

MEMORANDUM



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

Purpose:

Staff will present a draft rule that would implement a slot limit for barracuda in south Florida in response to public requests for a size limit due to concerns about declines in the population within south Florida.

Summary:

Over the last several years, stakeholders have expressed concern about the population status of great barracuda in south Florida, in particular from Martin to Monroe Counties. Stakeholder consensus and some of the available data suggests that there has been a localized decline in the abundance and size of barracuda in the Keys and southeast Florida. While barracuda are detected in some of the research conducted by FWC and its partners, there is not enough rigorous scientific data available to evaluate the status of the population. Considering the broad agreement among a variety of stakeholder groups that the population in south Florida has declined substantially, the Commission implemented bag and vessel limits for the recreational and commercial barracuda fisheries in that area at the September 2015 Commission Meeting (2 fish per person, 6 per vessel, effective in Collier, Monroe, Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach, and Martin Counties beginning November 1, 2015). The Commission also directed staff to conduct additional public workshops and determine whether or not further consideration of a size limit was also warranted.

Staff conducted three public workshops in the Keys and southeast Florida the week of February 22 – 25, 2016, to gather feedback on whether fishermen still desire to see a size limit implemented for barracuda and if so, what type of size limit they would support. Staff specifically requested input on the previously proposed slot limit of 15 – 36 inches fork length and a possible alternative minimum size limit of 30 inches fork length. Staff also gathered feedback about whether or not to create a trophy fish allowance by allowing some amount of harvest above the slot, similar to what is allowed in the spotted seatrout fishery.

Stakeholder feedback on management of the south Florida barracuda population continues to be highly variable. However, the majority of workshop participants supported either the previously proposed slot limit of 15 to 36 inches, or a narrower slot range. Charter captains requested that their clients continue to have the option of retaining a large, trophy barracuda over the slot and most of the guides in the region said they were willing to support such a trophy allowance if it was limited to one fish per vessel.

Staff Recommendation:

Based on continued stakeholder concerns about declines in south Florida's barracuda population and the additional feedback gathered from public workshops conducted in February of 2016, staff recommend implementing a slot limit of 15 to 36 inches fork length in Collier, Monroe, Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach, and Martin Counties, with an allowance of one fish per vessel greater than 36 inches. Staff also recommend returning for a final public hearing at the November Commission meeting in Saint Petersburg.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Melissa Recks, Section Leader, Division of Marine Fisheries Management