

Project Update: November 2018

Our field work and interviews were successfully finished. During the period we discussed with more than 30 fisheries leaders (head of cooperatives or their associates) about the grouper fishery during the prohibition. The main fishery pressure on white groupers was from longliners. Additionally, gill and trammel nets, bottom trawls and recreational fishers also encounter these species incidentally.

We concluded that the white grouper fishery ban provided at least a 60% reduction in fishery pressure on white grouper populations resulted from longliners. We hope we will see positive results of this effort soon. On the other hand, white grouper fishers turned towards sole and shrimp fishery in Iskenderun Bay or shifted their target species to sea bream in Mersin Bay. During the period, none of fishers targeted other grouper species which were classed as data deficient by IUCN. This was somewhat unexpected for us. So we questioned the reasons and understood that this is because of the habitat preferences of different species. White groupers inhabit soft bottoms (i.e. sandy habitats) while others are reef fishes. Based on fisher's anecdotes, fishing around reefs is not profitable since they lose most of their gear. So they did not want to risk their income by targeting other groupers.

Among recreational fishermen, there was not a change of fishing behaviour related with the white and dusky grouper ban. Spear gun and angler fishermen continued to fish these species if they encountered them. This is probably because of the absence of an effective control mechanism. Additionally, bottom trawlers, which are the main fishery fleet group along the north-eastern Mediterranean coast of Turkey, also reported that if they encountered groupers they remained to send them to the market. When we asked the reason, they told us they were well aware of the ecological value of this species but white groupers are incidental catch and rarely caught alive in bottom trawl fishery. So, we can infer that the white grouper ban was not applied properly except for longliners but this also provided a significant reduction in fishery pressure.

A month ago, the prohibition on white groupers was cancelled by the fishery management authority. The regulation includes a temporal restriction (1 June to 31 August) and minimum landing size of 50 cm.

Now, we are preparing our final report to present your appreciation and making our arrangements for further projects. Meanwhile, we published our manuscript from our first project in a very prestigious journal on management of marine environment, *Marine Policy*. Additionally, we submitted another article to *Mediterranean Marine Science*, another prestigious journal. It is under review now. During this period, we made two oral presentations about our projects. One was at a larval fish conference held in Victoria, Canada and was about the fishery pressure on the spawning aggregations of mottled groupers. The second was at the The Rufford Foundation Grant Recipient Conference in Ukraine and about all of our activities covered by the Rufford Foundation. Our web site is up and running. Please find it from the link: <https://orangerproject.wixsite.com/grouper>