

Hapu'upu'u

hawaii sea bass (*Epinephelus quernus*)



Hawaii Sea Bass is commonly called *hapu'upu'u* in Hawaii and grouper in other markets. This species is only known to occur in the Hawaiian Islands and at seamounts just northwest of Hawaii. Members of the grouper family are able to change skin colors to blend into their natural habitat, and the *hapu'upu'u* is no exception. Most *hapu'upu'u* seen in the market are black, but fish captured in certain locations may be brownish or reddish.

Seasonality & How They Are Caught

Availability and Seasonality:

The largest landings of *hapu'upu'u* usually occur in the fall and winter (October-December) and in the spring (February-April). The majority of the *hapu'upu'u* catch

in recent years has come from the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

Most of the *hapu'upu'u* caught off the main Hawaiian Islands are from 5 to 10 pounds in size, whereas the waters around the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands yield fish mostly in the 10 to 30 pound size range.

The Hawaii bottomfish fishery is basically divided into the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) and the main Hawaiian Islands. These fisheries are undergoing change. The establishment of the National Monument in the NWHI has set in motion, the phasing out of the sustainable, NWHI limited-entry bottomfish fishery. The main Hawaiian Islands fishery remains under intensive management with an annual commercial catch limit. The restrictions on the NWHI fishery greatly reduce the supply of this important fish.

Fishing Methods:

Hapu'upu'u is frequently caught in the hook-and-line fishery for deepwater snappers. However, knowledgeable fishermen are capable of targeting this species, which is an aggressive feeder that readily takes baited hooks. *Hapu'upu'u* is a deepwater bottomfish usually caught at between 300 and 900 ft. In general, larger fish are caught at greater depths.

Distribution:

Hapu'upu'u caught off the main Hawaiian Islands are sold through the Honolulu fish auction, through intermediary buyers on the major islands, and directly to restaurants. Most of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands' catch is sold through the Honolulu fish auction.

Quality

Hapu'upu'u keeps well (2 weeks) when properly brined and iced after capture. The only quality problem which may arise is the occasional presence of sac-like parasites in *hapu'upu'u* flesh. The sac may be cut out of the flesh and is harmless if eaten.

Product Forms and Yields:

Most of the *hapu'upu'u* is landed as whole, iced fish. The fish is initially sold head-on so that buyers can assess product quality by the clarity of the eyes and the color of the gills. The ethnic and household retail market components have a strong

preference for smaller fish (1 to 5 pounds in round weight) that can be steamed head-on. The larger-sized fish harvested in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands are filleted for the restaurant market.

Although the skin is tough, the flesh is easy to fillet due to the lack of small bones. The fillet yield from round fish is about 40%.

Color, Taste and Texture:

Hapu'upu'u is noted for its clear white flesh that is almost as delicate in taste as that of Hawaii's deep-sea snappers. When cooked properly, *hapu'upu'u* has the texture reminiscent of lobster.

Preparation

Steaming is a favorite method of preparing *hapu'upu'u* in Hawaii, especially small fish. *Hapu'upu'u* is also used in ethnic restaurants to make sweet-and-sour fish and fish head soup. *Hapu'upu'u* is suitable for steaming, baking, poaching, deep frying with batter, and is sometimes served raw (as ceviche).



Hawaii Seafood Council

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