

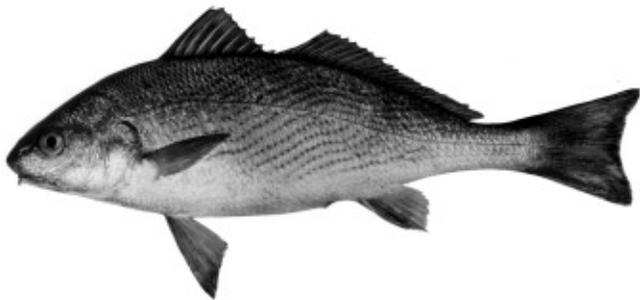
Yellowfin Croaker

History of the Fishery

The yellowfin croaker (*Umbrina roncadora*) is a nearshore croaker that has been reserved for the recreational fishery since 1915. It is primarily caught by anglers fishing from sandy beaches, piers, jetties, harbors and bays from Santa Barbara south to the U.S.- Mexico border. This croaker is among the most common fish caught from many of southern California's piers and sandy beaches during summer months. It is important to many anglers because they can be readily caught from shore with minimal investment in fishing gear and time. Yellowfin croaker are typically caught with light spinning gear using a variety of popular baits, including live and dead anchovies, mussels, blood worms, and ghost shrimp. About 80 percent of the catch occurs from May-October. Anglers fishing from piers and breakwaters account for 35 percent of the total catch, whereas anglers fishing from private skiffs and beaches account for 35 percent and 25 percent, respectively. The commercial passenger fishing vessel (CPFV) fleet accounts for approximately five percent of the total catch. CPFV catches fluctuated from a high of over 8,000 fish in 1947 to less than 100 fish in 1958. Catches are relatively low because the CPFV fleet rarely targets shallow (< 25 feet) sandy areas where yellowfin croaker are most abundant.

Status of Biological Knowledge

Yellowfin croaker have a series of yellow-brown stripes on their back, mostly yellow fins, and a pronounced chin barbel. Yellowfin croaker range from Point Conception to the Gulf of California, but are most abundant south of the Palos Verdes Peninsula. They occur in small schools over soft bottom habitats from shore to 125 feet, but are most commonly found in waters less than 30 feet. Yellowfin croaker are also common in harbors and bays and occasionally frequent kelp beds.



Yellowfin Croaker, *Umbrina roncadora*
Credit: DFG

Although very little is known about their basic life history, it appears that spawning occurs during summer months. Young-of-the-year have been found near the entrance of embayments during late fall and offshore in 30 feet of water during winter. They have been reported to reach 18 inches in length and weigh over five pounds, however fish over two pounds are uncommon. The current California state record is three pounds and 14 ounces. Preliminary ageing estimates indicate that a 10-inch fish is about 4 years old and a 15-inch fish is about 10 years old. Yellowfin croaker are opportunistic predators that feed during day and night. Their diet consists of a broad variety of prey, however California grunion eggs, mysids, and pelecypods are the most important components. Small fish feed primarily on mysids, whereas large fish concentrate on bivalves. Yellowfin croaker eggs, larvae, and small juveniles are preyed upon by many fishes; larger individuals are preyed upon by seals, sea lions, halibut and other large fishes.

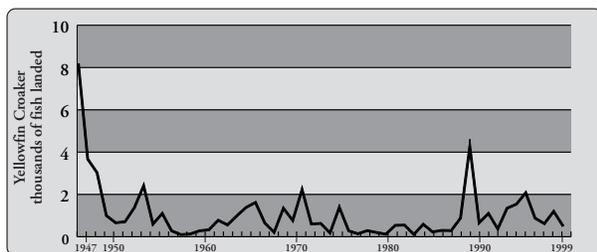
Status of the Population

No population estimates exist for yellowfin croaker, and stock structure has not been examined. The population appears healthy despite potentially damaging impacts associated with recreational fishing, contaminants from urban run-off, and shoreline habitat modifications such as development, dredging, filling, and erosion control projects. In fact, the population may be increasing; catch-per-unit-effort data from the Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey have increased during each of the past five years. In addition, a fishery independent study found a much greater abundance of yellowfin croaker in the mid-1990s than a similar study conducted during the mid-1950s. Increased sea surface temperatures caused by several El Niño events during the 1990s have probably benefited yellowfin croaker, since they are a warm temperate species whose center of abundance is in warmer waters off Baja California. However, without regular monitoring of catch and effort data it is difficult to accurately assess the status of the fishery.

Management Considerations

See the Management Considerations Appendix A for further information.

John W. O'Brien and Malcom S. Oliphant (retired)
California Department of Fish and Game



Recreational Catch 1947-1999, Yellowfin Croaker

CPFV = commercial passenger fishing vessel (party boat); Recreational catch as reported by CPFV logbooks, logbooks not reported prior to 1947.

References

Skogsberg, T. 1939. The fishes of the family Sciaenidae (croakers) of California. California Department of Fish and Game, Fish Bulletin 54.

Starks, E.C. 1919. The fishes of the croaker family (Sciaenidae) of California. California Fish and Game. 5:13-20.