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Socio-Economic Profile of South Carolina's Offshore Sport Fishermen

DAVID S. LIAO and DAVID M. CUPKA

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SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF SOUTH CAROLINA'S
OFFSHORE SPORT FISHERMEN

by

David S. Liao

Marine Resources Research Institute

and

David M. Cupka

Office of Conservation, Management and Marketing

Marine Resource Division
South Carolina Wildlife and Marine Resources Department
Charleston, South Carolina 29412

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CONTENTS

	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. THE PRIVATE BOAT FISHERMEN.....	2
Income.....	2
Occupation.....	2
Residence.....	2
Fishing Experience.....	3
Preferred Days for Fishing.....	3
Preferred Months for Fishing.....	3
Species Caught.....	4
III. THE CHARTER BOAT FISHERMEN.....	5
Income.....	5
Occupation.....	5
Residence.....	5
Fishing Experience.....	5
Trip Days.....	6
Species Caught.....	6
Reason for Staying in the Coastal Area.....	6
Factors Influencing the Trip Decision.....	7
IV. THE HEAD BOAT FISHERMEN.....	7
Income.....	7
Occupation.....	7
Residence.....	8
Fishing Experience.....	8
Hours Fished.....	8
Species Caught.....	8
Reasons for Staying in the Coastal Area.....	9
Factors Influencing Trip Decision.....	9
V. SUMMARY.....	10

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Percent of South Carolina private boat fishermen in each income class.....	2
2. Percent of South Carolina private boat fishermen in each occupational category.....	2
3. Percent of South Carolina private boat fishermen by county residence.....	2
4. Percent of South Carolina private boat fishermen in each offshore fishing experience group.....	3
5. Percent of South Carolina private boat fishermen by preferred days for fishing.....	3
6. Percent of South Carolina private boat fishermen by fishing methods.....	4
7. Fishing Activity of South Carolina boat fishermen by month.....	4
8. Catch composition of South Carolina private boat fishermen.....	4
9. Percent of South Carolina charter boat fishermen in each income class.....	5
10. Percent of South Carolina charter boat fishermen in each occupational category.....	5
11. Percent of South Carolina charter boat fishermen by home state.....	5
12. Percent of South Carolina charter boat fishermen in each offshore fishing experience group.....	6
13. Number of days that South Carolina charter boat fishermen remained in a coastal community.....	6
14. Catch composition of South Carolina charter boat fishermen.....	6
15. Reason given for staying in the coastal region by charter boat fishermen.....	7
16. Reason given by charter boat clients concerning their decision to fish in South Carolina.....	7
17. Percent of South Carolina head boat fishermen in each income class.....	7
18. Percent of South Carolina head boat fishermen in each occupational category.....	8
19. Percent of South Carolina head boat fishermen by home state.....	8
20. Percent of South Carolina head boat fishermen by offshore fishing experience group.....	8
21. Number of hours fished by South Carolina head boat fishermen.....	9
22. Catch by species of South Carolina head boat fishermen.....	9
23. Reason given by South Carolina head boat fishermen for staying in the coastal communities.....	9
24. Factors influencing South Carolina head boat fishermen in their fishing trip decision.....	9

I. INTRODUCTION

This is a brief report on the socio-economic characteristics of South Carolina's offshore sport fishermen. The report deals with three types of offshore fishermen: (1) private boat, (2) charter boat, and (3) head boat. Socio-economic characteristics of these three types of fishermen can be useful for decision-making by the sport fishing industry and the fishery management agencies. For example, descriptions of charter boat fishermen are useful to predict the types of people who are most likely to go charter boat fishing.

Data from private boat fishermen were collected by mail survey in 1977. Out of 36,917 private boat owners with boats measuring greater than 16 feet in length, 5,547 were randomly selected for the mail survey. Approximately 615 survey forms were mailed at the end of each month during the 1977 fishing season. A total of 692 individuals completed and returned the survey form in this survey. One hundred and thirteen of them made offshore fishing trips. Data from these fishermen were analyzed.

The telephone interview technique was used to obtain data from the charter boat fishermen. The sample sport fishermen to be interviewed were randomly chosen from the charter boat operator's 1977 log book. Seventy-five fishermen were included in the survey.

Sport fishermen, who went head boat fishing in South Carolina in 1977, were surveyed by personal interview on their fishing trips. A total of 1,045 individuals were interviewed.

II. THE PRIVATE BOAT FISHERMEN

This section of the report focuses specifically on the socio-economic characteristics of private boat fishermen. The data is presented in Figures 1 through 8 and a descriptive profile is also given.

Income

Private boat fishermen tended to have a high family income, with an estimated average family income of \$29,500. The range of income information is shown in Figure 1. About seven percent of the private boat fishermen had family incomes between \$5,000 and \$10,000. Income for ten percent ranged between \$10,000 and \$15,000; for about seven percent, incomes ranged between \$15,000 and \$20,000. The income range between \$20,000 and \$25,000 accounted for about twenty-four percent of fishermen while forty-two percent had annual family incomes exceeding \$25,000.

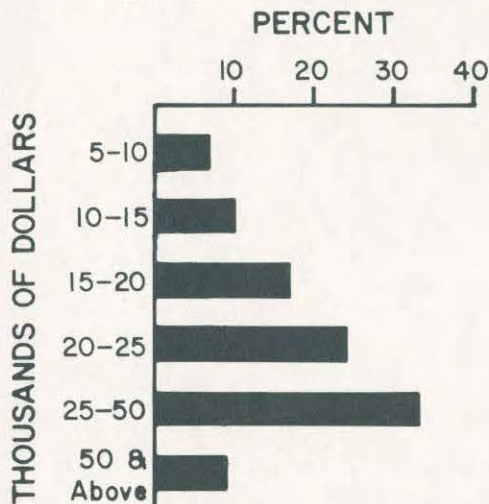


Figure 1. Percent of South Carolina private boat fishermen in each income class.

Occupation

The distribution of occupation of private boat fishermen in South Carolina is shown in Figure 2. Slightly less than one-third (29%) were classified as professionals. Twenty-three percent were self-employed. About one-fifth (21%) were managers or supervisors. Retired people accounted for thirteen percent of offshore private boat fishermen. About eight percent were blue collar workers, and about six percent "white" collar workers (i.e. salespersons, clerical, and service occupations).

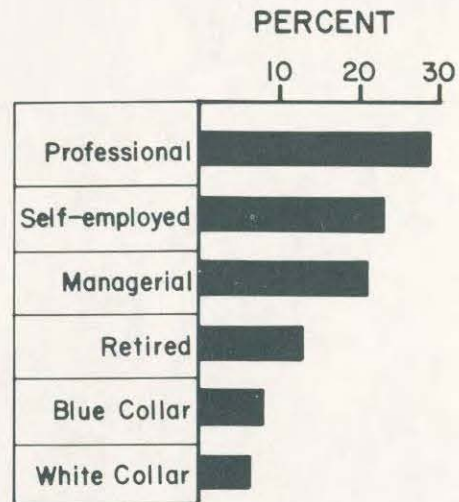


Figure 2. Percent of South Carolina private boat fishermen in each occupational category.

Residence

Private boat fishermen, can also be summarized by county of residence. (Figure 3). About twelve percent of South Carolina's private boat fishermen reside in Charleston County; another ten percent reside in Richland County; the remaining seventy-eight percent reside throughout the state.

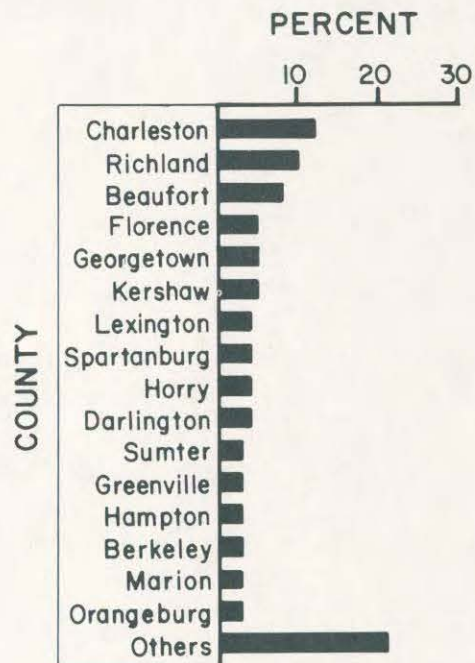


Figure 3. Percent of South Carolina private boat fishermen by county residence.

Fishing Experience

Private boat fishermen have been engaged in offshore fishing for an average of thirteen years. Figure 4 provides a breakdown of the years fishermen have fished. Approximately fifty-two percent of fishermen had ten years or more offshore fishing experience, whereas, twenty-five percent had three years or less experience.

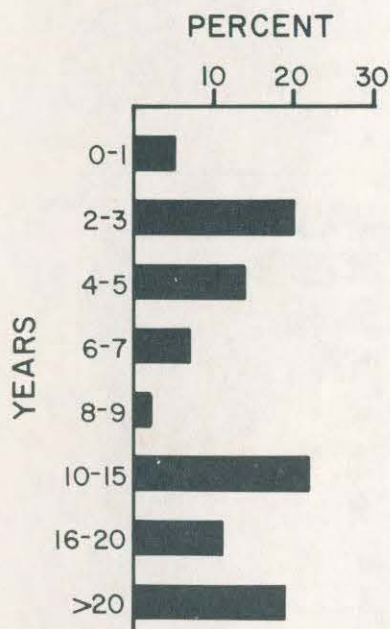


Figure 4. Percent of South Carolina private boat fishermen in each offshore fishing experience group.

Preferred Days for Fishing.

Fishermen were asked to indicate the days of the week that they went fishing. About sixty-two percent indicated that they fished on weekends or holidays while about thirty-eight percent indicated weekdays (i.e. Monday through Friday). This shows that the majority of South Carolina's boat owners are weekend or holiday fishermen.

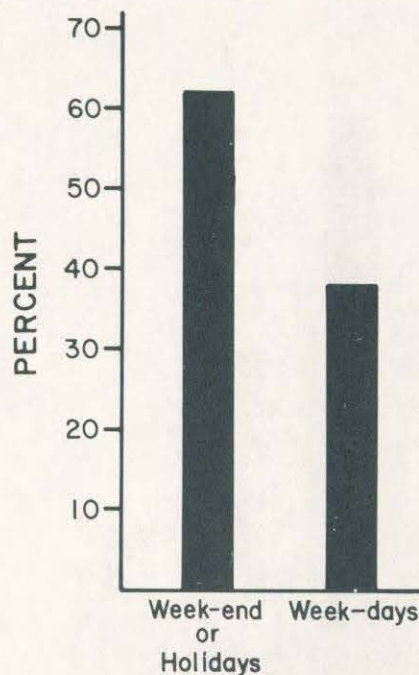


Figure 5. Percent of South Carolina private boat fishermen by preferred days for fishing.

Preferred Fishing Methods

Surface fishing methods included trolling, chumming, or jigging with natural baits or artificial lures on or near the surface for pelagic fishes. In contrast, bottom fishing included various forms of fishing for demersal species with natural or artificial baits on or near the bottom while anchored or drifting. Surface fishing was employed by sixty percent of private boat fishermen, while bottom fishing was preferred by thirty-one percent (Figure 6). The remaining nine percent used a mixture of both methods while fishing.

Preferred Months for Fishing

About Fifty-two percent of the fishermen went offshore fishing during the summer season (June, July, August) (Figure 7). More private boat users went fishing in July (24%).

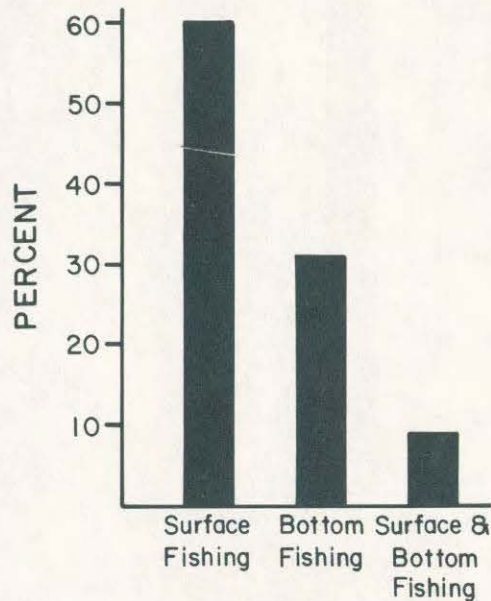


Figure 6. Percent of South Carolina private boat fishermen by fishing methods.

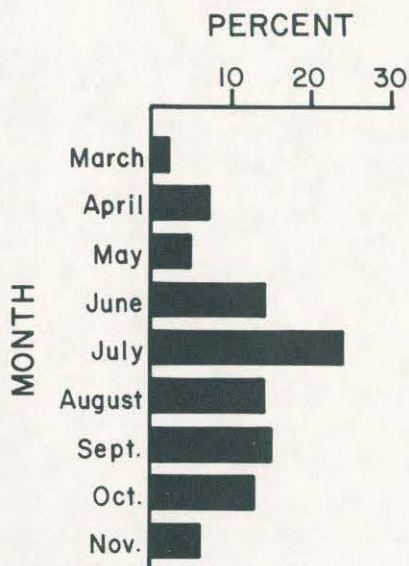


Figure 7. Fishing activity of South Carolina boat fishermen by month.

Species Caught

King mackerel was most frequently caught, comprising thirty percent of the total reported catch (Figure 8). Black sea bass, which comprised fifteen percent of the catch followed king mackerel. Spanish mackerel were also caught by private boat fishermen. Only three percent of fishermen caught red-snapper and grouper on offshore fishing trips.

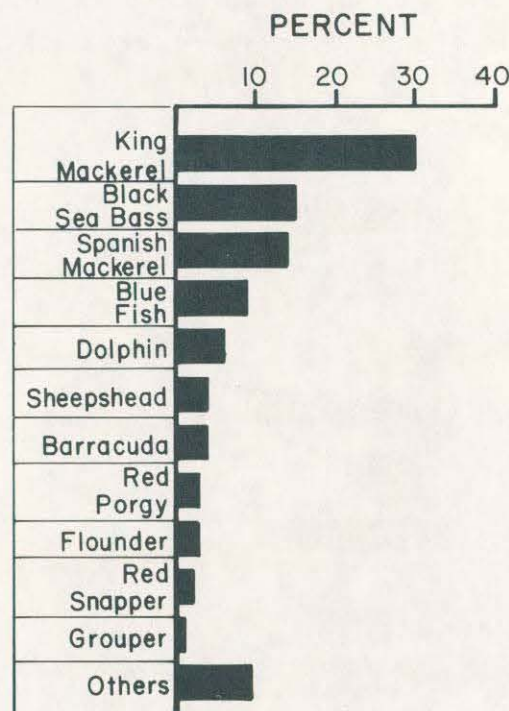


Figure 8. Catch composition of South Carolina private boat fishermen.

III. THE CHARTER BOAT FISHERMEN

A typical South Carolina charter boat usually ranges between twenty and fifty feet in length. The boat is usually chartered by the day or half day by a single party of one to six people.

Income

Charter boat fishermen in South Carolina had relatively high family incomes. Seventy-one percent of them had family incomes exceeding \$25,000 annually (Figure 9). Further, sixteen percent of those surveyed had family incomes above \$50,000 per year. The estimated average income for the group was \$37,700. Charter boat fishing is an expensive activity; therefore, it is not surprising that clients had high family income.

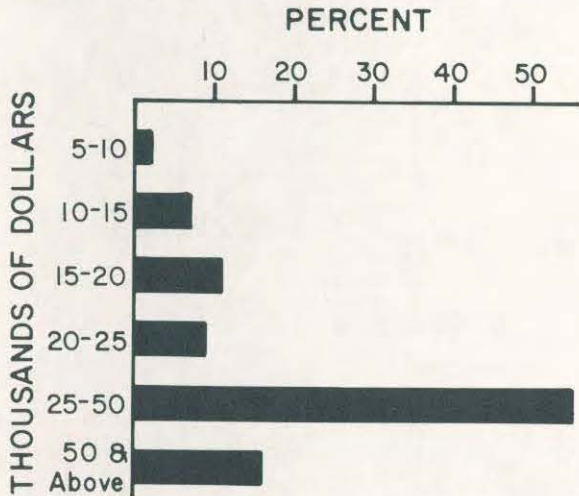


Figure 9. Percent of South Carolina charter boat fishermen in each income class.

Occupation

The occupational distribution of charter boat fishermen is shown in Figure 10. About two-thirds (68%) of charter boat customers were professional and managerial level people.

Residence

Most charter boat customers were South Carolina residents (Figure 11). The majority of out-of-state charter customers came from neighboring states; North Carolina (36%), Tennessee (3%), and Georgia (1%).

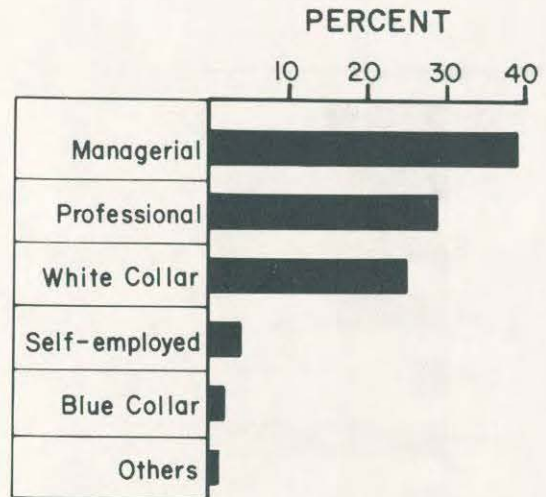


Figure 10. Percent of South Carolina charter boat fishermen in each occupational category.

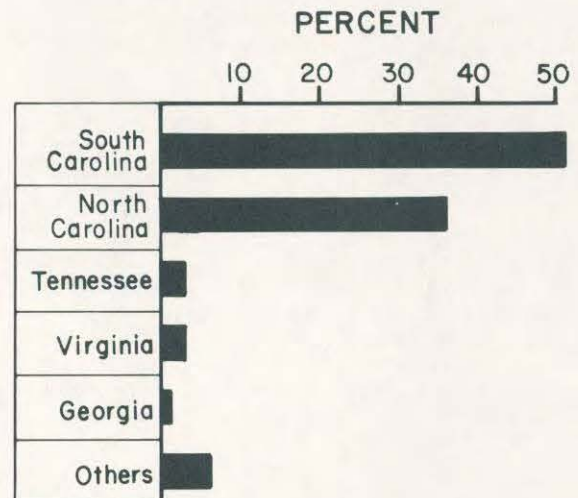


Figure 11. Percent of South Carolina charter boat fishermen by home state.

Fishing Experience

The average charter boat fishermen had about eleven years of offshore fishing experience (Figure 12). Twenty-nine percent of charter fishermen had engaged in offshore fishing for ten to fifteen years and fourteen percent had fished offshore for twenty years. Only fifteen percent had one year or less experience. Thus, almost all of South Carolina charter fishermen had extensive offshore fishing experience.

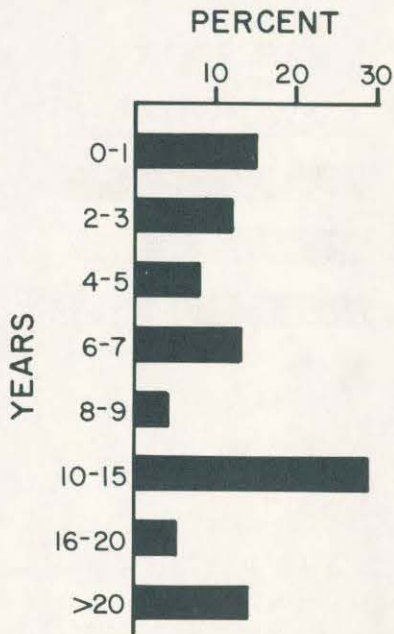


Figure 12. Percent of South Carolina charter boat fishermen in each offshore fishing experience group.

Trip Days

The number of days a charter fisherman remains in the coastal community is important especially when considering the resulting economic impact of a fisherman's trip expenses. The average length-of-stay was two days (Figure 13). Forty-eight percent stayed only one day; thirty-one percent remained two days; fifteen percent spent three days; and three percent stayed more than four days.

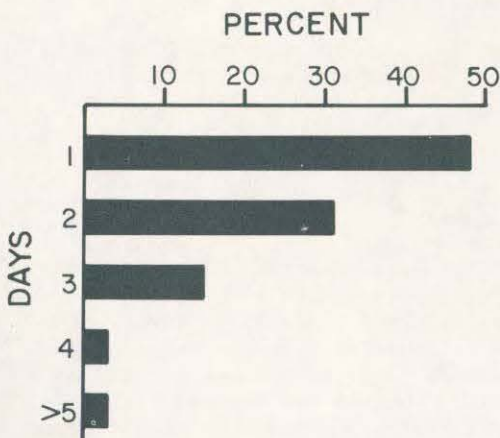


Figure 13. Number of days that South Carolina charter boat fishermen remained in a coastal community.

Species Caught

Forty percent of charter fishermen reported that they had caught king mackerel while fishing. This indicates that charter boats rely upon king mackerel to provide the greatest amount of fishing. Fourteen percent of charter fishermen caught barracuda. Grouper were reported by seven percent of fishermen and red snapper by only three percent.

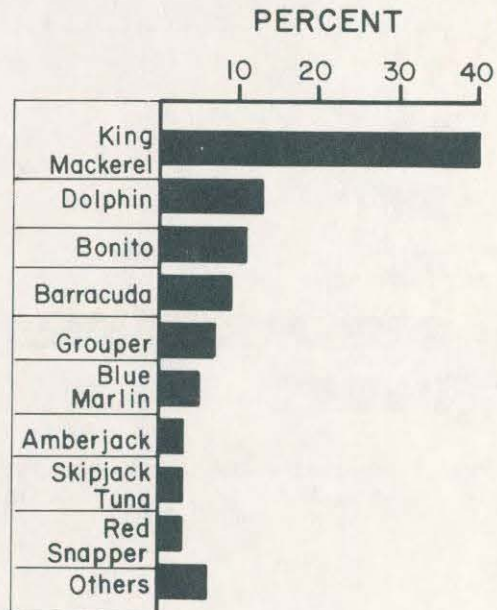


Figure 14. Catch composition of South Carolina charter boat fishermen.

Reasons for Staying in the Coastal Area

Sixty percent of charter boat fishermen reported that fishing was the major reason for their coming to the coastal region; twenty-seven percent reported business trips; eight percent stated that they were attracted by the beach and other recreational facilities; and four percent to visit friends or relatives (Figure 15).

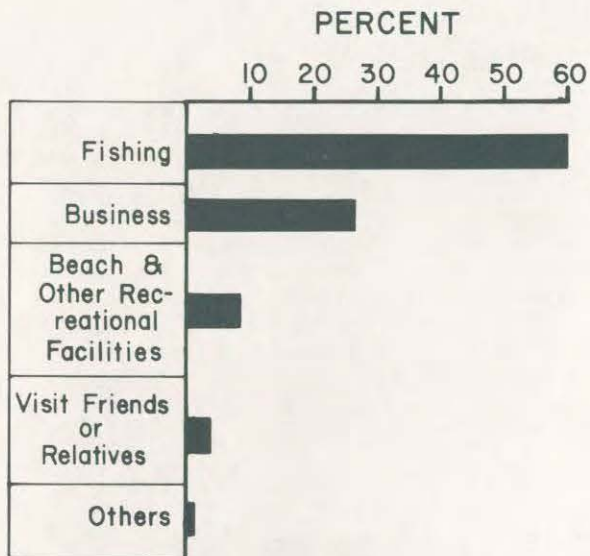


Figure 15. Reason given for staying in the Coastal region by charter boat fishermen.

Factors Influencing the Trip Decision

Charter fishermen were asked to indicate what motivated them to plan their fishing trip along the South Carolina coast. The information obtained indicates that fifty percent of them were influenced by past fishing trips and twenty-three percent were here on the recommendation of friends and relatives (Figure 16). Advertisement by newspaper, radio, etc., attracted only three percent of charter boat fishermen.

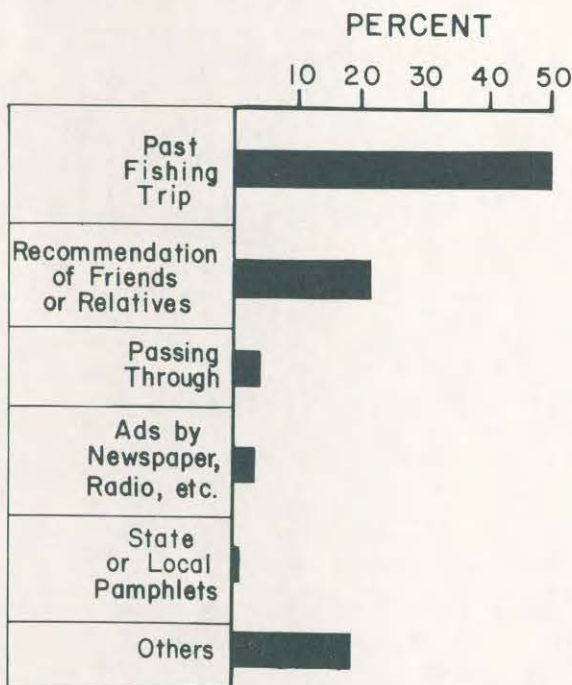


Figure 16. Reason given by charter boat clients concerning their decision to fish in South Carolina.

IV. THE HEAD BOAT FISHERMEN

The head boat fishing operation in South Carolina is characterized by the use of a large boat, usually ranging forty-five to ninety-five feet in length. Most head boats fish for bottom fish. The head boat operators normally charge a set fee per head for the fishing trip. The fishing fee varies from \$10.00 to \$30.00 depending on the duration of the fishing trip. Many of the boats must have a certain minimum number of people aboard before the boat will undertake a fishing trip. Socio-economic characteristics of head boat fishermen are discussed in the following section.

Income

Approximately forty-six percent had family incomes over \$20,000 per year, while fifty-four percent had family incomes below \$20,000. Figure 17 shows a normal distribution of income for the group. The estimated mean income of head boat fishermen was about \$23,400 annually, which was lower than the average incomes of charter fishermen and private boat fishermen.

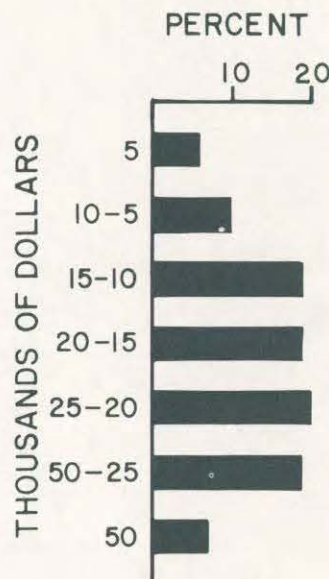


Figure 17. Percent of South Carolina head boat fishermen in each income class.

Occupation

South Carolina's head boat fishermen consisted of substantial numbers from each major occupational grouping (Figure 18). The two major occupations were professional and blue collar, which included about forty-seven percent of all head boat fishermen.

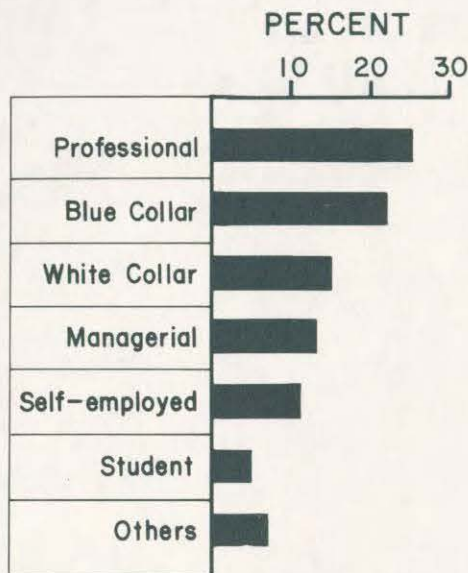


Figure 18. Percent of South Carolina head boat fishermen in each occupational category.

Residence

The majority of all head boat fishermen (67%) were from out-of-state; North Carolina (14%), Ohio (8%), Georgia (6%), Virginia (6%), Wyoming (5%), and Tennessee (4%). One-third of head boat fishermen were South Carolina residents.

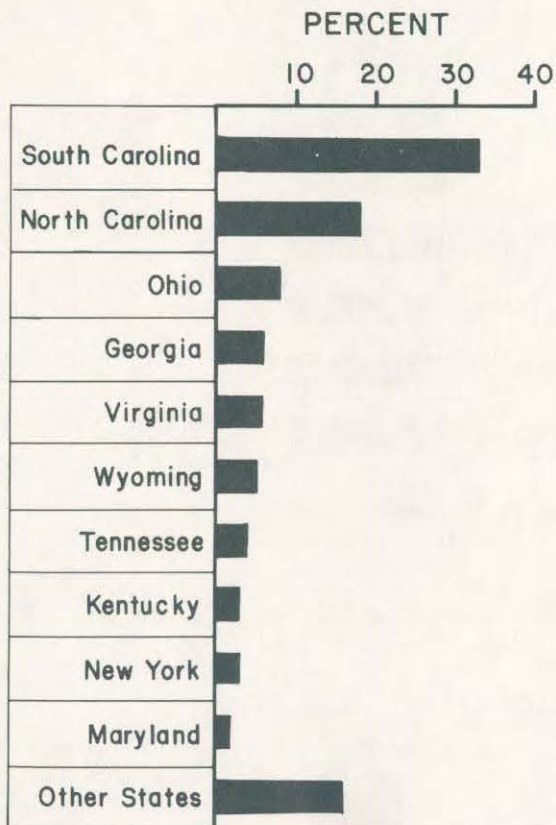


Figure 19. Percent of South Carolina head boat fishermen by home state.

Fishing Experience

Data in Figure 20 shows that about thirty-six percent of the 1977 head boat fishermen had one year (or less) of offshore fishing experience. About fifteen percent of the fishermen had two or three years offshore fishing experience. The next largest experience group, ten to fifteen years, included fourteen percent of the fishermen. The average for all head boat fishermen was eight years.

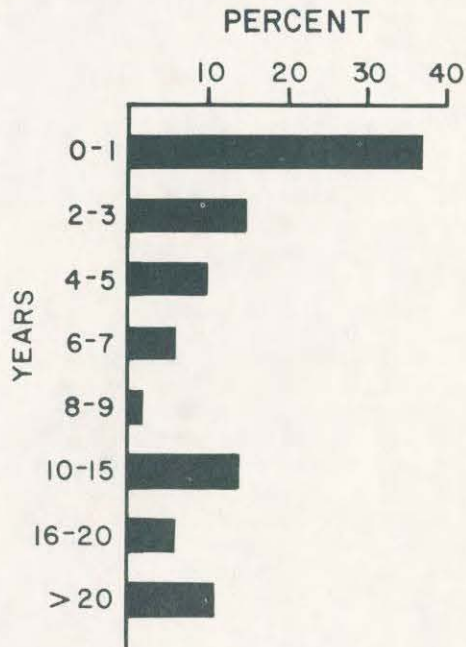


Figure 20. Percent of South Carolina head boat fishermen by offshore fishing experience group.

Hours Fished

Figure 21 presents percent of head boat fishermen by hours fished. Approximately twenty-seven percent of all fishermen spent two hours fishing on their trip about twenty percent spent three hours fishing and twenty-one percent had four hours fishing. The average hours fished for the group was 3.6.

Species Caught

Forty-five percent of all head boat fishermen reported catching black sea bass while twenty-two percent reported catching red porgy. Thus, it can be seen that these two species are the most important fishes for the head boat fishing activities. Vermilion and red snapper accounted for seven percent and four percent respectively. Grouper accounted for four percent (Figure 22).

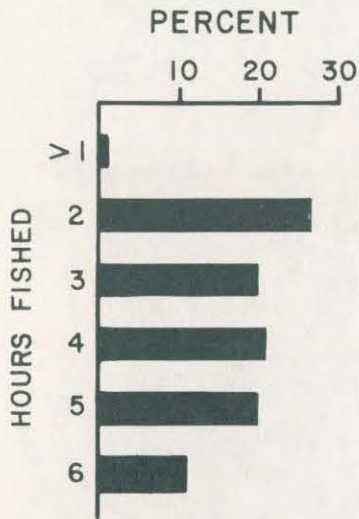


Figure 21. Number of hours fished by South Carolina head boat fishermen.

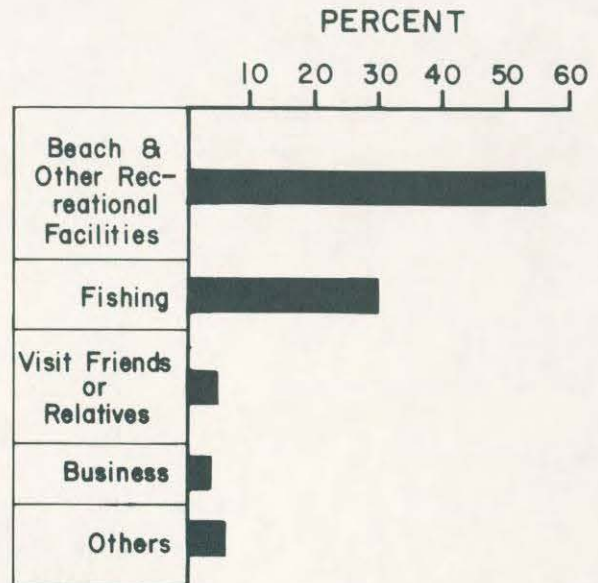


Figure 23. Reason given by South Carolina head boat fishermen for staying in the coastal communities.

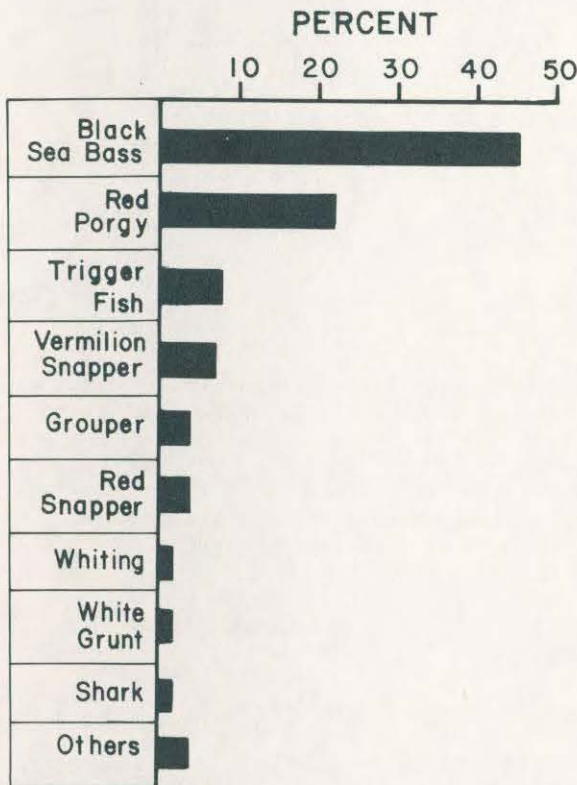


Figure 22. Catch by species of South Carolina head boat fishermen.

Reasons for Staying in the Coastal Area

Fifty-six percent of head boat fishermen came and stayed in the South Carolina coastal area because they were attracted by beach and other recreational facilities. About one-third of the fishermen stayed in the area in order to go offshore fishing.

Factors Influencing Trip Decision

Past fishing trips had influenced thirty-seven percent of fishermen in their fishing trip decision. These people were "old timers" to head boat operators. Recommendation of friends or relatives had also influenced many head boat fishermen in planning their fishing trip in South Carolina (22%). State or local pamphlets were factors in fishing trip decisions by twelve percent of the fishermen. Other factors such as business trips and vacation trips to the area attracted seventeen percent.

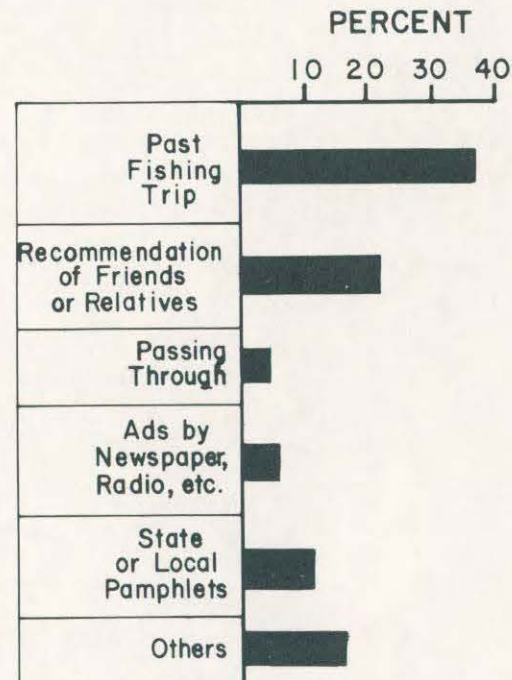


Figure 24. Factors influencing South Carolina head boat fishermen in their fishing trip decision.

V. SUMMARY

1. Based on a mail survey of private boat owners, a socio-economic profile of offshore private boat fishermen was drawn. The average private boat fishermen:
 - is a South Carolina resident with an annual family income of \$29,500.
 - is a professional or self-employed individual.
 - has 13 years of offshore fishing experience.
 - goes offshore fishing on the weekends or holidays during the summer season.
 - usually uses surface fishing techniques to catch king mackerel, or Spanish mackerel.
2. A profile of the average charter boat fishermen would read:
 - is a South Carolina or North Carolina resident.
 - comes from relatively high status occupations such as professional or managerial.
 - has a high family income per year (\$37,900).
 - has engaged in offshore fishing for 11 years.
 - would stay in the coastal area for two days in order to pursue charter boat fishing.
 - is a repeat customer of the South Carolina boats and would likely catch king mackerel or dolphin on the charter trip.
3. A typical head boat fishermen in South Carolina would be:
 - a professional or blue collar worker with an average family income of \$23,400.
 - a non-resident with 8 years of offshore fishing experience.
 - an individual who would spend an average of 3.6 hours fishing for black sea bass or red porgy.

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