

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: November 17, 2016
Subject: Barracuda – Final Public Hearing

Purpose:

Staff will present a proposed final rule to 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 in that area.

Summary:

Over the last several years, stakeholders have expressed concern about the population status of great barracuda in south Florida, in particular from Monroe through Martin counties. Stakeholder consensus and some of the available data suggests that there has been a localized decline in both the abundance and size of barracuda in the Keys and southeast Florida. At the September 2015 Commission Meeting, the Commission adopted a bag limit of 2 fish per person and vessel limit of 6 fish for recreational and commercial harvesters, 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 warranted.

In February 2016, staff conducted three public workshops in the Keys and southeast Florida to gather feedback on whether fishermen still desire a size limit 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 to 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. 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.

Based on feedback received at the February 2016 barracuda workshops, the Commission approved a draft rule 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 larger than 36 inches at the June 2016 Commission meeting.

Staff Recommendation:

Based on continued stakeholder concerns about declines in south Florida's barracuda population and the additional feedback gathered since the Commission adopted bag and vessels limits for this fishery, staff recommend approving the proposed final rule to implement 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 larger than 36 inches. Staff recommend making this rule effective January 1, 2017.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Melissa Recks, Section Leader, Division of Marine Fisheries Management