variables included the categorical variable DepthZone (10–17 m, 18–30 m, 31–90 m, or 91–300 m), and the covariates Layer (vertical depth bands 3–12 m [labeled as 1], 13–22 m [labeled as 2], etc.), temperature and dissolved oxygen (DO). These last two covariates were included as extraneous/nuisance variables to reduce noise and confounding influences; furthermore, they were converted to standard

normal deviates (z-scores) within each DepthZone-Layer combination before analysis. Layer was entered as a covariate to allow change in Assemblage Structure along the vertical depth gradient. Ignoring subscripts and parameters for the right side of the equation, fixed effects for the final model were specified as follows:

$$\lambda_{ij} = \text{DepthZone}|\text{Layer} + \text{Temperature} + \text{DissolvedOxygen} \quad (3)$$

where the operator “|” indicates an interaction of two or more terms and all of the corresponding main effects. We attempted to let the intercept and covariates Temperature and DO vary randomly across subjects defined with the categorical variable Site nested within each Year-DepthZone combination. Model convergence could not be achieved with this specification so Site could not be modelled as a random variable. Thus all effects remained fixed. This specification formed a generalized linear model (GLM) for which we estimated parameters with the GLIMMIX procedure in the statistical software SAS 9.4 TS Level 1M5 (SAS Institute, Inc. 2016).

2.2.2.2 Total Fish Abundance from Hydroacoustic Surveys

The hydroacoustic surveys provided observations of total fish abundance (TFA) for each Site-Layer combination. This response was assumed to be from a lognormal distribution, which we modeled with the log link function:

$$\log_e(TFA_i) = \alpha + x_i\beta + z_ib \quad (4)$$

where, TFA_i=predicted total fish abundance for the *i*th sample, α = the intercept, x_i =the vector of fixed effects explanatory variables for the *i*th sample, β = their corresponding vector of coefficients, and Z_i and b = the random effects and coefficients. The likelihood (*li*) for each *i*th observation was given as:

$$l_i = -\frac{1}{2} \left[\frac{\log\{y_i\} - \mu_i}{\sigma_i^2} + \log\{\sigma_i^2\} + \log\{2\pi\} \right] \quad (5)$$

where y_i = observed total fish abundance for the *i*th sample, μ_i and σ_i^2 are the respective predicted mean and variance parameters for the loge transformed observations, and π =the constant π . The same fixed effects variables were used as was described above for modeling Assemblage Structure. However, as the pattern of fish abundance throughout the water column did not appear to be linear, the term Layer was fit using a cubic B-spline (splLAYER) with three equally spaced knots positioned between the minimum and maximum values. Ignoring subscripts and parameters for the right side of the equation, fixed effects for the final model were specified as follows:

$$\mu_i = \text{DepthZone}|\text{splLAYER} + \text{Temperature} + \text{DissolvedOxygen} \quad (6)$$

The intercept and covariates Temperature and DO were allowed to vary randomly across subjects defined with the categorical variable Site nested within each Year-DepthZone combination. This specification formed a generalized nonlinear mixed model (GNLMM) whose parameters were also estimated with the GLIMMIX Procedure in SAS.

2.2.2.3 Species Abundance and Associated Variance Propagation

Abundance of each species was predicted by Layer for an average platform within each Depth Zone as the product of their predicted proportions from the Assemblage Structure model output and the predicted total fish abundance from the TFA model output. The arithmetic variance of TFA was given by the method of moments estimator:

$$Var[TFA] = e^{2\mu + \sigma^2} (e^{\sigma^2} - 1) \quad (7)$$

Variances from TFA and Assemblage Structure were then combined using Goodman's (1960) variance of products estimator:

$$Var[\lambda * TFA] = \lambda^2 Var[TFA] + TFA^2 Var[\lambda] - Var[TFA] * Var[\lambda] \quad (8)$$

2.2.3 Red Snapper Studies

Red snapper were collected for age, growth and condition evaluations by means of hook-and-line fishing. Gear and bait were standardized across all sampling sites. We used two hook sizes: a 6/0 Mustad demon perfect circle hook (model 39948NP-BN) baited with squid (order Teuthida), and an 11/0 Mustad circle hook (model 39960-DT) baited with Gulf menhaden (*Brevoortia patronus*). Each hook size and bait combination was deployed on independent poles at the same time during sampling and no more than one of each hook size was deployed while sampling. Red snapper were marked according to which hook size they had been caught on. Morphometric measurements (total length [TL], fork length [FL] in mm, individual weight in kilograms) were recorded, sex was determined by macroscopic examination of gonads, and sagittal otoliths were extracted, rinsed and cleaned, dried, and stored in coin envelopes.

Additionally telemetry studies of red snapper were conducted at three selected sites to estimate site fidelity, and mark and/or recapture studies were attempted at 10 sites as described below to obtain independent population estimates for comparison to the hydroacoustic and/or SRV estimates obtained independently.

2.2.3.1 Age and Growth

Otoliths provided from field sampling were mounted and thin sectioned in a transverse plane with a Pace Technologies, Pico 155 sectioning machine outfitted with 2, 4" diamond embedded wafering blades with a 0.75 mm spacer between the blades. Sections were polished on 2000 grit wet-dry sandpaper. Otoliths sections were submerged in water on a black background read under reflected light using a dissecting microscope outfitted with a Tucsen Bioimager camera. This method allowed us to read the annuli along the dorsal margin of the sulcus acousticus from the core to the proximal edge (Allman et al. 2005).

We obtained the reference otolith dataset used in Allman et al. 2005 to gauge the ability of our reader to obtain an Average Percent Error (APE) of 5% or better. An APE of 5% is the benchmark for moderately long-lived species with relatively difficult to read otoliths (Morison et al. 1998; Campana, 2001). Our readers obtained an APE of 5% on the reference dataset. A second reader read our sectioned otoliths at a later date.

Age structure was modeled as a nominal multinomial distribution using a generalized logit link as described above for Assemblage Structure. Fixed effects for the final model were all categorical and specified as follows:

$$\lambda_{ij} = DepthZone + Year + Hook\ size + Sex \quad (9)$$

where, λ_{ij} is now the predicted number of individuals in the j th Age and i th sample (i.e., platform), Year was either 2017 or 2018, Hook size was either 6/0 or 11/0, and Sex was male or female.

Growth was modeled for observed TL with the three parameter Von Bertalanffy growth equation following the SEDAR stock assessments:

$$TL_t = L_\infty(1 - e^{-K(t-t_0)}) \quad (10)$$

where, TL_t = TL at age t , L_∞ = TL asymptote, K = growth coefficient, t = age in years, and t_0 = age at length 0. The growth performance index, ϕ , developed by Munro and Pauly (1983) is reported, but not used for comparisons:

$$\phi = \log_{10}K + 2*\log_{10}L_\infty \quad (11)$$

2.2.3.2 Condition

Individual weight (W_t in kg) for red snapper was related to total length (TL in mm) as per Anderson and Neumann (1996) using the power function ($W_t = aTL^b$), where $\ln(TL)$ was interacted with three categorical variables. Ignoring subscripts and parameters, fixed effects for the final model were specified as follows:

$$W_t = TL|Sex + TL|DepthZone + TL|Age + e \quad (12)$$

where, sex was either male or female, DepthZone (defined above), and age ranged from 1 to 13 (ages 9-13 were grouped due to low sample sizes for each of these ages). Error (e) was assumed to be lognormally distributed. The intercept was allowed to vary randomly across subjects defined with the categorical variable Site nested within each Year-DepthZone combination. Likewise, we attempted to let the covariate TL vary randomly as well, but its covariance parameter was essentially estimated to be zero. This specification formed a generalized linear mixed model (GLMM) for which we estimated parameters with the GLIMMIX procedure. All effects were tested at $\alpha = 0.05$.

2.2.3.3 Site Fidelity (Telemetry)

Four VPS telemetry arrays were deployed on platforms off the coast of Alabama and Louisiana (Figure 3, Panel A). The East site (Site 30) was located 25 km (13 nautical miles) southeast of Dauphin Island, Alabama and was deployed on 28 March 2017. The Center site (Site 9) and West site (Site 6) were located south of coastal Louisiana. The Center site was deployed on 3–4 July 2017. The West site was deployed 7–8 July 2017. The fourth site (Site 59) was placed 2 km east of Site 30 on 23 May 2018. The first data set from Site 59 was downloaded 30 Oct 2018 and has not yet been analyzed. Each array includes six VEMCO VR2Tx receivers. A center receiver (C) was placed 20 m north of each platform. Surrounding receivers were placed 300 m to the northeast (NE), northwest (NW), southeast (SE) and southwest (SW) of the C receiver. A south receiver (S) was placed 415 m south of the C receiver. Environmental meters (DO, temperature, and salinity) were attached to the center receiver line at each site. Receivers were collected and replaced at the East site on 11 August 2017, 30 November 2017, 4 May 2018, and 30 October 2018. Receivers were collected and replaced at the Center and West sites on 30–31 October 2017 and 24–25 April 2018. The Center and West sites were permanently removed on 27 July 2018.

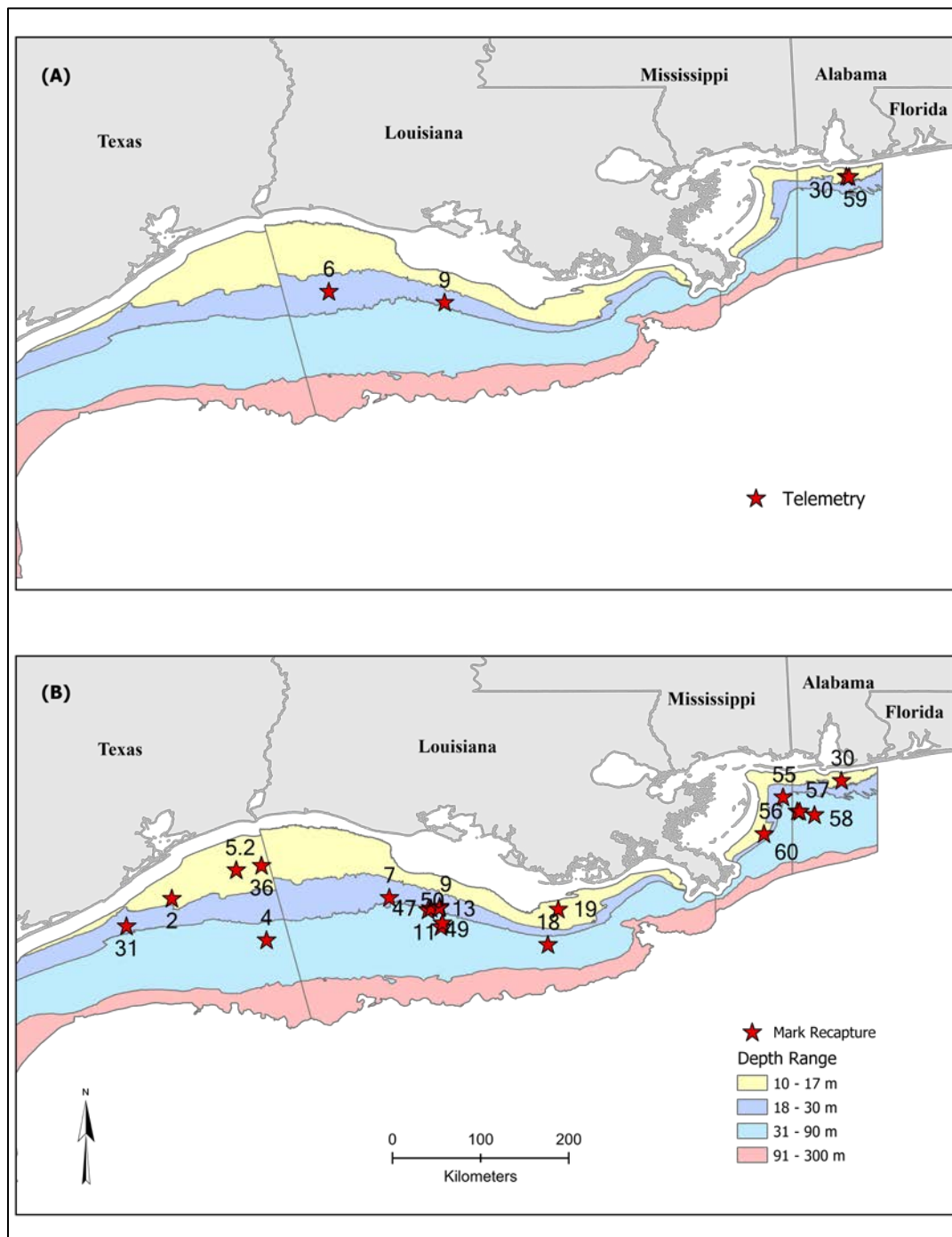


Figure 3. Location of telemetry and mark-recapture study sites, 2017 and 2018.

Red snapper were tagged following previous protocols (Piraino and Szedlmayer 2014; Williams-Grove and Szedlmayer 2016a, 2016b). As of October 2018, 81 red snapper (>406 mm total length TL) were tagged with acoustic V16-6x transmitters (69 kHz, 20–69 s signal interval, five year battery life) and internal anchor tags (Floy® FM-95W) over all VPS platform sites. Fish were captured using hook and line, anesthetized in 150 mg/L MS-222 (tricaine methanesulfonate) for 90 s, weighed (0.1 kg), measured

(mm) and injected with 0.4 ml/kg oxytetracycline dehydrate (OTC). Fish were released with remotely opening predator protection cages at depth (Piraino and Szedlmayer 2014; Williams-Grove et al. 2015; Williams-Grove and Szedlmayer 2016a, 2016b).

A monetary reward (\$150) was offered for red snapper tag returns to increase fisher reporting rate and increase the accuracy of fishing mortality estimates. Also, to increase tag reporting, reward posters were displayed at local marinas, tackle stores and bait shops, and identification numbers, contact information and reward notice were placed on external floy tags that were used to tag red snapper.

Fish positions for 54 red snapper were analyzed with the R program for home range area estimates (95% KDE) and compared over diel and seasonal time periods with repeated measures (GLMM and Tukey-Kramer, SAS 9.4; Venables and Ripley 2002; Venables and Dichmont 2004; Seavy et al. 2005; Bolker et al. 2008; Piraino and Szedlmayer 2014; Williams-Grove and Szedlmayer 2016a, 2016b). Fish size (TL) was compared to area use by linear regression in SAS software. Mean environmental measures of DO, salinity and temperature were calculated by date for each VPS site and compared to home range with linear regression.

Distances (m) of fish positions from platform structure were measured with ArcMap 10.4.1 proximity analysis tools (Environmental Systems Research Institute [ESRI]; McKinzie et al. 2014). Percent frequencies of positions located inside (0 m), near (< 95 m) or away (\geq 95 m) from platform structure were calculated.

A known fate model in the “MARK” program (White 2014) was used to estimate residence time, site fidelity and mortalities for tagged red snapper (Edwards 1992; Kaplan and Meier 1958; Schroepfer and Szedlmayer 2006; Topping and Szedlmayer 2011; Topping and Szedlmayer 2013; Williams-Grove and Szedlmayer 2016a, 2016b).

2.2.3.4 Mark and/or Recapture

Mark and/or recapture studies were attempted at 21 sites; 10 sites in 2017 and 11 sites in 2018 (Panel B of Figure 3). Fish were captured using hook and line, tagged with internal anchor tags (Floy ® FM-95W) and released with remotely opening predator protection cages at depth. A remote YSIEX02 was used to record oceanographic conditions at each site. As noted above, a high monetary tag reward was offered for red snapper tag returns and reward posters were placed at key facilities as described above.

A minimum of 10 days was allowed to pass between marking and recapture attempts to allow full recovery and mixing of tagged and untagged fish. All recapture events coincided with trips made to obtain samples for age, growth and condition analyses so all recaptured fish were kept for age determination. Population estimates were made using the historical Peterson estimate as well as a Bayesian approach following Gazey and Staley (1986).

2.3 Results

2.3.1 Assemblage Structure

A total of 36 taxa were included in our GLM and it provides an estimate of abundance for each of these species at each “average platform”, even if a species was not actively observed at platforms within that depth zone (Table 5). We actually observed 7, 26, 32, and 13 species at study platforms within the depth zones 10 to 17 m, 18 to 30 m, 31 to 90 m, and 91 to 300 m, respectively. The abundance estimates for the species actually observed at platforms within a depth zone constituted from 97 to 99% of the total

estimated abundance for all 36 species. Some of the species not documented to have been present during sampling would be expected to occur given a larger sample size; others would not be expected to be present or they would only rarely occur. Nevertheless, the overall abundance of such species would be expected to be low, as suggested by the model.

Model diagnostics for the hydroacoustic predictions of TFA indicated no pattern in the residuals, and the average predicted values agreed well with those observed (Appendix 4 in LGL 2019; Figures A4-1 and A4-2). Likewise, the predicted values for the SRV counts were similar to those observed (Figure A4-3); however, residuals are not available for multinomial responses. The interaction of Depth Zone and Layer (modeled as spline) was significant for the hydroacoustic model of TFA as was the random covariate effect of DO, while Temperature was not statistically significant (Tables A4-1 and A4-2 of Appendix 4, LGL 2019). All fixed effect terms were statistically significant (at $\alpha=0.05$) for the SRV model (Table A4-3).

The dominant species at the average platforms within the 10- to 17- m deep shallow Coastal Zone were, in order of abundance, Atlantic bumper (4,362), Atlantic spadefish (1,815), blue runner (622), and red snapper (359). These four species comprised 92% of the total number of individuals at the average shallow coastal platform. Numerically dominant species at an average platform in the deeper Coastal Zone (18- to 30- m deep) included Atlantic bumper (6,227), Gulf menhaden (2,876), blue runner (1,712), red snapper (1,015), Atlantic spadefish (926), Atlantic moonfish (514) and gray snapper (400). Collectively, these species comprised about 91% of the fish present (13,670 of 15,014, Table 5). The dominant species predicted to be associated with the average platform within each of the Coastal Zones (10- to 17- m deep and 18- to 30- m deep) were remarkably consistent with the historical findings (LGL 2017a), albeit there was one major exception.

For example, the similarity of our assemblages with the only literature included common dominant species for both the early studies (see Gallaway and Lewbel 1982) and our study conducted in 2017 and 2018. Namely, these included Atlantic spadefish, bluefish, blue runner, lookdown, Atlantic moonfish, and red snapper. The exception was Atlantic bumper. This species was observed in our study to be the most abundant species at coastal platforms in the 10- to 30- m depth range (Table 5). It was not listed by Gallaway and Lewbel (1982) as even being present on Gulf platforms, nor was it listed as being seen at coastal platforms in the Northern Gulf by Stanley and Wilson (1997, 2003) or by Stunz and Ajemian (2016) for platforms offshore south Texas. In contrast, Reeves (2015), Munally (2016) and Reeves et. al. (2017) observed Atlantic bumper were abundant at platforms offshore Louisiana by the mid 2000s.

Chesney et al. (2000) noted that Gunter (1936) reported that Atlantic bumper ranked 22nd in abundance in shrimp trawl bycatch in the 1930s but, by the mid 1990s, Atlantic bumper ranked 7th in abundance in the shrimp trawl bycatch (Adkins 1993). Many possible factors may have contributed to this and other changes in faunal assemblages. Chesney et al. (2000) focused on eutrophication and hypoxia as being possible factors accounting for Atlantic bumper increases over time, but also suggested that installation of offshore oil and gas platforms may have also been a contributing factor. Whatever the reason, the Atlantic bumper, a forage species, has become the dominant species on coastal platforms in the Northern Gulf in recent years (since about 2015). Apparently, it was not abundant or even present on platforms from the 1970s to the early 2000s.

At the average Offshore and/or Bluewater Platform (31- to 90- m deep), 10 species comprised 93% of the numerical abundance and adding the unidentified component raised the total percent to 95% (Table 5). The 10 dominant species were blue runner (3,971), red snapper (2,980), vermilion snapper (3,506), Bermuda chub (838), gray snapper (491), leatherjack (706), Atlantic cumper (841), greater amberjack

(487), Atlantic spadefish (481), and Crevalle jack (326). Again the results are consistent with historical knowledge (LGL 2017a) with the exception of Atlantic bumper, as noted above.

We documented 13 species to occur at Shelf-Edge Platforms (91- to 300- m deep) based on SRV surveys (Table 5). Unidentified baitfish dominated the estimates of total abundance (13,090 of 20,284 total fish) but the deep platforms, on average, were characterized by Crevalle jack (2,074) and Bermuda chub (1,405). Other notable species present included great barracuda (478), horse-eye jack (416), greater amberjack (587), rainbow runner (405) and red snapper (133). The 13 documented species comprised 97% of the total abundance.

Abundance-by-vertical depth estimates for all 36 species for each of the four bottom depth zones are shown in Appendix 3 of LGL 2019. Vertical abundance patterns for key federally managed species will be discussed below. Vertical abundance and distance from platform will be key factors in the model used to predict mortality from explosive decommissioning activities.

Though the focus of the project was specific numbers of individual fish species, the “raw” hydroacoustic information was also highly useful in providing information concerning the general abundance of fish around platforms. Hydroacoustic data of fish density in number of fish/m³ is plotted with increasing distance from the platforms as a boxplot in Figure 4. This shows how the overall fish density declines with increasing distance from the center of each platform at the seafloor and provides reassurance that we are capturing the platform associated fish. In 2017, differences between distance zones were statistically significant ($F = 38.511$, $p < 0.001$) with the greatest difference between the 0-25m and 75-100m zones ($Z=16.29$, $p < 0.001$), and similarly in 2018 significant differences were seen ($F = 57.33$, $p < 0.001$) with the greatest difference being between the 0-25m and >100m zones, unsurprisingly ($Z=26.136$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 5. Model estimates of the abundance of fish at the “average platform” in the four depth zones defined in this study

(For additional detail see Appendix Table 2.1)

	Depth zone (m)			
Common Name	10–17	18–30	31–90	91–300
Amaco jack	5	16	129	111
Angelfish sp.	0.4	2	47	0.7
Atlantic bumper	4,362	6,227	841	324
Atlantic moonfish	19	514	97	23
Atlantic spadefish	1,815	926	481	60
Bar jack	1	4	13	178
Bermuda chub	39	162	838	1,405
Black jack	0.1	0.2	0.1	23
Blue runner	622	1,712	3,971	691
Bluefish	2	4	0.6	0.6
Butterflyfish sp.	0.1	0.4	8	0.2
Cobia	57	13	24	1.4
Crevalle jack	16	148	326	2,074
Dog snapper	0.2	0.1	0.5	0.05
Filefish sp.	-	-	0.2	-
Gray snapper	137	400	491	37
Gray triggerfish	1.3	13	63	2
Great barracuda	4	27	75	478
Greater amberjack	14	32	487	587
Grouper sp.	0.2	0.7	16	0.3
Guaguanche	3	32	22	2
Gulf menhaden	67	2,876	169	105
Horse-eye jack	3	19	86	416
kKng mackerel	4	81	38	5
Leatherjack	26	105	706	45
Lookdown	3	26	107	8
Ocean triggerfish	0.6	1	10	20
Rainbow runner	13	266	53	405
Red drum	0.1	4	0.2	0.2
Red snapper	359	1,015	2,980	133
Sheepshead	0.3	19	6	1
Spanish hogfish	0.1	0.3	2	0.1
Spanish mackerel	0.2	-	0.1	-
Unidentified fish	142	250	276	13,090

	Depth zone (m)			
Common Name	10–17	18–30	31–90	91–300
Vermilion snapper	45	118	3,506	57
Yellow jack	0.8	0.9	7	0.5
Total	7,764	15,014	15,877	20,284
Confidence Intervals	(1975-30517)	(8593-26234)	(6349-39700)	(10169-40459)
7	26	32	13	
7,494	14,784	15,707	19,611	
96.5	98.5	98.9	96.7	

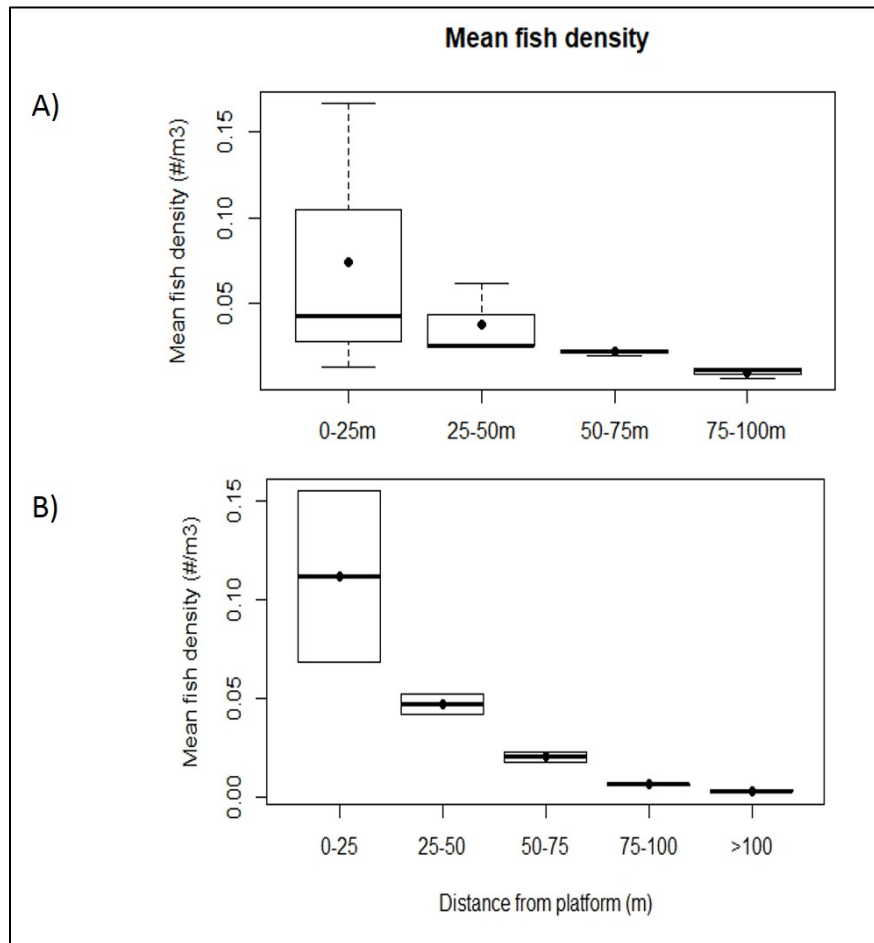


Figure 4. Acoustic fish density in number of fish/m³ with increasing distance from platform across all a) 2017 survey sites and b) 2018 survey sites.

Box plots show median values (solid horizontal line) and means (black dot). The lower and upper ends of the box are the 25% and 75% quartiles, respectively.

2.3.2 Species Accounts

We discuss each of the five selected species in order of their overall stock size estimate. Red snapper has the largest stock of our selected species (36.8 million fish), followed by vermilion snapper (30.1 million fish), gray triggerfish (2.8 million fish), greater amberjack (696 thousand fish), and cobia (424 thousand fish).

2.3.2.1 Red Snapper

The red snapper is one of, if not the, most valuable finfish in the Gulf recreational and commercial fisheries (SEDAR 2018). It occurs throughout the Gulf and is considered to be represented by two stocks, divided at the mouth of the Mississippi River. The Gulf-wide stock of age 2+ fish is estimated to consist of nearly 37 million individuals; 13 million fish in the East and 24 million fish in the West (see Table 3 above). In our study, red snapper ranked 4th in overall abundance (Table 5).

2.3.2.1.1 Distribution and Abundance

Red snapper were most abundant at offshore platforms within the 31- to 90- m bottom depth range (2,980 fish typically present with a 95% confidence interval of 875 to 10,152, Table 5), followed by abundance at platforms in the 18- to 30- m bottom depth range where 1,015 fish (confidence interval: 541 to 1904) were typically present. About 359 red snapper were estimated at shallow platforms (10- to 17- m bottom depth). At deeper (91- to 300- m bottom depth) platforms, on the order of 133 fish were seen. Using the abundance levels from Table 5 and the number of platforms present by bottom depth and State Management Zone in 2017 and 2018 (Table 1), we estimate that about 5.3% of the total age 2+ red snapper stock resided on platforms in 2017 and 4.9% in 2018 following the removal of 89 platforms (Table 6). Approximately 75% of the age 2+ red snapper estimated to occur on offshore platforms in the Gulf occurred in the Louisiana Management Zone.

Vertical distribution patterns for age 2+ red snapper determined from the hydroacoustic/SRV surveys (Appendix 3 of LGL 2019) show that, for the average platform within the 18- to 30- m bottom depth zone, this species was present throughout the water column, but was more abundant at depths of 13 to 22 m (490 fish) and 22 to 30 m (315 fish) than in the upper water column (210 fish between 3 to 12 m in depth) (see Appendix 3 of LGL 2019). Similarly, red snapper occurred throughout the water column at platforms in the 31- to 90- m depth zone but were least abundant in the surface layer. Abundance by depth at these sites ranged from 575 to 768 fish at depths between 13 and 32 m, and from 282 to 487 fish were present at depths of 33m to the bottom. As will be shown below, red snapper remained close to the platform with 98% of all positions measured in the telemetry study being either within or adjacent to the platform.

Before Williams-Grove and Szedlmayer (2017), the common view was that the red snapper was a demersal fish species exhibiting a high association with low relief bottom standing throughout their life span. However, in recent years, anecdotal accounts from fishers began to suggest upper water column use by this species. Williams-Grove and Szedlmayer (2017) documented red snapper tended to stay at deeper depths during colder months (<3m from the seafloor) but moved up in the water column more frequently during spring and summer months. Their results were consistent with our findings.

2.3.2.1.2 Site Fidelity

A total of 764,515 red snapper positions from 54 individuals (from the total of 81 red snapper tagged with acoustic telemetry tags) were recorded. These data were analyzed from the three primary sites (Sites 6, 9, 30) from March 2017 to May 2018. Red snapper remained close to platform structure with 98% of all

positions either within or near the structures (LGL et al. 2018b). Over all sites, red snapper were, on average, located $28.2 \pm 33.9\text{M}$ from the platforms (Everett et al. in prep). Observed home range estimates (95% KDE) for an individual fish at each of the three sites are shown by Figure 5. Overall, least square mean (LSM) home range estimates based on all red snapper at each site ranged from a high of 35,026 m² at the West site to a low of 15,199 m² at the East site. The home range estimate for the Central site was 22,749 m². red snapper at the East and Central sites showed no significant differences in area used between diel periods, but fish at the West site showed significantly increased area used during the midday as compared to night, dawn and dusk. Area use was largest in summer and fall and smallest during winter (LGL et al. 2018b).

Site fidelity on platforms was 30% per year; i.e., 30% of the fish remained at the site marked for an entire year. Of the 22 fish that emigrated from the marking sites, 9 showed homing behavior and returned to their original release site. Residence time (50% of the fish still present) was 11 months. Fishing mortality (F) for red snapper at all sites was high ($F=0.75$, LGL et al. 2018b). Whereas, the estimate of natural mortality was low ($M=0.06$; 95% Confidence Limits 0.01 to 0.22).

Table 6. Estimated abundance of Age 2+ red snapper at platforms within each of our four bottom depth zones, 2017 and 2018

A) Age 2+ Red Snapper by Year and Depth Zone (Median Estimates with Confidence Limits)						
	2017			2018		
Depth Zone (m)	LCL	Median	UCL	LCL	Median	UCL
10–17	35,156	134,247	511,258	32,524	124,197	472,982
18–30	133,627	250,774	470,288	123,889	232,499	436,016
31–90	455,000	1,549,523	5,279,040	423,500	1,442,249	4,913,568
91–300	29,274	8,568	24,570	27,552	8,064	23,125
Total		1,943,113			1,807,008	
B) Age 2+ Red Snapper by State and Depth Zone, 2017 (Median Estimates)						
	Depth zone (m)					
State	10–17	18–30	31–90	91–300	Total	
TX	10,769	26,397	148,993	2,232	188,390	
LA	106,608	201,025	1,150,223	4,752	1,462,609	
MS	13,999	20,306	199,650	936	234,891	
AL	2,872	3,046	50,657	648	57,223	
				2017 Platform Total	1,943,113	
				GOM Stock Size	36,738,000	
				Percent of Stock on Platforms	5.3	
C) Age 2+ Red Snapper by State and Depth Zone, 2018 (Median Estimates)						
	Depth zone (m)					
State	10–17	18–30	31–90	91–300	Total	
TX	9,333	23,351	140,053	1,872	174,609	
LA	98,711	188,842	1,060,827	4,680	1,353,061	

MS	13,999	17,260	196,670	936	228,865
AL	2,154	3,046	44,698	576	50,473
				2018 Platform Total	1,807,008
				GOM Stock Size	36,738,000
				Percent of Stock on Platforms	4.9

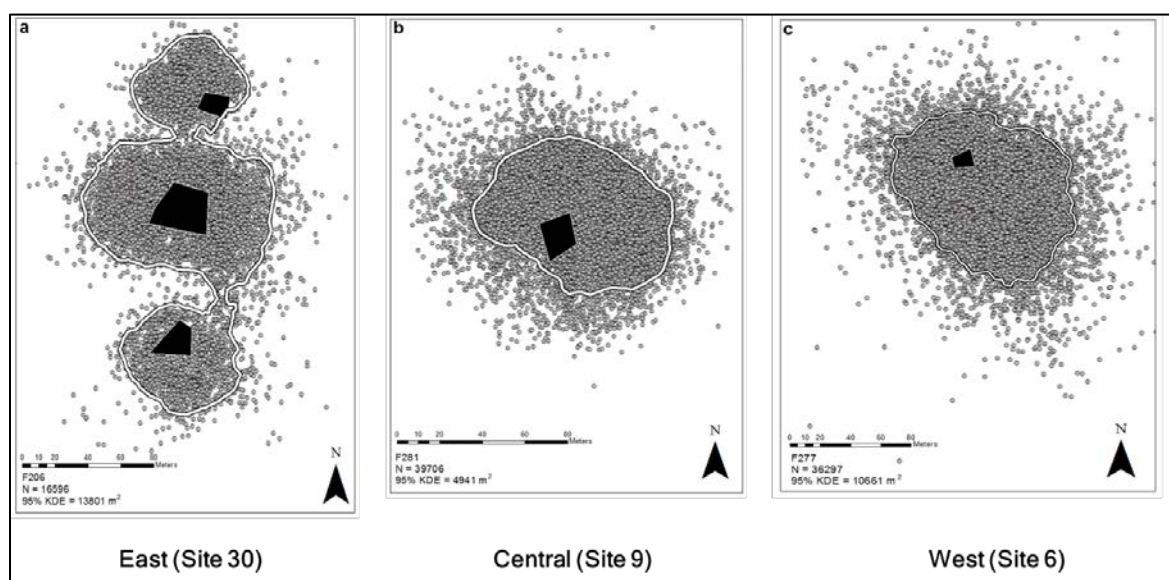


Figure 5. Home range (95% kernel density estimate) of an individual red snapper at each of the three sites is illustrated with a white line.

Two previous telemetry studies of red snapper on Louisiana offshore platforms (Peabody 2004, McDonough and Cowan 2007) reported lower site fidelity than we observed. Peabody (2004) observed high site fidelity in the first five months of a 202-d long study followed by low site fidelity in later months. The low site fidelity observed after the first few months may have been related to red snapper movements or a number of other factors. Peabody (2004) reported three possible difficulties that may have reduced site fidelity: variable transmitter detection range, thermoclines causing reduced detections, and transmitter battery failures. The transmitter detection range was greatly reduced (ranging from 30 to 180 m) compared with previous studies that indicated a high detection rate (~50%) out to 800 m with a maximum detection of 1600 m (Szedlmayer and Schroepfer 2005; Topping and Szedlmayer 2011b).

McDonough and Cowan (2007) tracked red snapper on a single platform with the Vemco Radio-linked Acoustic Positioning system (VRAP, Vemco, Bedford, Nova Scotia) that had a hard wire link between all receivers allowing fine-scale movement estimates. This system was the predecessor of the VPS system and has been discontinued. red snapper of unspecified sized ($N = 20$) were caught from several platforms but all were released on the same platform. Movements from 15 fish were tracked for a limited time period (14 days), and low residency was reported, with only five fish remaining at their release site until the end of the study. This study also reported a short detection range (150 m), which was attributed to

acoustic noise on the active production platforms. In both of these platform studies that reported low site fidelity, short study periods, structural interference, and equipment failure prevented long-term tracking of red snapper. All things considered, we believe the present study represents the best estimate of red snapper site fidelity at offshore petroleum platforms.

2.3.2.1.3 Mark and/or Recapture Population Estimates at Platforms

As a way of verifying our abundance estimates for red snapper based on the hydroacoustic and/or SRV approach, we obtained mark and/or recapture abundance estimates at selected sites (Figure 6). Ten mark/recapture estimates were available for the 18–30 m depth zone across site-year combinations and ranged from 447 to 5,347. The median value from these ten estimates was 1,166, which was remarkably close to our hydroacoustic/SRV median estimate of 1,015 for this depth zone. No mark and/or recapture estimates were obtained from the 10–17 m and 91–300 m depth zones, and only one estimate was available for 31–90 m. This one estimate, 534, was lower than the hydroacoustic/SRV median estimate of 2,980.

2.3.2.1.4 Age Distribution

In all, there were 2,155 red snapper aged from otolith cross sections; after filtering for missing independent variables, 1,900 remained for analysis. Only one red snapper was caught in the 91–300 m depth zone and was not reported. Because the sample sizes varied by combinations of the various factor levels, means are reported as marginal means across all factor combinations.

The age distribution for red snapper increased with depth zone (Figure 7; $p < 0.0001$); modal ages were ages 2–3 for 10–17 m, age 3 for 18–30 m, and age 5 for 31–90 m. Year was also significant and modes at ages 3 and 5 in 2017 clearly translated into modes at ages 4 and 6 in 2018. Though the hook size was significant at $p = 0.0343$, the biological significance appeared negligible. Age structure did not differ between sexes.

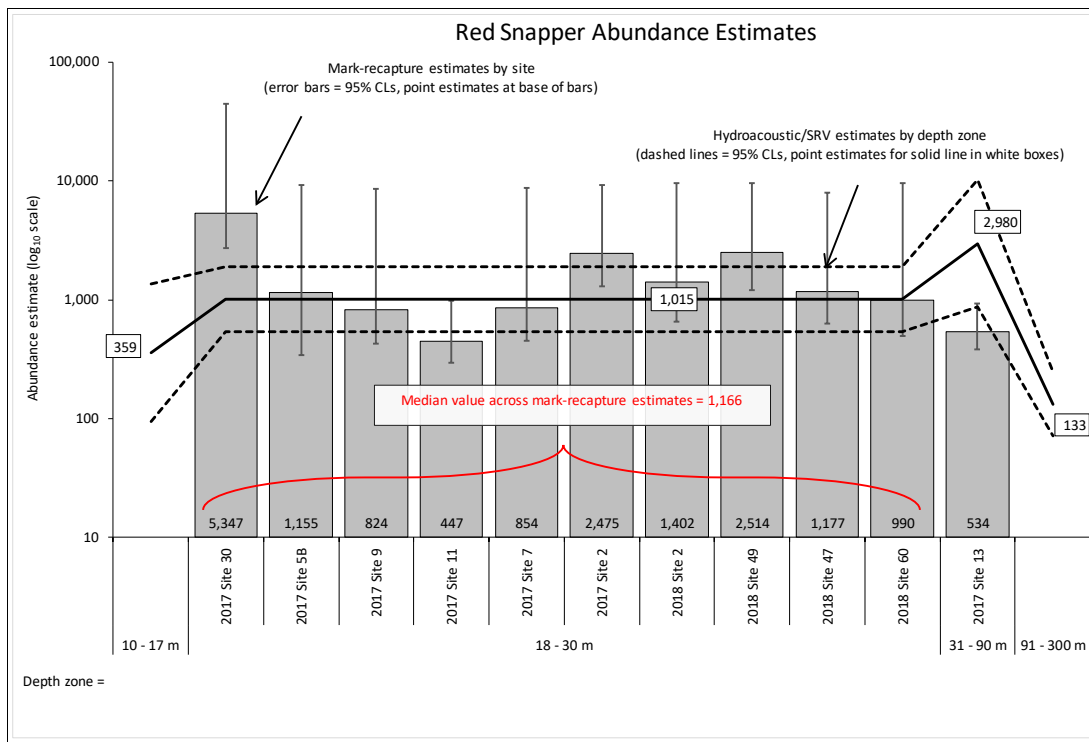


Figure 6. Comparison of abundance estimates made with the hydroacoustic and/or SRV approach and mark and/or recapture method for selected sites.

The hydroacoustic/SRV estimates represent median values; as such, the median value is reported for the mark/recapture estimates within the 18–30 m depth zone (point estimates for each site are given at the base of each bar).

2.3.2.1.5 Growth and Condition

Length at age was modeled for each depth zone with a three parameter Von Bertalanffy growth equation (Figure 8). Fitted curves were similar across all depth zones and to the curve reported in SEDAR 31 (Figure 9). Though no analyses were performed to test for statistical significance of differences, these plots indicate there was little if any biological significance.

Weight-length relationships were compared between males and females, depth zones, and ages (Figure 10) to assess condition. None of the comparisons demonstrated statistically or biologically significant differences.

2.3.2.2 Vermilion Snapper

The vermilion snapper population is centered in the Gulf but ranges north to North Carolina and south to Brazil (Grimes et al.1982). This species occurs in moderately deep (40–300 m) waters, most commonly over rock, gravel, or sand bottoms near the edge of the continental shelf. Vermilion snapper are generalist predators that are able to feed on benthic and pelagic fishes, shrimp, crabs, polychaetes, cephalopods, and other invertebrates (Sedberry and Cuellar 1993). Vermilion snapper share similar habitats and diets as red snapper, though red snapper are more voracious predators. In our study, the vermilion snapper ranked fifth in overall abundance of fishes present on offshore platforms area during 2017 and 2018. Vermilion snapper were present at all depth zones but were most abundant at platforms within the 31- to 90- m depth

range. Within this depth range, the average platform harbored 3,506 vermillion snapper (95% CI: 428–28,743) as shown by Table 5 and/or Appendix Table 2.1. Using the abundance levels from Table 5 and the numbers of platforms present by bottom depth and State Management Zone in 2017 and 2018 (Table 1), we estimate that about 6.2% of the total age 2+ vermillion snapper resided on platforms in 2017 and a similar percentage, about 5.8% was estimated for 2018 (Table 7). Considering the numbers of platforms in each state management and depth zone, approximately 75% of the total vermillion snapper on platforms occurred offshore Louisiana. As shown in Appendix 3 of LGL (2019), this species was most abundant at depths between 13 and 72 m, as compared to shallower and deeper water layers. Few were observed within the 12- m deep layer in the 31- to 90- m bottom depth zone where vermillion snapper was most abundant.

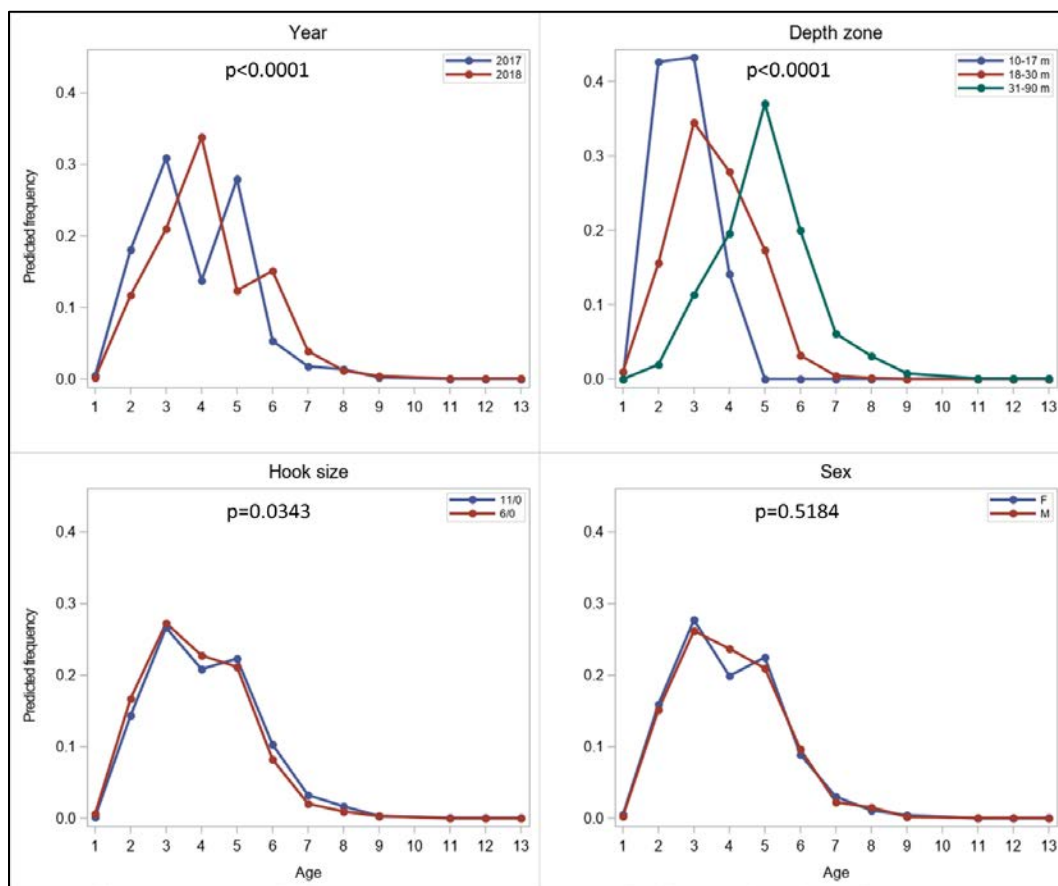


Figure 7. Comparison of age distributions for year, depth zones, and hook size.

Type III p-values are given for each comparison.

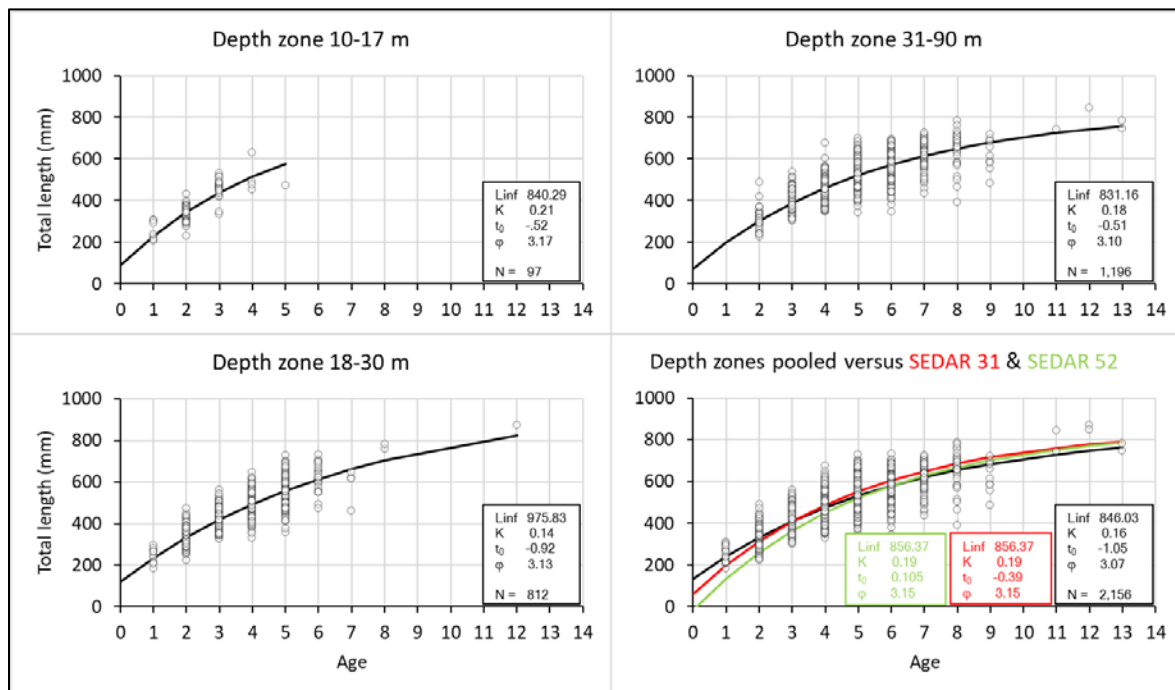


Figure 8. Von Bertalanffy curves by depth zone and pooled compared to SEDAR estimates.

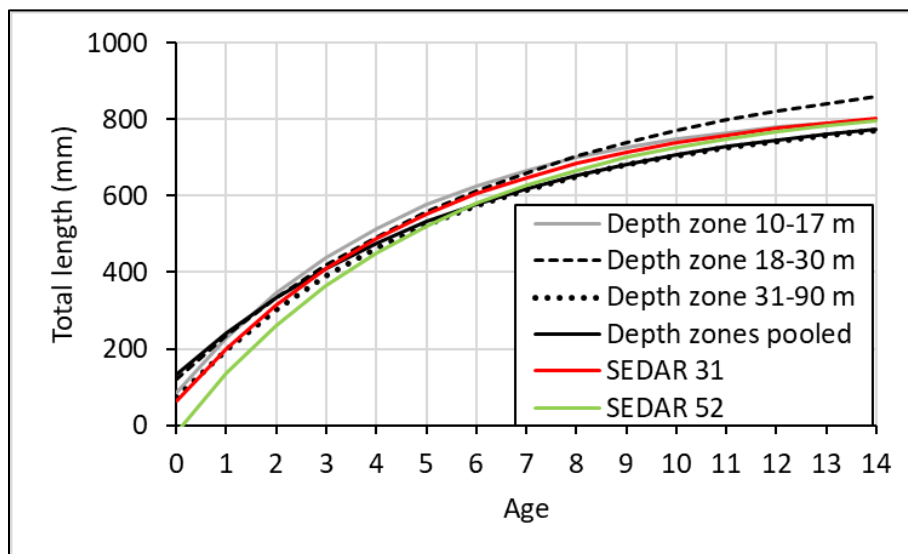


Figure 9. Comparison of Von Bertalanffy curves among depth zones and SEDAR estimates.

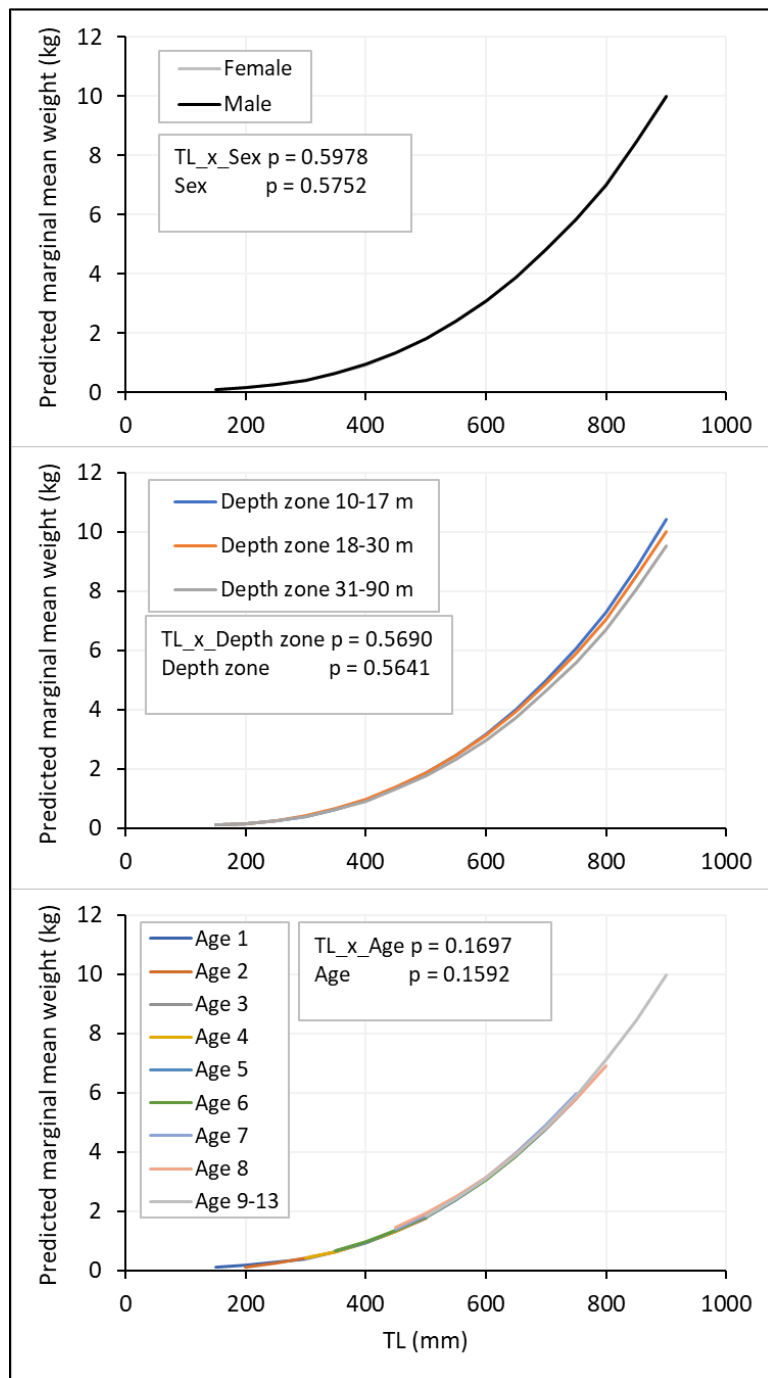


Figure 10. Comparison of weight compared to length relationships for gender, depth zones, and ages.

2.3.2.3 Gray Triggerfish

The gray triggerfish was reported by Gallaway (1981), Gallaway and Lewbel (1982), Stanley and Wilson (2003) and Gitschlag et al. (2000) as being one of the more abundant species associated with platforms at bottom depths greater than 20 m. In this study, gray triggerfish were not abundant (ranked 22nd in overall abundance), ranging from about only 1 to 63 fish at the “average platform” over all depths (Table 5). We suspect that this might reflect a sampling problem and that many more gray triggerfish were present at our study sites but were within the structure itself where they could not be counted. Based on our estimates, only about 1.0% of the age 2+ gray triggerfish stock occurred at platforms (Table 8).

2.3.2.4 Greater Amberjack

Greater amberjack ranked 10th in overall abundance in our study (Table 5). The “average platform” within the 31- to 90- m bottom depth zone was characterized by 487 (176-1,347) greater amberjack and similar numbers were estimated to occur on the average platform within the 91- to 300- m bottom depth zone (median estimate was 587 fish with a confidence interval of 313-1,095 specimens). Most of the greater amberjack collected at platforms were relatively large fish, averaging over 28 lbs. each. Considering only age 2+ fish, a total of 336,210 fish were at offshore platforms in 2017 and 313,602 fish were present at these habitats in 2018 (Table 9). The estimates, if accurate, would suggest that about 48% of the stock resided on platforms in 2017 and that number was reduced to 45% in 2018 due to the removal of 89 platforms. The vast majority of the greater amberjack occurred in the Louisiana Management zone where deep platforms are most abundant (Table 9).

Greater amberjack were most abundant in the water column at depths between 13 to 32 m (118 to 140 fish present, on average) based on the “average platform” within the 31- to 90- m depth zone. In the deep zone (91- to 300- m deep), the high abundance zone shifted to depths between 33 and 52 m (see Appendix 3 in LGL 2019).

2.3.2.5 Cobia

Cobia are usually thought of as being generally solitary but are also common in pairs and/or small groups ranging up to 8 or more fish. Cobia ranked 21st in total abundance in our study. The number of cobia present on an “average platform” in water 10- to 17- m deep, 18- to 30- m deep, 31- to 90- m deep and 91- to 300- m deep was 57 (14–230), 13 (6–26), 24 (16–36) and 1.4 (0–5) fish, respectively (Table 5). Collectively, these numbers, used in combination with the total number of platforms within each depth zone, suggest that 37,045 cobia were present on platforms in 2017 and 34,350 cobia were present in 2018 following the removal of 89 platforms between years (Table 10). On the order of 8 to 9% of the Gulf cobia stock occurs on platforms, mostly in Louisiana where platforms are the most numerous (SEDAR 2013). In general, cobia were typically more abundant in the upper 12 to 22 m of the water column (see Appendix 3 in LGL 2019).

3 Explosive Removal Impacts

The UnderWater Calculator version 1 (UWC), was the underwater acoustic shock propagation model used for this study. A description of the UWC and the motivation for its selection over other models are detailed elsewhere (Dzwilewski and Fenton 2003; GSI and LGL 2017). User input to the UWC includes detonation charge specifications (explosive type and weight), pile specifications (diameter and wall thickness), source (charge) depth, and receiver (e.g., fish) depth. In addition, the UWC offers three bottom boundary conditions to be specified by the user: water (free space), soft clay, and stiff clay. The UWC fixes the explosive coupling efficiency for these bottom types at 43.51%, 37.90%, and 34.37%, respectively.

Table 7. Estimated abundance of age 2+ vermilion snapper at platforms within each of our bottom depth zones, 2017 and 2018, by state and bottom depth zone 2017 and 2018

A) Age 2+ Vermilion Snapper by Year and Depth Zone (Median Estimate with Confidence Limits)						
	2017			2018		
Depth Zone (m)	LCL	Median	UCL	LCL	Median	UCL
10–17	4,114	16,708	67,320	3,806	15,457	62,280
18–30	16,549	29,242	51,870	15,343	27,111	48,090
31–90	222,560	1,823,235	14,946,360	207,152	1,697,011	13,911,612
91–300	3,570	6,783	12,971	3,360	6,384	12,208
Total		1,875,967			1,745,963	
B) Age 2+ Vermilion Snapper by State and Depth Zone, 2017 (Median Estimate)						
	Depth zone (m)					
State	10–17	18–30	31–90	91–300	Total	
TX	1,340	3,078	175,311	1,767	181,496	
LA	13,268	23,441	1,353,401	3,762	1,393,872	
MS	1,742	2,368	234,917	741	239,768	
AL	357	355	59,606	513	60,831	
				2017 Platform Total	1,875,967	
				GOM Stock Size	30,184,024	
				Percent of Stock on Platforms	6.2	
C) Age 2+ Vermilion Snapper by State and Depth Zone, 2018 (Median Estimate)						
State	10–17	18–30	31–90	91–300	Total	
TX	1,161	2,723	164,792	1,482	170,159	
LA	12,285	22,020	1,248,214	3,705	1,286,225	
MS	1,742	2,013	231,411	741	235,906	
AL	268	355	52,593	456	53,673	
				2018 Platform Total	1,745,963	
				GOM Stock Size	30,184,024	
				Percent of Stock on Platforms	5.8	

Table 8. Estimated abundance of age 2+ gray triggerfish at platforms within each of our bottom depth zones, 2017 and 2018, by state and bottom depth zone 2017 and 2018

A) Age 2+ Gray Triggerfish by Year and Depth Zone (Median Estimates with Confidence Limits)						
	2017			2018		
Depth Zone (m)	LCL	Median	UCL	LCL	Median	UCL
10–17	42	485	4,114	39	449	3,806
18–30	1,482	3,174	6,311	1,374	2,943	5,851
31–90	20,800	32,973	52,520	19,360	30,690	48,884
91–300	119	251	714	112	236	672
Total		36,883			34,318	
B) Age 2+ Gray Triggerfish by State and Depth Zone, 2017 (Median Estimates)						
	Depth zone (m)					
State	10–17	18–30	31–90	91–300	Total	
TX	39	334	3,170	65	3,609	
LA	385	2,544	24,476	139	27,545	
MS	51	257	4,248	27	4,583	
AL	10	39	1,078	19	1,146	
				2017 Platform Total	36,883	
				GOM Stock Size	2,822,750	
				Percent of Stock on Platforms	1.3	
C) Age 2+ Gray Triggerfish by State and Depth Zone, 2018 (Median Estimates)						
	Depth zone (m)					
State	10–17	18–30	31–90	91–300	Total	
TX	34	296	2,980	55	3,364	
LA	357	2,390	22,574	137	25,458	
MS	51	218	4,185	27	4,481	
AL	8	39	951	17	1,014	
				2018 Platform Total	34,318	
				GOM Stock Size	2,822,750	
				Percent of Stock on Platforms	1.2	

Table 9. Estimated abundance of age 2+ greater amberjack at platforms within each of our bottom depth zones, 2017 and 2018, by state and bottom depth zone 2017 and 2018

A) Age 2+ Greater Amberjack by Year and Depth Zone (Median Estimates with Confidence Limits)						
Year:	2017			2018		
Depth Zone (m)	LCL	Median	UCL	LCL	Median	UCL
10 - 17	1,122	5,226	22,440	1,038	4,835	20,760
18 - 30	4,199	7,910	14,573	3,893	7,334	13,511
31 - 90	91,520	253,279	700,440	85,184	235,744	651,948
91 - 300	37,247	69,795	130,781	35,056	65,689	123,088
Total		336,210			313,602	
B) Age 2+ Greater Amberjack by State and Depth Zone, 2017 (Median Estimates)						
		Depth zone (m)				
State	10–17	18–30	31–90	31–300	Total	
TX	419	833	24,354	18,182	43,787	
LA	4,150	6,341	188,011	38,710	237,212	
MS	545	640	32,634	7,625	41,444	
AL	112	96	8,280	5,279	13,767	
				2017 Platform Total	336,210	
				GOM Stock Size	695,549	
				Percent of Stock on Platforms	48.3	
C) Age 2+ Greater Amberjack by State and Depth Zone, 2018 (Median Estimates)						
	Depth zone (m)					
State	10–17	18–30	31–90	91–300	Total	
TX	363	737	22,893	15,249	39,242	
LA	3,843	5,956	173,399	38,123	221,321	
MS	545	544	32,147	7,625	40,861	
AL	84	96	7,306	4,692	12,178	
				2018 Platform Total	313,602	
				GOM Stock Size	695,549	
				Percent of Stock on Platforms	45.1	

Table 10. Estimated abundance of age 2+ cobia on the platforms within each of our bottom depth zones, 2017 and 2018, by state and depth zone 2017 and 2018

A) Age 2+ Cobia by Year and Depth Zone (Median Estimates with Confidence Limits)						
Year:	2017			2018		
Depth Zone (m)	LCL	Median	UCL	LCL	Median	UCL
10 - 17	5,236	21,365	86,020	4,844	19,765	79,580
18 - 30	1,598	3,216	6,391	1,482	2,981	5,925
31 - 90	8,320	12,303	18,720	7,744	11,451	17,424
91 - 300	21	162	595	20	152	560
Total		37,045			34,350	
B) Age 2+ Cobia by State and Depth Zone, 2017 (Median Estimates)						
	Depth zone (m)					
State	10–17	18–30	31–90	91–300	Total	
TX	1,714	338	1,183	42	3,277	
LA	16,966	2,578	9,133	90	28,766	
MS	2,228	260	1,585	18	4,091	
AL	457	39	402	12	910	
				2017 Platform Total	37,045	
				GOM Stock Size	423,955	
				Percent of Stock on Platforms	8.7	
C) Age 2+ Cobia by State and Depth Zone, 2018 (Median Estimates)						
	Depth zone (m)					
State	10–17	18–30	31–90	91–300	Total	
TX	1,485	299	1,112	35	2,932	
LA	15,709	2,421	8,423	88	26,642	
MS	2,228	221	1,562	18	4,028	
AL	343	39	355	11	748	
				2018 Platform Total	34,350	
				GOM Stock Size	423,955	
				Percent of Stock on Platforms	8.1	

The minimum slant range (distance) to a defined peak acoustic pressure is a function of said pressure, the explosive weight, and two Swisdak Similitude Coefficients specific to a given explosive (Dzwilewski and Fenton, 2003). The UWC includes four built-in types of explosive material (TNT, pentaerythritol tetranitrate, H6, and C-4) as well as allows user-defined Swisdak Similitude Coefficients for other explosives. For the four types of explosives included in the UWC, relevant Swisdak coefficients K and a range from 52.4–60.6 and 1.13–1.22, respectively. The explosive material utilized for platform removals during the hydroacoustic measurements of this report was Composition B (Comp-B). Unfortunately, Swisdak coefficients were unavailable for Comp-B. Such coefficients were available for mixtures HBX-1 and HBX-3 (Kaye, 1983), initially thought to be similar to Comp-B based upon their peak pressure equivalents in free air (Brown, 1986). However, when these coefficients were applied in the UWC, they predicted weaker explosions than TNT, yet TNT Equivalent Weight Factors were known for Comp-B to range from 1.11 (NATO, 2010) to 1.35 (Dahl, 2016). That is, a given Comp-B charge should yield the same impact as a TNT charge with 11–35% larger mass. Consequently, to accommodate Comp-B, rather than relying upon Comp-B-specific Swisdak coefficients which were unavailable, Swisdak coefficients for TNT were used as input, and a TNT Equivalent Weight Factor for peak pressure was added to the UWC. For this study, the aforementioned TNT Equivalent Weight Factors for Comp-B were used as bounding values to adjust the effective weight of the explosives. The additional user input of a TNT Equivalent Weight Factor to the UWC in and of itself does not affect the modeled impacts, although the increased effective weight of Comp-B relative to TNT certainly does.

This study analyzes the explosive severance of four types of pipes: piles, conductors, skirt piles, and caissons. The UWC was designed for piles and lacks a method for modeling other types of pipes. This study treated all pipe types the same except for the 11 sites that had conductors with internal concentric pipes. Although the thickness of the internal pipes was available, their diameters were not. The UWC is based upon parametric numerical simulations of “typical pile diameters” of 24, 36, 48, and 72 in (Dzwilewski and Fenton, 2003) and, thus, treats any pipes with diameters less than 24 in (61.0 cm) as having no effect on the efficiency of the transmitted shock wave. Therefore, for the results in this report, two pipe cases were considered. One case was Small Internal Pipes, in which the internal pipes were less than 24” in diameter and, thus, assumed to have no effect on acoustic energy. In this case, only outer pipe specifications were used in the UWC. The second case was Large Internal Pipes, which assumed the outer diameter of the internal pipe was as large as the inner diameter of the largest pipe. In this case, the sum total of the wall thicknesses of all concentric pipes was entered into the UWC model as a single pipe wall thickness.

In its forward calculation, the UWC estimates underwater shock wave parameters such as the peak pressure, impulse, and energy flux density for a user-specified source-to-receiver slant range. In its backward or inverse calculation, the UWC estimates the slant range from the explosive charge to a user-specified energy flux density or peak pressure value. In this study, the range of received peak sound pressure level (SPL_{peak}) of 229–234 dB re 1 μ Pa was adopted as the acoustic threshold for mortal and potential mortal injury to fish (Popper et al., 2015), and the inverse calculation was performed to determine the ranges to that threshold.

For each pipe explosion, the inverse calculation was performed twice: once to calculate a narrow range of mortal injury using the most conservative model input values and a second time for a wider range of potential mortal injury using the least conservative values (Table 11).

Table 11. Bounding model cases

Variable	Narrow Range	Wide Range
	(Less Conservative)	(More Conservative)
Sediment type	Stiff clay	Soft clay
Pipe option	Large internal pipes	Small internal pipes
SPL _{peak}	234 dB re 1 μ Pa	229 dB re 1 μ Pa

One set of estimates is based on the less conductive stiff clay, the large internal pipe option (i.e., all internal concentric pipes are large enough to consider in the thickness of the outer pipe), and the higher peak pressure mortality threshold. The second set of estimates are based on the more conductive soft clay, small internal pipe option (i.e., all internal pipes are smaller than 24 in (0.61 m) and, thus, do not affect calculations), and the lower peak pressure mortality threshold.

The range of each randomly placed fish to each explosion was calculated and the count of lethal exposures tallied. Minimum and maximum exposure levels, as well as the total number of exposures (most sites involved multiple explosions), were recorded for any fish located farther than the defined lethal range based on the UWC forward calculation.

Below, we first describe methods and results obtained from modeling the effects of the explosive removal activities on the mortality of the resident fish based upon three scenarios: 1) the actual explosive removals of 24 platforms in 2017 and 23 platforms in 2018; 2) the effects that would occur if all the remaining platforms in the study area were removed in a single year; and 3) the effects of removing all the remaining platforms within a 100 mile radius of major fishing ports. The last section of the report provides an assessment of the predicted effects using existing stock assessment models for each of the five selected species.

3.1 Estimation of Effects

As described above, we organized our effects description around three scenarios: the actual removals that occurred in 2017 and 2018 (the years of our study), the removal of all the remaining platforms in federal waters in a single year and the removal of all platforms within 100-miles of major ports.

3.1.1 2017 and 2018 Removals

3.1.1.1 Model Results

In 2017 and 2018, 329 explosions were used to sever 319 pipes at 47 platforms in water depths ranging from 10 m to 93 m. These 47 platforms were divided into four depth zone categories as follows:

Depth Zone	Water Depth	2017	2018	Number of Platforms
A	10–17 m	3	11	14
B	18–30 m	12	1	13
C	31–90 m	8	10	18
D	91–300 m	1	1	2

A listing of each platform and its attributes used in the assessment is provided as Appendix 1 in Conrad et al. (2019). Detailed structural plans were available for only a subset of the platforms. For those platforms with very limited or no available structural information other than depth, the depth zones were used, in part, to estimate platform size and pipe orientation.

The explosive material used in the 2017–2018 removals was Comp B, a mixture of the explosives RDX and TNT along with paraffin wax (see Appendix 2 in Conrad et al. 2019). The standard proportions are 59.5% RDX, 39.4% TNT, and 1% wax. The explosions generally used 36.3–90.7 kg (80–200 lbs) of explosive material. At platform B1_2018, three explosions were made using 36.3 kg (80 lbs) each of Comp B. In addition, two explosions were made using only 3.2 kg (7 lbs) of explosive material each, and one explosion was made using 15.0 kg (33 lbs) of Comp B. Using such small quantities of Comp B to sever pipes was atypical.

The explosions severed pipes having diameters 0.25–1.8 m (10–72 in) with wall thicknesses generally ranging between 1.0–6.35 cm (0.38–2.5 in). Platforms A8_2018 and A11_2018 had conductors with wall thicknesses of 29.2 cm (11.5 in) and 22.6 cm (8.88 in), respectively, but these were unusually thick. Data on abundance of fishes were binned with respect to horizontal distance from the platforms and vertical depth below the water surface (see Appendices 3 through 7 in Conrad et al. 2019). Four horizontal bins, shaped as rounded rectangular rings each of 25 m width, surrounded each platform. The depth bins were 10 m thick, starting 3 m below the surface. Depending on the water depth, the number of depth bins for the platforms ranged from 1 to 9.

For each platform and based on fish distances derived from the hydroacoustic data, simulated fish were randomly placed in a uniform distribution within each horizontal bin. First, the total number of fish in each bin was determined by randomly rounding the (non-integer) abundance estimate of that bin up or down depending on the decimal portion of the abundance estimate value. For example, if the abundance estimate in a bin was 104.2, then in 8 random simulations out of 10, 104 fish would be placed. For the other 2 simulations out of 10, 105 fish would be placed. Thus, the average over all simulations would be 104.2 fish placed.

For each platform site, fish in each horizontal and vertical bin were randomly placed based on the abundance distribution estimates for that site's depth category. The initial placements were done in circular rings, using polar coordinates. The bins were not circular, however; they were rounded rectangles (see Fig. 11 below) because they represented distances from a rectangular platform. Consequently, fish initially placed outside of bins were removed and then randomly placed again. This placement process was repeated until the correct number of fish had been placed in each bin.

Table 12 displays the number of fish of each federally-managed species that were estimated to occur at sites within each of the depth zones, A–D. These represent the total number of fish summed over all depth bins at each depth zone. Due to abundance estimates' binning into four depth zones "A" through "D", most platforms were actually in shallower water than the deepest bins for their prescribed depth zone. All fish in bins shallower than each platform's total water depth were placed, and the remaining fish were then placed in the deepest bin based on the depth at the platform. The number of fish and their locations were randomized 10,000 times to ensure representative fish distribution.

Table 12. Abundance estimates for each species for each depth zone

Depth Zone	Red Snapper	Vermilion Snapper	Gray Triggerfish	Greater Amberjack	Cobia	TOTAL
A	359	44.7	1.3	14	57.1	476
B	1015.3	118.4	12.8	32	13	1191.6
C	2979.9	3506.2	63.4	487.1	23.7	7060.2
D	133.1	57	2.1	586.5	1.4	780

An example of one iteration of fish placement of the five species in the 4 horizontal range bins at the deepest platform removed in 2017 or 2018 (see D1_2017 in Appendix 1 of Conrad et al. 2019) can be seen in Figure 11. Each rounded rectangle (blue, orange, purple and black) represents the line of constant range from the platform edge (red). Fish were randomly placed in each range bin based on abundance estimates described above. Densities of each species vary but are constant within each bin.

Mortality and potential mortal injury to fish were anticipated to occur at a received sound level of 229–234 dB re 1 μ Pa SPL_{peak} (Popper et al., 2015). For this report, over 100,000 simulated fish were placed around 47 platforms, and mortality ranges were calculated for 329 explosions. Using the most conservative inputs (229 dB, Small Inner Pipes and Soft Clay), every fish was exposed to a lethal peak pressure at all 47 sites. The exact number of fish and their positions were randomly selected 10,000 times as described above.

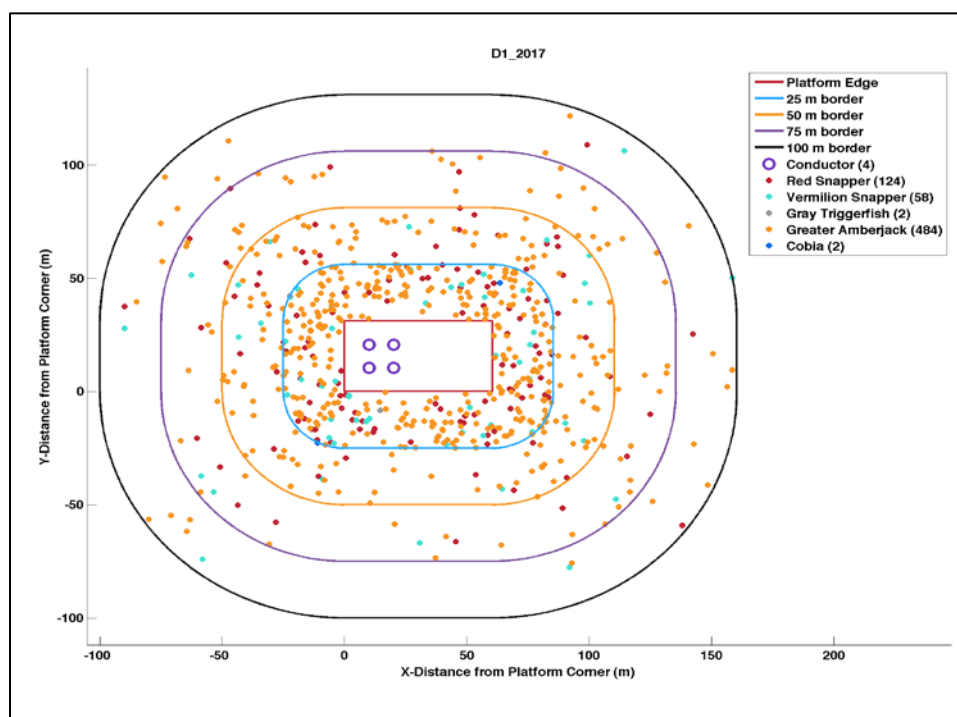


Figure 11. Random placement of 670 fish around platform D1_2017 in 91.44 m water depth, using hydroacoustic abundance estimates.

The five species included are red snapper (red dots), vermilion snapper (cyan dots), gray triggerfish (gray dots), greater amberjack (orange dots) and cobia (blue dots). Four conductors were exploded at this site on 3 July 2017. The estimated positions of the four conductors (based on schematics of other platforms) are shown as purple circles inside the red platform boundary. Edges of horizontal range bins are shown as rounded rectangles outside the platform boundary.

Based upon the simulated fish positions in Figure 11, all 670 fish representing federally-managed species present at platform D1_2017 were exposed to lethal doses using the most conservative inputs (229 dB re 1 μ Pa peak, Small Internal Pipes, Soft Clay). These fish are depicted in Figure 12 as red x's. When using the less conservative inputs (Large Internal Pipes, Stiff Clay), 665 fish were exposed to the lethal dose of 234 dB re 1 μ Pa peak. However, the remaining five fish were each exposed to at least 232.9 dB re 1 μ Pa peak, four times due to the four conductor explosions. In Figure 12, these potentially surviving five fish are denoted with green triangles.

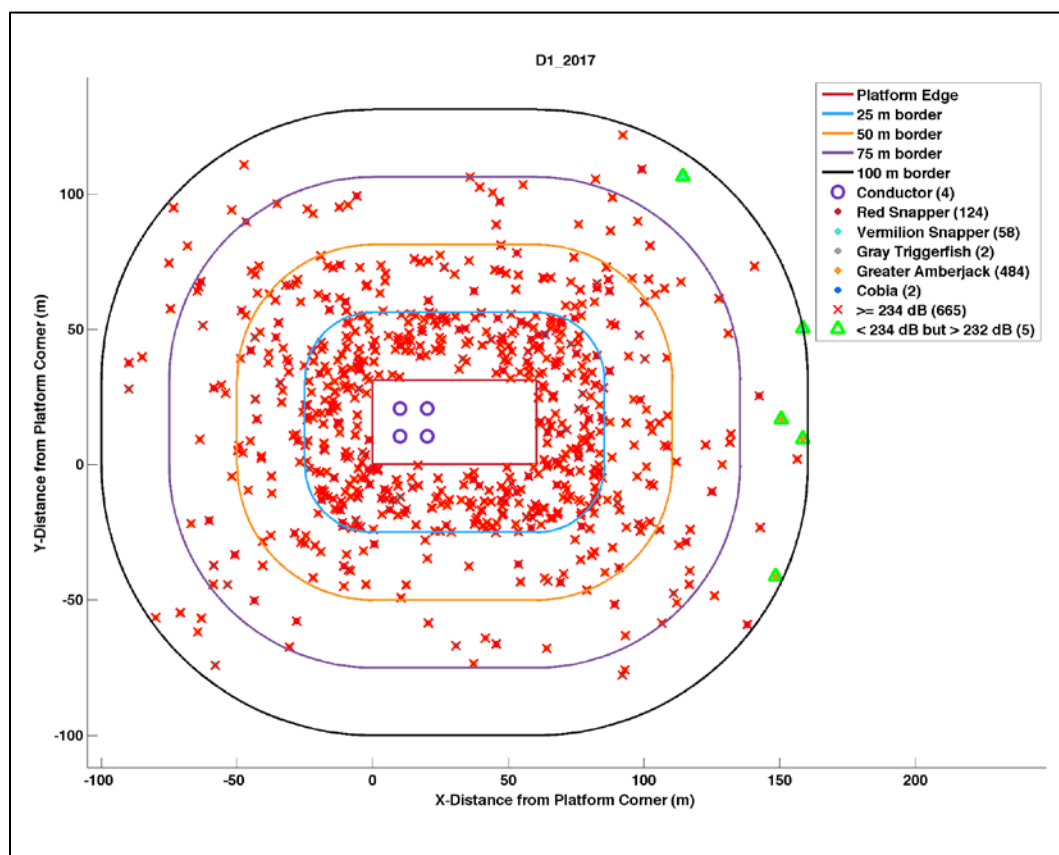


Figure 12. Fish exposed to lethal doses.

Red x = lethal dose. Based upon the simulated fish positions in Figure 1, all 670 fish were exposed to lethal doses using (229 dB re 1 μ Pa peak, Small Internal Pipes, Soft Clay). When using (234 dB re 1 μ Pa peak, large Internal Pipes, and stiff clay, 665 fish were exposed to lethal doses. The remaining five fish, exposed to greater than 229 dB re 1 μ Pa peak but less than 234 dB re 1 μ Pa peak, are denoted with green triangles.

As shown in Appendix Table 2.2, the least conservative range of survival for platform D1_2017 was 157 m. The explosions occurred 6.9 m below the 91.4 m deep mudline, so fish on the outer edge of the 100 m range opposite the conductors and near the sea surface were further than 157 m.

Using the less conservative inputs (234 dB re 1 μ Pa peak, Large Internal Pipes, and Stiff Clay), every fish was exposed to a lethal dose at 46 of the 47 sites (Appendix Table 2.2). At one site, platform D1_2017, depending on the random placement of fish, 0 or up to 5 of the 653–688 fish (0–0.8%) were exposed to less than the lethal threshold. However, each of those 0–5 fish were exposed to four separate explosions with peak pressures of more than 232.3 dB re 1 μ Pa. Figure 12 shows positions based on one iteration in which 5 fish were exposed to less than the lethal threshold using the less conservative input parameters.

The UWC acoustic model was used to estimate fish mortality based on fish abundance estimates and explosive type and weight at a wide variety of platform sites. Using this model, fish at all of the sites were exposed to lethal blasts using the most conservative (i.e., yielding greatest mortality) model inputs, and nearly all fish were exposed to lethal blasts when using less conservative inputs. A few fish (0.1%) may have survived at one site, a platform located in the deepest water using some of the smaller explosive charges. Nearly all of the approximately 101,742 fish simulated in this study were exposed to lethal levels of peak pressure from the 329 explosions detonated to remove platforms in 2017 and 2018. Based on these results, we conclude that all the fish at a platform will be lost if explosives are used to remove platforms.

“More Conservative” exposure counts were the average number of fish that experienced at least 229 dB re 1 μ Pa peak pressure based on calculations with Small Internal Pipes in soft clay. “Less Conservative” exposure counts were estimated using a 234 dB re 1 μ Pa peak pressure threshold based on calculations with Large Internal Pipes in stiff clay. “Range for Survival” is the minimum distance for a fish to avoid lethal peak pressure at each site. Platform D1_2017 is highlighted because it is the only platform at which some fish simulated in this study were not exposed to a lethal dose of acoustic energy.

3.1.1.1.1 Red Snapper

The explosive removal of 24 platforms in 2017 and 23 platforms in 2018 likely resulted in the mortality of 69,506 red snapper, 37,233 in 2017 and 32,273 in 2018 (Table 13). In 2017, based on project-specific ageing studies, the ages of these fish ranged, from age 1 (0.5%) to age 13 (0.2%), with most being age 5 (40%). Based on average weight-at-age (SEDAR 52 2018), ~179,000 lbs. of red snapper were killed in association with platform removals in 2017, all from the western Gulf (Appendix Table 2.3). In 2018, the estimated 32,275 red snapper that were assumed to have been killed had a total biomass of ~152,000 lbs.

3.1.1.1.2 Vermilion Snapper

The 2017 platform removals were predicted to have resulted in an estimated kill of 29,662 vermillion snapper which compared to an estimated kill of 32,268 fish in 2018:

Depth Zone (m)	2017			2018		
	East GOM	West GOM	Total	East GOM	West GOM	Total
10–17	-	134	134	45	491	536
18–30	-	1,421	1,421	-	118	118
31–90	-	28,050	28,050	3,506	28,050	31,556
91–300	-	57	57	-	57	57

	2017			2018		
Depth Zone (m)	East GOM	West GOM	Total	East GOM	West GOM	Total
Total	-	29,662	29,662	3,551	28,717	32,268

Of these, the vast majority came from the 31- to 90- m depth zone and most were from the western Gulf.

Table 13. Estimates of red snapper killed by explosive removal of structures in 2017 and 2018.

(See Appendix Table 2.3 for detail)

Age	2017	2018	Total
1	161	358	519
2	2,673	3,765	6,438
3	7,510	4,762	12,272
4	4,727	8,368	13,095
5	14,876	5,167	20,043
6	4,144	7,004	11,148
7	1,781	1,941	3,722
8	1,134	596	1,730
9	130	219	349
11	0	31	31
12	32	31	63
13	65	31	96
	37,233	32,273	69,506

Based on the model results above, all fish present were assumed to have been killed. The red snapper stock is divided at the mouth of the Mississippi River into the Eastern and Western stocks following the SEDAR stock assessments for red snapper.

3.1.1.1.3 Greater Amberjack

A total of 10,079 greater amberjack were estimated to have been killed in association with platform removals over the study period, 4,909 in 2017 and 5,170 in 2018:

	2017			2018		
Depth Zone (m)	EastGOM	WestGOM	Total	EastGOM	WestGOM	Total
10–17	-	42	42	14	154	168
18–30	-	384	384	-	32	32
31–90	-	3,897	3,897	487	3,897	4,384
91–300	-	587	587	-	587	587
Total	-	4,909	4,909	501	4,669	5,170

Most of the platform removals occurred in the western Gulf and most of the estimated mortality occurred in the 31- to 90- m depth zone.

3.1.1.1.4 Gray Triggerfish

Gray triggerfish were not found to be abundant in our study. Explosive platform removals in 2017 were estimated to have killed 667 gray triggerfish, and 601 gray triggerfish were estimated to have been killed in 2018:

	2017			2018		
Depth Zone (m)	East OM	WestGOM	Total	EastGOM	WestGOM	Total
10–17	-	4	4	1	14	16
18–30	1,041	154	154	-	13	13
31–90	-	507	507	63	507	571
91–300	-	2	2	-	2	2
Total	1,041	667	667	65	537	601

Again, most of the mortality occurred in the 31- to 90- m depth zone.

3.1.1.1.5 Cobia

An estimated 518 cobia were assumed to have been killed in the western Gulf in 2017 in association with explosive platform removals and another 913 were estimated to have been killed in 2018:

	2017			2018		
Depth Zone (m)	EastGOM	WestGOM	Total	EastGOM	WestGOM	Total
10–17	-	171	171	57	628	685
18–30	-	156	156	-	13	13
31–90	-	189	189	24	189	213
91–300	-	1	1	-	1	1
Total	-	518	518	81	832	913

In 2018, 628 of the total estimated 913 Cobia mortalities occurred in the 10- to 17- m deep zone in the western Gulf.

3.1.2 Removal of all Platforms in a Single Year (2018)

In 2018, there were 1,171 standing platforms in the Gulf (Figure 13). If all of these had been explosively removed in 2018, we estimate that a total of 1,813,853 red snapper would have been killed having an estimated biomass of 8,595,496 lbs. (Table 14, Appendix Table 2.4). Tables 15-18 show the total numbers of vermilion snapper, greater amberjack, gray triggerfish and cobia that might have been killed had all the standing platforms in federal waters of the Gulf been explosively removed.

3.1.3 Removal of all Platforms within 100 miles of Fishing Ports

Figure 13 shows that of the 1,171 standing offshore platforms remaining in 2018, 1,115 were located within a 100-mile radius of a major fishing port. Thus the vast majority of these platforms were within range of recreational fisheries. Had all the accessible platforms been explosively removed in 2018, a total of 1,755,160 red snapper having a biomass of 8,284,260 lbs. would have been lost to the directed red

snapper fishery (Table 19, Appendix Table 2.5). Further, 1,680,701 vermilion snapper, 282,548 greater amberjack, 33,097 gray triggerfish and 33,872 cobia would have been lost (Table 20). These results suggest significant local effects on fisheries.

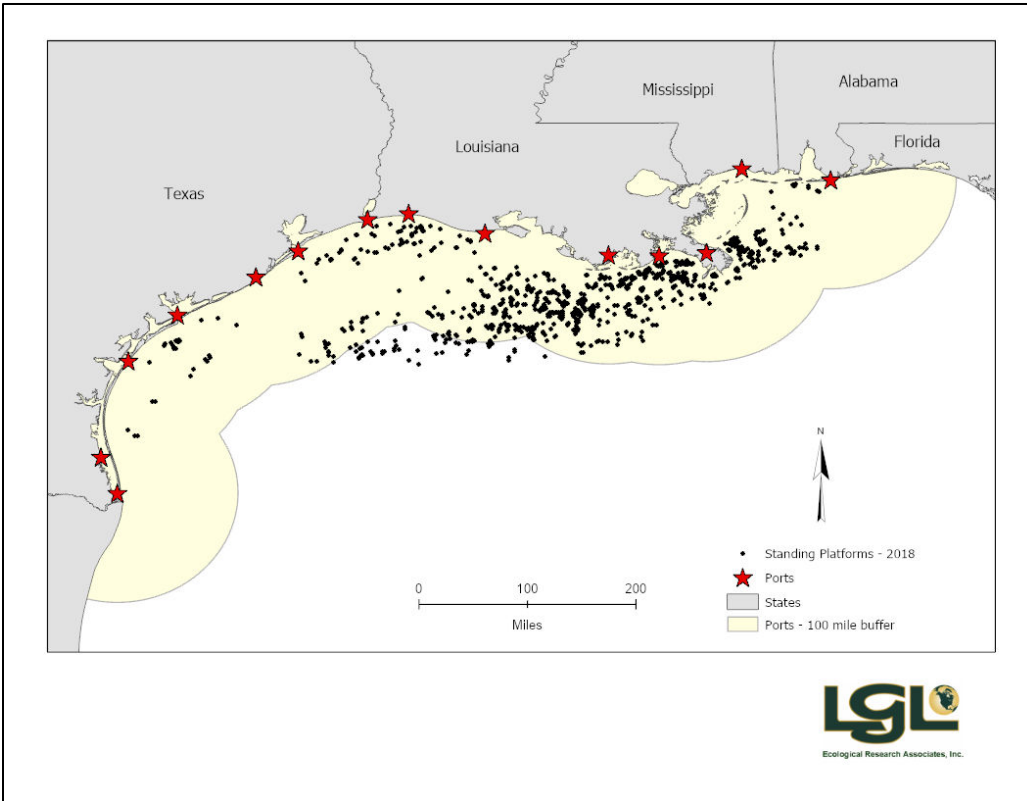


Figure 13. The location of the 1,171 standing platforms in the Gulf of Mexico in 2018.

The red stars represent major fishing ports and the yellow polygon represents a 100-mile radius from each major port. A total of 1,115 platforms were located within 100-m of each port.

Table 14. Median abundance of red snapper by age on the 1,171 standing platforms present in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico in 2018

(For detail, see Appendix Table 2.4)

Age	Number	Biomass
1	12,599	3,611
2	173,942	184,069
3	281,742	645,980
4	519,163	1,980,083
5	287,269	1,570,630
6	384,266	2,744,803
7	105,329	921,872

Age	Number	Biomass
8	32,640	333,885
9	11,833	136,698
11	1,690	23,218
12	1,690	24,709
13	1,690	25,938
	1,813,853	8,595,496

Based on the model results above, all fish present would be assumed to be killed if all the platforms were explosively removed.

Table 15. Median abundance of vermilion snapper on the 1,171 standing platforms in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico in 2018

Depth Zone (m)	East GOM	West GOM	Total
10–17	2,010	13,446	15,457
18–30	2,368	24,743	27,111
31–90	284,007	1,413,022	1,697,029
91–300	1,197	5,187	6,384
Total	289,582	1,456,398	1,745,980

Based on the model results above, all fish present would be assumed to be killed if all the platforms were explosively removed.

Table 16. Median abundance of greater amberjack on the 1,171 standing platforms in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico in 2018

Depth Zone (m)	East GOM	West GOM	Total
10–17	629	4,206	4,835
18–30	640	6,693	7,333
31–90	39,453	196,292	235,745
91–300	12,317	53,373	65,690
Total	53,039	260,564	313,603

Based on the model results above, all fish present would be assumed to be killed if all the platforms were explosively removed.

Table 17. Median abundance of gray triggerfish on the 1,171 standing platforms in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico in 2018

Depth Zone (m)	East GOM	West GOM	Total
10–17	58	391	449
18–30	257	2,686	2,943
31–90	5,136	25,554	30,690

Depth Zone (m)	East GOM	West GOM	Total
91–300	44	192	236
Total	5,496	28,822	34,318

Based on the model results above, all fish present would be assumed to be killed if all the platforms were explosively removed.

Table 18. Median abundance of cobia on the 1,171 standing platforms in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico in 2018

Depth Zone (m)	East GOM	West GOM	Total
10–17	2,571	17,195	19,765
18–30	260	2,721	2,981
31–90	1,916	9,535	11,451
91–300	29	124	152
Total	4,776	29,574	34,350

Based on the model results above, all fish present would be assumed to be killed if all the platforms were explosively removed.

Table 19. Median abundance of red snapper by age on the 1,115 standing platforms within 100 miles of major fishing ports in 2018

(For detail, see Appendix Table 2.5)

Age	Number	Biomass
1	12,599	3,611
2	172,036	182,051
3	274,388	629,119
4	502,140	1,915,159
5	276,238	1,510,320
6	369,082	2,636,343
7	101,107	884,923
8	31,346	320,651
9	11,356	131,192
11	1,622	22,283
12	1,622	23,713
13	1,622	24,894
Total	1,755,160	8,284,260

Based on the model results above, all fish present would be assumed to be killed if all the platforms were explosively removed.

Table 20. Median abundance of other federally-managed species on the 1,115 standing platforms within 100 miles of a major fishing ports

Depth Zone (m)	Vermilion Snapper	Greater Amberjack	Gray Triggerfish	Cobia
10–17	15,457	4,835	449	19,765
18–30	27,111	7,333	2,943	2,981
31–90	1,633,916	226,978	29,549	11,026
91–300	4,218	43,402	156	100
Total	1,680,701	282,548	33,097	33,872

Based on the model results above, all fish present would be assumed to be killed if all the platforms were explosively removed.

4 Assessment of Removal Impacts

Above we described the consequences of explosive platform removals on five federally-managed fish species that were documented to use these habitats. We addressed 1) the specific effects for the 2017 and 2018 platform removals; 2) the effects of removing all the remaining platforms in a single year; and 3) the effects of removing all the remaining platforms within a 100-mile radius of the major fishing ports. These effects data have been provided to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for formal incorporation into upcoming stock assessments for each of the species in question. Three stock assessments have been initiated in 2019 (cobia, vermilion snapper, gray triggerfish) and a greater amberjack assessment is scheduled to be initiated in 2020. The date of the next red snapper assessment will follow in 2020 or 2021. For these assessments, NMFS will address the effects of platform removals and acknowledge the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) as the source of the data.

For the present, we base our assessment of the significance of the estimated impacts based upon the degree to which the platform-associated mortality increased fishing mortality rates and the consequences of these increases to the directed fisheries. Following the SEDAR stock assessments, we use exploitation rates (in our case, number killed/total age 2+ stock size) as a proxy for fishing mortality. We will be discussing the assessment on a State Management Area basis (see Figure 1 above).

4.1 2017 and 2018 Platform Removal Mortality

The number of key species killed as a consequence of the specific 2017 and 2018 platform removals had minimal effects on exploitation rates, at least on a total stock size basis (Table 21). The maximum impact was observed for greater amberjack which had an exploitation rate of 0.007. However, the biological effects of the annual removals appeared to be of some consequence on a local basis as described below for red snapper which has the most comprehensive assessment information.

For background, the GMFMC and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries manages the red snapper fishery in the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf). NOAA Fisheries (2018) notes that fishery is first divided into commercial and recreational sectors. In 2018, the red snapper catch quota for both sectors combined was 13.74 million pounds whole weight. The recreational sector is allocated 49% of the total quota (6.73 mp) and the commercial sector is allocated 51% of the total quota (7.01 mp). The recreational quota is further split with 57.7% allocated to the private angling component and 42.3% to the for-hire component. An annual catch target is then set at 80% of the quota. This 20% buffer helps minimize the potential for a quota overage.

NOAA (2019) provides the Allowable Catch Limit (ACL) for red snapper for the private recreational sector for each Gulf state in 2018 and 2019. The state ACL's for 2018 were 1,778,515 lbs. for Florida; 984,291 lbs. for Alabama; 137,949 lbs. for Mississippi; 743,000 lbs. for Louisiana; and 241,245 lbs. for Texas (Table 22). Given these ACLs, the total allowable catch for the Eastern Gulf (Florida, Alabama, Mississippi) was 2,900,755 lbs.; and for the western Gulf, allowable catch totaled 984,245 lbs. In 2018, platform removals in the Eastern Gulf region killed 16,323 lbs. (0.6 of the red snapper total ACL); whereas in the western Gulf, platform removals killed 135,862 lbs. of red snapper (13.8% of the western Gulf ACL).

Table 21. Exploitation rates (number killed/total age 2+ stock size) associated with 2017 and 2018 platform removals based on estimated mortalities and stock size from SEDAR stock assessments

1) Red Snapper	East	West	Total Removals	Exploitation Rate
2017 number killed	0	37,232	37,232	0.001
2018 number killed	3,339	28,936	32,275	0.004
2016 TOTAL STOCK ¹	13,094,871	23,143,192	36,738,063	
2) Vermilion Snapper	East	West	Total Removals	Exploitation Rate
2017 number killed	0	29,662	29,662	0.001
2018 number killed	3,551	28,717	32,268	0.001
2014 TOTAL STOCK ²			30,181,024	
3) Greater Amberjack	East	West	Total Removals	Exploitation Rate
2017 number killed	0	4,909	4,909	0.007
2018 number killed	501	4,669	5,170	0.007
2015 TOTAL STOCK ³			695,548	
4) Gray Triggerfish	East	West	Total Removals	Exploitation Rate
2017 number killed	0	667	667	0.0002
2018 number killed	65	537	601	0.0002
2013 TOTAL STOCK ⁴			2,822,749	
5) Cobia	East	West	Total Removals	Exploitation Rate
2017 number killed	0	518	518	0.001
2018 number killed	81	832	913	0.002
2011 TOTAL STOCK ⁵			423,955	

1) SEDAR 52

2) SEDAR 45

3) SEDAR 33

4) SEDAR 43

5) SEDAR 28

Table 22. Allowable Catch Limit (ACL) for red snapper for each Gulf state in 2018, and comparative "takes" from platform removals

1)	East Gulf	2018 ACL (lbs)	2018 Platform Take (lbs)	% of ACL
	Florida	1,778,515	0	0.00%
	Alabama	984,291	16,323	1.66%
	Mississippi	137,949	0	0.00%
		2,900,755	16323	0.56%
2)	West Gulf	2018 ACL (lbs)	2018 Platform Take (lbs)	% of ACL

	Louisiana	743,000	118,311	15.92%
	Texas	241,245	17,551	7.28%
		984,245	135,862	13.80%
3)	Total Gulf	3,885,000	152,185	3.92%

For Louisiana, platform removal mortality was about 16% of the ACL allotted to the private recreational sector.

4.2 Removal of all Platforms in a Single Year

Our approach for evaluating the significance of the effects of removal of all the remaining platforms in a single year was based on data for red snapper. Subadult and adult red snapper are targeted by both the recreational (Private Sector, Charter boats, and Headboats) and commercial sectors of the Gulf of Mexico fishery. The catch in each sector includes landed catch and fish that were discarded, both alive and dead. We characterized the take in each sector in 2016 (the most recent year for which data are available) in terms of number of red snapper, and compared these takes to the “take” that would have occurred if all the platforms and associated fish present in the Gulf in 2018 had been removed in 2016. This is the worst case scenario assuming that explosive severance was the only method used to decommission the structure (mechanical removal is also a common decommissioning method).

Recreational fisheries catch in numbers of fish were obtained from the SEDAR 52 stock assessment. Table 2.12 provided landings and Tables 2.14 and 2.15 provided numbers of discards. In the commercial fisheries, catch was reported in kg of fish landed (e.g., Table 2.5, SEDAR 52) and in numbers of fish discarded (SEDAR 2018, Table 2.7). The number of fish caught by the commercial sector was determined by multiplying the total catch (in kg) by the age frequencies of the landings (SEDAR 52 Table 2.6), then dividing the total kg for each age group by an estimate of weight at age. We used a model-derived weight at age (kg whole weight) for Gulf red snapper calculated within the SEDAR 52 stock assessment model at the mid-point of the calendar year (personal communication, Matthew Smith).

Under this scenario, the “platform fleet” dead discards would have accounted for about 18% of the total landings in 2016 (1,813,955 fish of the total 10,150,249 fish hypothetically landed, Table 23). However, in the western Gulf, platform takes were on the order of 35% of the total (1,533,233 red snapper divided by the 4,337,717 total take, Table 23). This represented an increase in the western Gulf exploitation rate from 0.119 to 0.183, an increase of the base rate by a factor of 1.54.

Table 23. Recreational and commercial fleet landings of red snapper (numbers) in 2016, the terminal year of the SEDAR 52 red snapper stock assessment

A. Landings	East	West	Total
2016 Rec Landings	863,253	235,478	1,098,731
2016 Rec. Discards	3,267,883	545,671	3,813,554
2016 Comm Landings	1,278,813	1,985,921	3,264,734
2016 Comm Discards	121,861	37,414	159,275
	5,531,810	2,804,484	8,336,294
2018 Platform Discards	280,622	1,533,233	1,813,955
	5,812,432	4,337,717	10,150,249

2016 Stock Size	13,094,871	23,643,192	36,738,063
B) Exploitation rates (number age 2+ killed/total number age 2+ , a proxy for fishing mortality)			
Without Platforms	0.422	0.119	0.227
With Platforms	0.444	0.183	0.276

In 2018 the “platform fleet” removals are also assumed to be representative of actual platform mortalities in recent years.

The vast majority of the red snapper Gulf platform population occurs in the western as compared to the eastern Gulf, and the western Gulf totals are documented by the Louisiana platform populations (Table 24). The eastern Gulf totals are dominated by Mississippi.

Table 24. Numbers and biomass of red snapper associated with offshore platforms in the eastern and western Gulf of Mexico

East	Number	Biomass
Alabama	50,962	254,810
Mississippi	229,660	1,123,493
East Total	280,622	1,378,303
West	Number	Biomass
Texas	176,198	843,682
Louisiana	1,357,035	6,373,511
West Total	1,533,233	7,217,193
Total	1,813,855	8,595,497

The Florida shelf is characterized by a diversity of hard-substrate, natural habitat on its shelf but there are no offshore platform habitats. The natural habitats offshore Florida, especially in the Florida panhandle and the shelf north of the Tampa Bay area, hold large numbers of red snapper and many of these are lost as dead discards during closed seasons (Goethel and Smith 2018). The Alabama shelf has a high density of artificial reefs, as well as natural reefs (Karnauskas et al. 2017). Hard substrate within the small Mississippi State Management Area and the large Louisiana Management Areas is dominated by petroleum platform habitat and has relatively few natural reefs. Texas is characterized by a variety of natural and artificial reef habitats (Karnauskas et al. 2017).

We suggest that, at least for red snapper, petroleum platform habitats located over soft bottom habitats on the Louisiana and Mississippi shelves have served to increase productivity as opposed to simply aggregate fish. Carr and Hixon (1997) observed that artificial reefs could increase production under several scenarios. They observed if there were no natural reefs in a management area, then the addition of artificial reefs would enhance production of obligate reef species within the management area. We suggest that red snapper between age 2 and 7–10 years of age are essentially obligate reef species because of their demonstrated affinity for high-relief vertical structure (Gallaway et al. 2009 and many others). red snapper recruit to high-relief vertical structure as age-2 fish in late summer and fall. Before this age juveniles aggregate on low-relief habitats (shell, gravel, etc.). Natural high-relief habitat occurs as rock outcrops and ledges, and coral reefs. Figure 14 shows a major portion of the Louisiana Management area showing platforms, the distribution of soft sediments (mud and sand), gravel-sized substrate (an index to

age 0–1 juvenile rearing habitat) and rock substrates (an index of natural high-relief habitat for age 2- to 10- yr. old fish). Our study sites are displayed as numbered green stars. All presently existing platforms are also shown. Substrate type and distribution are from the usSEABED database (Buczkowski et al. 2006).

Each of the 312 platforms within this polygon, on average, were populated by 1,220 age 2+ red snapper. The average weight of these fish was 2.02 kg. Thus a total of 768,893 kg (1,695,116 lbs.) of red snapper were present in this area that would otherwise not have been present in the absence of any platforms. There were no natural adult habitat areas within our soft bottom polygon or within 6 to 8 km of the polygon border. We suggest the red snapper in this area represent production that would not have occurred in the absence of platforms. The Louisiana total recreational harvest of red snapper in 2016 was estimated to have been 1,103,723 lbs. (Ava Lasseter, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, pers. comm.) which is about the same as the biomass of red snapper within our polygon.

This report is focused on five, selected federally-managed species. At sites located in the 31- to 90- m depth zones these species accounted for 42.6% of the total mortalities. The other 57.4% of the mortalities would be expected to be documented by species such as blue runner, Atlantic bumper, jacks and leatherjack. In contrast, the five federally-managed species constituted less than 10% of the total fish present in all other depth zones. All the two shallow sites, the Atlantic bumper was the dominant species along with blue runner. At the deep sites, jacks and Bermuda chub were among the dominants.

4.3 Removal of all Platforms within 100 Miles of Fishing Ports

As shown above, 95% (1115 of 1,171) of the offshore platforms remaining in 2018 were within a 100-mile radius of a major fishing port. Ultimately, the loss of these habitats will affect local directed reef fish fisheries, especially those in the Louisiana and Mississippi State Management areas. For example, hard substrate habitat within the Louisiana Management Area (not including pipelines and pipeline crossings) consists of 866 offshore platforms (platforms plus 161 caissons and 4 well protectors), 372 toppled oil platforms and bases located in 91 permitted artificial reef areas and, based on analysis of existing natural bank topography data, 448 km² of natural bank habitat. Though large in area, the natural banks consist of only 13 discrete or named banks, mostly located well offshore at the shelf edge. On a numerical basis, offshore platforms (including caissons and well protectors) thus constitute about 72% of the known, discrete reef habitats (1031 of 1363 sites). The loss of 72% of the known sites in the Louisiana Management Area would likely have significant impacts on the local fisheries. The same is likely true for Mississippi; Texas and Alabama fisheries would be less impacted.

However, there may be more natural reef habitat offshore Louisiana than has been characterized. The rock areas shown in Figure 15 generally correspond to natural banks and suggest that only a dozen or more sites may be present (Buczkowski et al. 2006). The soft bottom areas of the region constitute prime penaeid shrimp habitat, and the region is heavily trawled out to the 100 m depth contour. Areas of limited trawling (≤ 25 total 10-min tow intervals over the 13-yr. period of record mapped) result from prevalent hypoxia, offshore oil and gas structures, natural banks, artificial reefs and known obstructions (e.g. LOOP) (Figure 16). This leaves other areas, however, where it is unknown why no shrimping occurs. These areas may represent bottom obstructions constituting red snapper and other reef fish habitat. There may be more reef habitat in western Louisiana (and other areas of the Gulf) than is currently recognized.

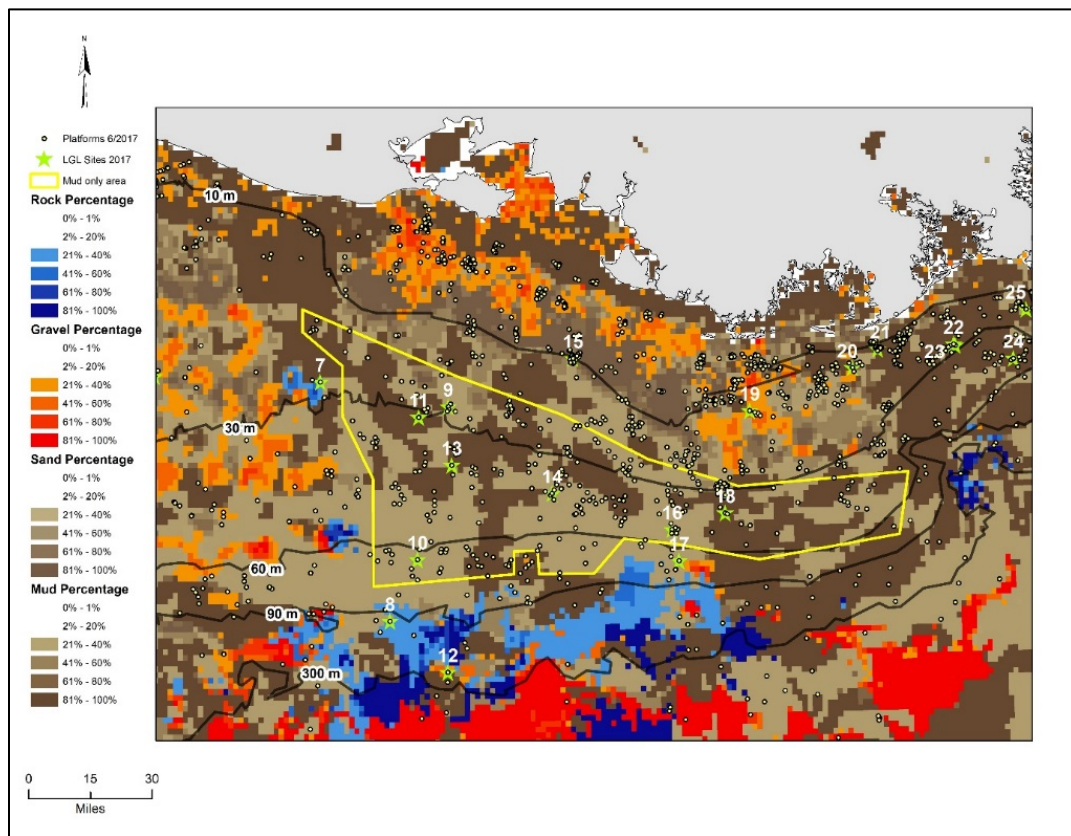


Figure 14. Distribution of platforms, and substrate types, in a selected area offshore western Louisiana.

The polygon depicts a large area of soft substrate.

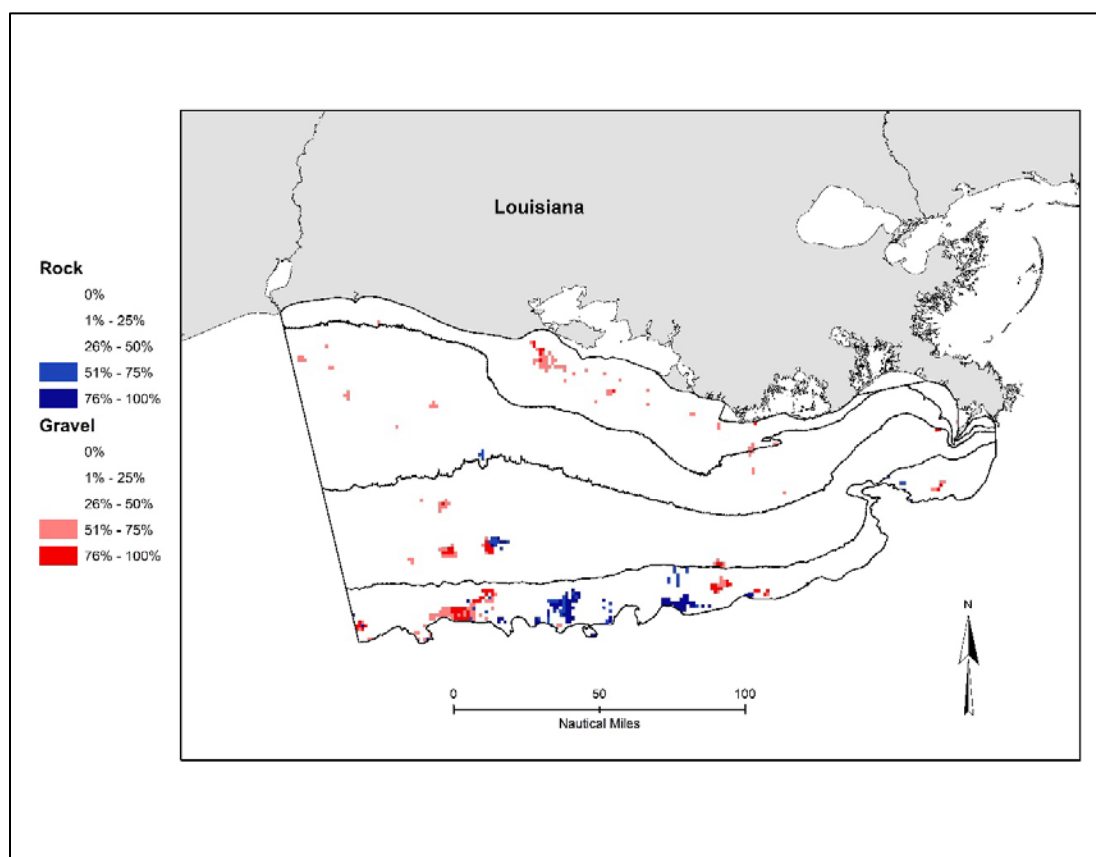


Figure 15. Rock and gravel bottom substrate distribution on the Louisiana Shelf corresponding to Region 2 of the Sea Grant Red Snapper abundance study.

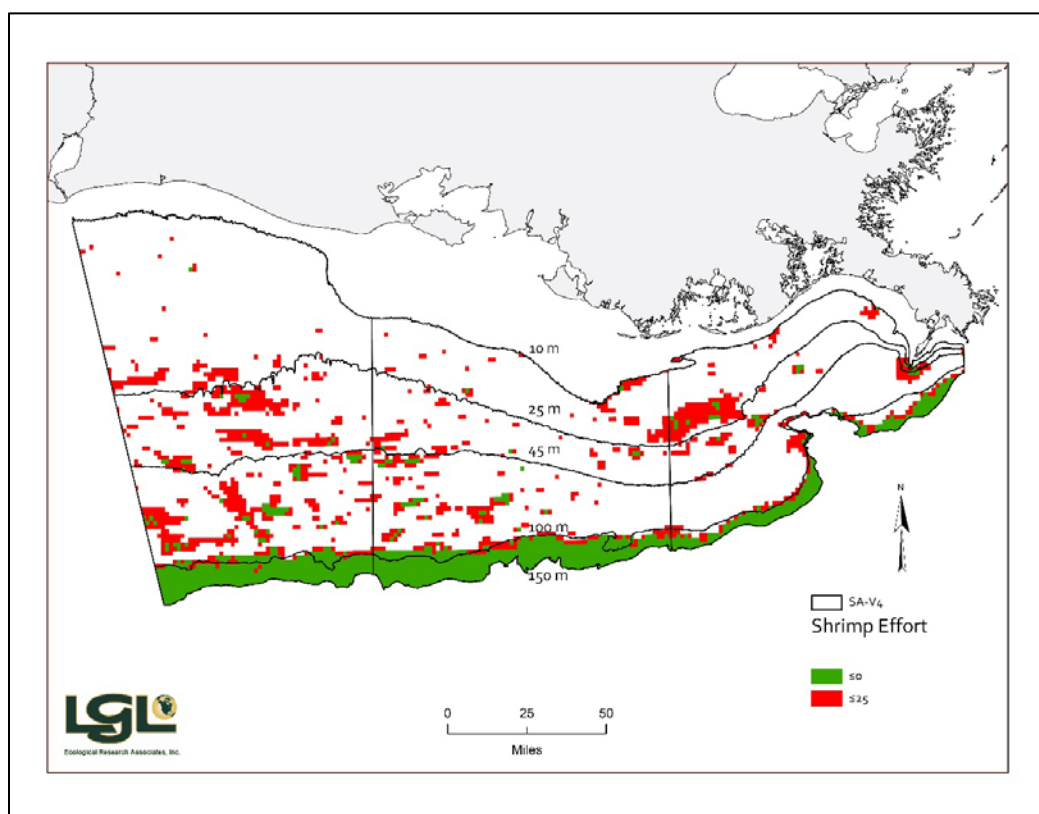


Figure 16. Distribution of limited shrimp trawling effort.

5 Summary and Conclusions

An Acoustic model-based approach combined with measurements of the relative abundance and distribution of commercially and/or recreationally valuable, federally-managed fish species was used to estimate the mortality of managed fish species due to the explosive severance of the offshore platforms.

5.1 The Model

The UnderWater Calculator version 1 (UWC), was the underwater acoustic shock propagation model used for this study.

User input to the UWC includes detonation charge specifications (explosive type and weight), pile specifications (diameter and wall thickness), source (charge) depth, and receiver (e.g., fish) depth. In addition, the UWC offers three bottom boundary conditions to be specified by the user: water (free space), soft clay, and stiff clay. The UWC fixes the explosive coupling efficiency for these bottom types at 43.51%, 37.90%, and 34.37% respectively. The UWC includes four built-in types of explosive material (TNT, pentaerythritol tetranitrate, H6, and C-4) and allows user-defined Swisdak Similitude Coefficients for a fifth type. The explosive material utilized for platform removals during the hydroacoustic measurements of this report was Composition B (Comp-B).

We analyze the explosive severance of four types of pipes: piles, conductors, skirt piles, and caissons. We treated all pipe types the same except for the 11 sites that had conductors with internal concentric pipes. These were treated as a special case. In this study, the range of received peak sound pressure level (SPL_{peak}) of 229-234 dB re 1 μ Pa was adopted as the acoustic threshold for mortal and potential mortal injury to fish (Popper et al. 2015). For each pipe explosion, the inverse calculation was performed twice: once to calculate a narrow range of mortal injury using the most conservative model input values and a second time to determine a wider range of potential mortal injury using the least conservative values. The range of each randomly placed fish to each explosion was calculated and the count of lethal exposures tallied. Minimum and maximum exposure levels, as well as the total number of exposures (most sites involved multiple explosions), were recorded for any fish located farther than the defined lethal range based on the UWC forward calculation.

5.2 Estimation of Effects

Effects were based upon three scenarios; 1) the actual removals that occurred in 2017 and 2018 (the years of our study); 2) the removal of all the remaining structures in federal waters in a single year (2018); and 3) the removal of all platforms within 100 miles of major ports. A major finding of our study is that very few fish survive explosive removals.

5.2.1 2017 and 2018 Removals

The explosive removal of 24 platforms in 2017 and 23 platforms in 2018 likely resulted in the following mortalities of selected species:

- Red snapper: 69,505 fish (37,232 in 2017 and 32,275 in 2018)
- Vermilion snapper: 61,930 fish (29,662 in 2017 and 32,268 in 2018)
- Greater amberjack: 10,079 fish (4,909 in 2017 and 5,170 in 2018)
- Gray triggerfish: 1,268 fish (667 in 2017 and 601 in 2018)
- Cobia: 1,431 fish (518 in 2017 and 913 in 2018)

These annual mortalities typically constituted a small fraction of the total stock. Both red and vermilion snapper have stocks that exceed 30 million age 2+ fish; the gray triggerfish stock numbers approximately 3 million fish; the greater amberjack stock is estimated to contain about 700,000 fish; and the cobia stock contains an estimated 424,000 fish.

5.2.2 Removal of all Platforms in a Single Year (2018)

If all the remaining platforms had been removed in 2018 using the explosive severance method, the following mortalities would have been expected:

- Red snapper: 1,813,855 killed, (4.9% of total stock)
- Vermilion snapper: 1,745,980 killed (5.8% of total stock)
- Greater amberjack: 313,603 killed (45.1% of total stock)
- Gray triggerfish: 34,313 killed (1.2% of total stock)
- Cobia: 34,500 killed (8.1% of total stock)

Of these, greater amberjack losses appear problematic, but the stock size for Greater Amberjack is suspect.

5.2.3 Removal of all Platforms within 100 miles of Fishing Ports

As the vast majority of the offshore platforms are located within 100 miles of a major port, the results are similar to the effects associated with removing all the platforms in a single year using the explosive severance method.

- Red snapper: 1,755,161 killed
- Vermilion snapper: 1,680,701 killed
- Greater amberjack: 282,548 killed
- Gray triggerfish: 33,097 killed
- Cobia: 33,872 killed

Again, greater amberjack effects appear problematic.

5.3 Assessment of Effects

5.3.1 2017 and 2018 Platform Removal

As shown below, annual removals reflect low exploitation rates on a stock-wide basis:

Species	Year	Exploitation Rate
Red snapper	2017	0.001
	2018	0.004
Vermilion snapper	2017	0.001
	2018	0.001
Greater amberjack	2017	0.007
	2018	0.007
Gray triggerfish	2017	0.0002
	2018	0.0002

Species	Year	Exploitation Rate
Cobia	2017	0.001
	2018	0.002

However, on a state and biomass basis, these same removals may represent as much as 16% of the red snapper Allowable Catch Limits for the Private Recreational Sector. In 2018, platform mortalities represented the following percentages of the respective ACLs:

East Gulf	% ACL
Florida	0.00
Alabama	1.66
Mississippi	0
West Gulf (2018)	
Louisiana	15.92
Texas	7.28

If the Louisiana platform removal losses were subtracted from the private recreational sector ACL, fewer fish would be available and the allowable take would be reached sooner thereby shortening the season.

5.3.2 Removal of all Platforms in a Single Year

If all the remaining platforms were removed using only the explosive severance method in a single year (e.g., 2018), the platform removals would be equivalent to ~18% of the comparable total red snapper landings, Gulfwide. However, our assessment based on the SEDAR 52 stock size and the 2018 platform removals suggested red snapper losses in the Western Gulf would be on the order of 35% of the total landings if all the platforms were removed. Platform red snapper populations are especially important to the Louisiana and Mississippi Management Areas and may have increased red snapper productivity in these areas.

5.3.3 Removal of all Platforms within 100 miles of Fishing Ports

Most of the existing platforms are within a 100-mile range of a major fishing port. Loss of these platforms would likely have significant adverse impacts on local fisheries. In Louisiana, platforms may represent on the order of 72% of the accessible fishing sites.

5.4 Conclusions

An array of recreationally and commercially valuable, federally-managed reef fish species aggregate to varying degrees around offshore oil and gas platforms. On a Gulf-wide basis, these aggregations typically represent small fractions of the overall stocks. However, there appears to be at least one potential exception. On the order of 48% of the greater amberjack stock is associated with offshore oil and gas platforms, mainly platforms offshore Western Louisiana. Few, if any, fish that aggregate around platforms survive explosive platform removal.

Platform removals are likely having, and will likely have, significant adverse impacts on local fisheries, especially those offshore Louisiana and Mississippi. In these specific areas, a case can be made that platforms serve to increase reef fish productivity as opposed to merely aggregating the fish due to the apparent absence of other suitable habitats. However, evidence is presented that there may be more reef habitat in these areas than is currently recognized.

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Appendix 1. Version 6 of the Endnote TM Database

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Appendix 2. Data Tables

Appendix Table 2.1 Model estimates of the abundance of fish at the “average platform” in the four depth zones defined in this study

Provides detail for Table 5.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Depth zone (m)			
		10 - 17	18 - 30	31 - 90	91 - 300
Almaco Jack	<i>Seriola rivoliana</i>	5 (1-25)	16 (8-32) *	129 (90-183) *	111 (-) *
Angelfish sp.	<i>Pomacanthidae</i> sp.	0.4 (0-5)	2 (1-6) *	47 (18-122) *	0.7 (0-3)
Atlantic Bumper	<i>Chloroscombrus chrysurus</i>	4,362 (1105-17216) *	6,227 (3507-11054) *	841 (585-1210) *	324 (171-612)
Atlantic Moonfish	<i>Selene setapinnis</i>	19 (4-82)	514 (261-1011) *	97 (68-138) *	23 (11-47)
Atlantic Spadefish	<i>Chaetodipterus faber</i>	1,815 (463-7117) *	926 (457-1876) *	481 (323-716) *	60 (31-115)
Bar Jack	<i>Carangoides ruber</i>	1 (0-9)	4 (2-10)	13 (7-24) *	178 (42-745) *
Bermuda Chub	<i>Kyphosus sectatrix</i>	39 (8-179)	162 (89-293) *	838 (545-1288) *	1,405 (521-3787) *
Black Jack	<i>Caranx lugubris</i>	0.1 (0-4)	0.2 (0-2)	0.1 (0-1)	23 (10-55) *
Blue Runner	<i>Caranx chrysos</i>	622 (152-2539) *	1,712 (956-3063) *	3,971 (2805-5622) *	691 (343-1390) *
Bluefish	<i>Pomatomus saltatrix</i>	2 (0-14)	4 (2-9) *	0.6 (0-1)	0.6 (0-2)
Butterflyfish sp.	<i>Chaetodontidae</i> sp.	0.1 (0-3)	0.4 (0-2)	8 (-) *	0.2 (0-2)
Cobia	<i>Rachycentron canadum</i>	57 (14-230) *	13 (6-26) *	24 (16-36) *	1.4 (0-5)
Creville Jack	<i>Caranx hippos</i>	16 (3-76)	148 (83-263) *	326 (234-456) *	2,074 (941-4571) *
Dog Snapper	<i>Lutjanus jocu</i>	0.2 (0-5)	0.1 (0-1)	0.5 (0-2) *	0.05 (0-1)
Filefish sp.	<i>Monacanthidae</i> sp.	- (-)	- (-)	0.2 (0-1) *	- (-)
Gray Snapper	<i>Lutjanus griseus</i>	137 (35-528) *	400 (255-710) *	491 (345-698) *	37 (19-70)
Gray Triggerfish	<i>Balistes capriscus</i>	1.3 (0-11)	13 (6-26) *	63 (40-101) *	2 (1-6)
Great Barracuda	<i>Sphyræna barracuda</i>	4 (1-24)	27 (14-51) *	75 (50-113) *	478 (206-1107) *
Greater Amberjack	<i>Seriola dumerili</i>	14 (3-60)	32 (17-59) *	487 (176-1347) *	587 (313-1099) *
Grouper sp.	<i>Epinephelinae</i> sp.	0.2 (0-5)	0.7 (0-3)	16 (-) *	0.3 (0-2)
Guaguanche	<i>Sphyræna guachancho</i>	3 (0-19)	32 (17-60) *	22 (14-33) *	2 (1-8)
Gulf Menhaden	<i>Brevoortia patronus</i>	67 (17-266)	2,876 (1642-5039) *	169 (120-239)	105 (56-197)
Horse-eye Jack	<i>Caranx latus</i>	3 (1-20)	19 (10-37) *	86 (56-133) *	416 (187-925) *
King Mackerel	<i>Scomberomorus cavalla</i>	4 (1-23)	81 (45-146) *	38 (26-57) *	5 (2-12)
Leatherjack	<i>Oligoplites saurus</i>	26 (6-106)	105 (59-187)	706 (475-1051) *	45 (23-86)
Lookdown	<i>Selene vomer</i>	3 (1-16)	26 (14-50) *	107 (72-159) *	8 (5-13)
Ocean Triggerfish	<i>Canthidermis sufflamen</i>	0.6 (0-9)	1 (0-4)	10 (5-17) *	20 (10-42) *
Rainbow Runner	<i>Elagatis bipinnulata</i>	13 (3-67)	266 (133-529) *	53 (36-78) *	405 (178-924) *
Red Drum	<i>Sciaenops ocellatus</i>	0.1 (0-2)	4 (1-13) *	0.2 (-)	0.2 (-)
Red Snapper	<i>Lutjanus campechanus</i>	359 (94-1367) *	1,015 (541-1904) *	2,980 (875-10152) *	133 (72-246) *
Sheepshead	<i>Archosargus probatocephalus</i>	0.3 (0-3)	19 (9-39) *	6 (-) *	1 (-)
Spanish Hogfish	<i>Bodianus rufus</i>	0.1 (0-2)	0.3 (0-1)	2 (-) *	0.1 (0-1)
Spanish Mackerel	<i>Scomberomorus maculatus</i>	0.2 (0-6)	- (-) *	0.1 (0-1) *	- (-)
Unidentified Fish		142 (39-520) *	250 (140-446) *	276 (196-389) *	13,090 (5363-31952) *
Vermilion Snapper	<i>Rhomboplites aurorubens</i>	45 (11-180)	118 (67-210)	3,506 (428-28743) *	57 (30-109)
Yellow Jack	<i>Carangoides bartholomaei</i>	0.8 (0-11)	0.9 (0-3) *	7 (4-13) *	0.5 (0-3)
Total		7,764	15,014	15,877	20,284
Confidence Intervals		(1975-30517)	(8593-26234)	(6349-39700)	(10169-40459)
Total Taxa Verified by SRV Observation		7	26	32	13
Total Number Verified by SRV Observation		7,494	14,784	15,707	19,611
Percent of Model Abundance Verified by SRV		96.5	98.5	98.9	96.7

Appendix Table 2.2. The 47 platform sites with water depth, number of explosions, and the mean number of fish placed at each site (in 10,000 simulated runs)

Site	Depth (m)	Number of Explosions	Mean Number of Fish Placed	More Conservative Model Input Parameters			Less Conservative Model Input Parameters		
				Exposure Count	Range for Survival (m)	Average Count of Unexposed	Exposure Count	Range for Survival (m)	Average Count of Unexposed
A1_2017	15.2	15	380	380	462	0	380	256	0
A2_2017	15.2	3	380	380	506	0	380	253	0
A3_2017	11.6	4	311	311	458	0	311	253	0
B1_2017	25.9	16	969	969	458	0	969	253	0
B2_2017	30.5	8	1123	1123	506	0	1123	285	0
B3_2017	29	1	1072	1072	506	0	1072	285	0
B4_2017	28.3	2	1052	1052	506	0	1052	285	0
B5_2017	26.8	12	1000	1000	374	0	1000	207	0
B6_2017	25.9	8	969	969	398	0	969	220	0
B7_2017	21.6	10	806	806	442	0	806	244	0
B8_2017	21	4	772	772	420	0	772	231	0
B9_2017	21.3	6	789	789	423	0	789	233	0
B10_2017	22.3	15	841	841	439	0	841	239	0
B11_2017	21.3	4	789	789	440	0	789	243	0
B12_2017	25.9	6	969	969	506	0	969	285	0
C1_2017	35.4	3	2897	2897	506	0	2897	285	0
C2_2017	39.9	4	3319	3319	503	0	3319	279	0
C3_2017	50.6	8	4131	4131	436	0	4131	241	0
C4_2017	64	20	5928	5928	481	0	5928	267	0
C5_2017	64	4	5928	5928	356	0	5928	194	0
C6_2017	50.9	4	4153	4153	453	0	4153	250	0
C7_2017	42.7	2	3568	3568	293	0	3568	154	0
C8_2017	48.8	10	4001	4001	453	0	4001	250	0
D1_2017	91.4	4	669	669	300	0	668	157	1
A1_2018	15.8	2	388	388	413	0	388	225	0
A2_2018	12.2	4	333	333	453	0	333	250	0
A3_2018	16.8	1	400	400	291	0	400	160	0
A4_2018	17.4	10	408	408	388	0	408	214	0
A5_2018	13.1	15	352	352	296	0	352	162	0
A6_2018	12.8	4	348	348	293	0	348	161	0
A7_2018	12.8	8	348	348	503	0	348	279	0
A8_2018	13.4	15	356	356	440	0	356	243	0
A9_2018	10.7	1	278	278	449	0	278	231	0
A10_2018	10.7	5	278	278	449	0	278	227	0
A11_2018	10.1	21	256	256	356	0	256	194	0
B1_2018	27.4	6	1021	1021	297	0	1021	163	0
C1_2018	50.3	9	4110	4110	356	0	4110	194	0
C2_2018	60	4	5368	5368	312	0	5368	172	0
C3_2018	68.6	6	6537	6537	312	0	6537	172	0
C4_2018	64	8	5928	5928	307	0	5928	169	0
C5_2018	64	4	5928	5928	449	0	5928	249	0
C6_2018	59.1	3	5235	5235	309	0	5235	160	0
C7_2018	68	4	6456	6456	356	0	6456	194	0
C8_2018	45.7	8	3785	3785	356	0	3785	197	0
C9_2018	31.1	3	2423	2423	458	0	2423	253	0
C10_2018	44.8	7	3720	3720	440	0	3720	243	0
D1_2018	92.7	8	671	671	444	0	671	246	0

Appendix Table 2.3. Red snapper median abundance by age on explosively removed platforms in 2017 (24 platforms removed) and 2018 (23 platforms removed).

Provides detail for Table 13.

Year 2017													
East GOM													
	Age												
Depth Zone (m)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	11	12	13	Total
10_17	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
18_30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
31_90	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
91_300	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Biomass (lbs)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West GOM													
	Age												
Depth Zone (m)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	11	12	13	Total
10_17	0	646	323	108	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,077
18_30	161	1768	4790	1704	3279	321	96	32	0	0	32	0	12,183
31_90	0	258	2384	2899	11533	3801	1675	1095	129	0	0	64	23,839
91_300	0	1	13	16	64	21	9	6	1	0	0	0	133
Total	161	2673	7510	4727	14876	4144	1781	1134	130	0	32	65	37,232
Biomass (lbs)	46	2829	17219	18029	81335	29601	15588	11596	1497	0	470	994	179,202
Total GOM													
	Age												
Depth Zone (m)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	11	12	13	Total
10_17	0	646	323	108	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,077
18_30	161	1768	4790	1704	3279	321	96	32	0	0	32	0	12,183
31_90	0	258	2384	2899	11533	3801	1675	1095	129	0	0	64	23,839
91_300	0	1	13	16	64	21	9	6	1	0	0	0	133
Total	161	2673	7510	4727	14876	4144	1781	1134	130	0	32	65	37,232
Biomass (lbs)	46	2829	17219	18029	81335	29601	15588	11596	1497	0	470	994	179,202
2018													
East GOM													
	Age												
Depth Zone	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	11	12	13	Total
10_17	29	223	91	12	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	359
18_30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-
31_90	0	97	373	864	560	771	214	66	24	3	3	3	2,980
91_300	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-
Total	29	320	464	877	564	771	214	66	24	3	3	3	3,339
Biomass (lbs)	8	338	1064	3343	3084	5506	1876	672	280	47	51	53	16,323
West GOM													
	Age												
Depth Zone	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	11	12	13	Total
10_17	318	2451	998	136	45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3,948
18_30	11	216	296	403	52	32	2	2	0	0	0	0	1,015
31_90	0	774	2987	6914	4480	6167	1715	525	194	28	28	28	23,839
91_300	0	4	17	39	25	34	10	3	1	0	0	0	133
Total	329	3446	4298	7492	4603	6233	1726	531	195	28	28	28	28,936
Biomass (lbs)	94	3646	9854	28573	25166	44525	15111	5428	2249	382	406	427	135,862
Total GOM													
	Age												
Depth Zone	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	11	12	13	Total
10_17	347	2674	1089	149	50	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4,307
18_30	11	216	296	403	52	32	2	2	0	0	0	0	1,015
31_90	0	871	3360	7778	5040	6938	1929	591	218	31	31	31	26,819
91_300	0	4	17	39	25	34	10	3	1	0	0	0	133
Total	358	3765	4762	8368	5167	7004	1941	596	219	31	31	31	32,275
Biomass (lbs)	103	3984	10918	31916	28251	50032	16987	6100	2528	429	457	480	152,185

Appendix Table 2.4. Median abundance of red snapper by age on the 1,171 standing platforms present in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico in 2018

Provides detail for Table 14.

East GOM:													
Depth Zone	Age												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	11	12	13	Total
10_17	1,300	10,026	4,085	557	186	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	16,153
18_30	228	4,325	5,919	8,059	1,047	637	46	46	-	-	-	-	20,306
31_90	-	7,840	30,241	70,003	45,362	62,442	17,361	5,320	1,960	280	280	280	241,369
91_300	-	91	350	810	525	723	201	62	23	3	3	3	2,794
Total	1,527	22,282	40,595	79,429	47,120	63,803	17,607	5,427	1,983	283	283	283	280,622
Biomass (lbs)	438	23,579	93,075	302,940	257,625	455,741	154,104	55,519	22,905	3,890	4,140	4,346	1,378,303
West GOM:													
Depth Zone	Age												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	11	12	13	Total
10_17	8,693	67,061	27,321	3,726	1,242	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	108,043
18_30	2,379	45,198	61,850	84,212	10,943	6,661	476	476	-	-	-	-	212,194
31_90	-	39,008	150,459	348,285	225,689	310,670	86,375	26,470	9,752	1,393	1,393	1,393	1,200,888
91_300	-	393	1,517	3,512	2,276	3,132	871	267	98	14	14	14	12,108
Total	11,072	151,661	241,148	439,734	240,149	320,464	87,721	27,212	9,850	1,407	1,407	1,407	1,533,233
Biomass (lbs)	3,173	160,490	552,905	1,677,143	1,313,005	2,289,062	767,768	278,367	113,793	19,327	20,568	21,592	7,217,193
Total GOM:													
Depth Zone	Age												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	11	12	13	Total
10_17	9,993	77,087	31,406	4,283	1,428	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	124,195
18_30	2,606	49,523	67,769	92,270	11,990	7,298	521	521	-	-	-	-	232,500
31_90	-	46,848	180,700	418,288	271,051	373,113	103,735	31,790	11,712	1,673	1,673	1,673	1,442,257
91_300	-	484	1,867	4,322	2,801	3,855	1,072	328	121	17	17	17	14,903
Total	12,599	173,942	281,742	519,163	287,269	384,266	105,329	32,640	11,833	1,690	1,690	1,690	1,813,855
Biomass (lbs)	3,611	184,069	645,980	1,980,083	1,570,630	2,744,803	921,872	333,885	136,698	23,218	24,709	25,938	8,595,497

Appendix Table 2.5. Median abundance of red snapper by age on the 1,115 standing platforms within 100 miles of major fishing ports in 2018

(Provides detail for Table 19)

Depth Zone (m)	Age 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	11	12	13	Total
10_17	9,993	77,087	31,406	4,283	1,428	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	124,195
18_30	2,606	49,523	67,769	92,270	11,990	7,298	521	521	-	-	-	-	232,500
31_90	-	45,106	173,980	402,732	260,970	359,237	99,877	30,608	11,276	1,611	1,611	1,611	1,388,619
91_300	-	320	1,234	2,856	1,850	2,547	708	217	80	11	11	11	9,846
Total	12,599	172,036	274,388	502,140	276,238	369,082	101,107	31,346	11,356	1,622	1,622	1,622	1,755,161
Biomass (lbs)	3,611	182,051	629,119	1,915,159	1,510,320	2,636,343	884,923	320,651	131,192	22,283	23,713	24,894	8,284,260



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