

# MEMORANDUM



**To:** Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners  
**From:** Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management  
**Date:** June 22, 2016  
**Subject:** Bringing Fish Back from The Bahamas

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## **Purpose:**

Staff will present draft rules that would exempt recreational harvesters from the requirement to maintain recreationally-caught reef fish, dolphin, and wahoo in whole condition when returning to Florida via vessel from the Commonwealth of the Bahamas. Recently, NOAA Fisheries Service established similar regulations for South Atlantic federal waters.

## **Summary:**

Since December 1998, federal rule has exempted recreational anglers traveling through Atlantic federal waters from the requirement to maintain reef fish in whole condition if the fish were harvested in The Bahamas and specific conditions were met.

In 2013, stakeholders requested the South Atlantic Council (Council) expand the federal exemption to include dolphin and wahoo. They contended anglers on recreational vessels could not properly ice large dolphin and wahoo in whole condition during transit from The Bahamas to the U.S., and the requirement to do so created a food safety risk. In response, federal rules were revised to exempt dolphin and wahoo caught in Bahamian waters from the whole condition requirement. At the same time, the Council revised their existing exemption for reef fish. These federal rules went into effect in January 2016.

The proposed state rules would apply similar regulations in state waters. Specifically, these proposed changes would require anglers in Florida state waters possessing recreationally-harvested reef fish, dolphin, or wahoo fillets from Bahamian waters to (1) maintain the skin intact on the fillets; (2) comply with federal South Atlantic bag and possession limits; (3) possess valid Bahamian fishing and cruising permits; and (4) possess valid government passports with current Bahamian stamps and travel dates. For the purpose of this rule, two fillets of a species count as one fish towards the respective bag limit. Anglers transporting filleted fish from The Bahamas would be required to maintain direct and continuous transit through state waters with all fishing gear stowed. Finally, the proposed rules would prohibit the purchase or sale of fish transported to Florida under this exception.

## **Staff Recommendation:**

Staff recommends approving the proposed draft rules to allow these fish to be brought back from the Bahamas and landed in Florida. If the Commission approves the proposed rule amendments, the draft rules will be noticed and filed without further hearing unless requested and become effective as soon as possible.

## **Staff Contact and/or Presenter:**

Jessica McCawley, Director, Division of Marine Fisheries Management