

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: June 23, 2016
Subject: Draft Rule – Red Drum

Purpose:

Staff will present an overview of the stakeholder engagement process designed to gather public feedback on the status of red drum in north Florida and present a draft rule to lower the recreational bag limit for red drum in the Northwest management zone to one fish per person per day.

Summary:

Red drum is among Florida's most popular recreational fisheries and is targeted for both food and sport. The stock assessment that included data through 2013 indicated that red drum is exceeding the Commission's management goal in all regions of the state. However, stakeholders from the Panhandle have expressed concerns about a decline in red drum during the past 2-3 years in their area. Specifically, Panhandle stakeholders have suggested that last year's red tide in northwest Florida and recent drought conditions 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. As a result of their experiences and concerns, stakeholders have asked the Commission to modify the management of this fishery.

In response to these concerns, staff completed a stakeholder engagement process during March – May of this year. Feedback from this process that was received through April 1 was presented to the Commission at its April meeting. The results of the entire effort will be presented at the June meeting. Engagement efforts included using social media to encourage discussion among a variety of stakeholders and attending fishing club meetings, boat shows, and other venues frequented by anglers. Also included in the engagement effort was an online survey to capture stakeholder observations and preferences statewide.

At the April Commission meeting, the Commission directed staff to take immediate, short-term action and reduced the bag limit of red drum in the Northwest management zone from 2 fish per person per day to 1 fish per person through an Executive Order. The bag limit reduction went into effect on May 1, 2016 and will be valid for six months, or until the Commission adopts a rule change regarding the bag limit, whichever is earlier. The Commission will consider whether this region-wide bag limit reduction is appropriate as a long-term management measure at the June meeting via a draft rule.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommend approving the proposed draft rule to lower the bag limit for red drum in the Northwest management zone to one fish per person per day and returning for a final public hearing at the September Commission meeting in St. Augustine.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Melissa Recks, Section Leader, Division of Marine Fisheries Management