

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: April 13, 2016
Subject: Review and Discussion – Red Drum Stakeholder Engagement

Purpose:

To provide an overview of the innovative methods being used to gather stakeholder input on the status of the red drum fishery in the Northwest and Northeast management zones and update Commissioners on the information received to date.

Summary:

Red drum is among Florida's most popular recreational fisheries and is targeted for both food and sport. The recently completed stock assessment indicated that red drum is exceeding the Commission's management goal in all regions of the state. With the stock assessment results in mind, a variety of stakeholders have expressed concerns about local red drum populations based on their local experiences. As a result of their experience, stakeholders are asking the Commission to consider management changes for this fishery.

The red drum bag limit in the Northwest and Northeast management zones was increased from one to two fish in 2012 based on the results of the stock assessment. Since that time, many stakeholders have expressed concern for anglers taking more than one red drum, and they would like the bag limit returned to one fish statewide. Additionally, there was a marked decline in the escapement rate in the Northeast zone over the last three years of the assessment, with escapement in 2013 still exceeding, but approaching the 40% management goal. Staff have also heard stakeholders express concerns about a decline in red drum during the past 2-3 years in the Panhandle. Specifically, Panhandle stakeholders have expressed concerns related to last year's red tide in Northwest Florida as well as recent drought conditions that may have impacted the red drum population. Since the stock assessment only included data through 2013, any effects from these events are not represented in the assessment.

Staff are in the process of completing a stakeholder engagement project to gather additional input about this topic in the Northwest and Northeast management zones. Engagement efforts include using social media to encourage discussion among a variety of stakeholders and attending fishing club meetings, boat shows, and other venues frequented by anglers. Included in the engagement effort is an online survey to capture stakeholder preferences and observations statewide. Staff are particularly interested in angler bag limit preferences and angler observations of the red drum fishery throughout these regions and are optimistic that these new, innovative efforts to engage anglers both as a group and one-on-one will result in better informed management recommendations.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommend continuing the current stakeholder engagement effort and returning with a draft rule to address potential recommended management changes in June 2016.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Melissa Recks, Section Leader, Division of Marine Fisheries Management