

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: November 17, 2016
Subject: Hogfish Federal Consistency

Purpose:

Staff will provide Commissioners with a federal consistency action that would make state hogfish regulations consistent with pending federal rules.

Summary:

The most recent stock assessment for hogfish was completed by FWRI and examined two distinct stocks off Florida (and a third off the Carolinas). The west Florida (Gulf) hogfish stock, which occurs in the Gulf of Mexico north of Monroe County, was found to be not overfished nor undergoing overfishing, but the Florida Keys/East Florida stock is overfished and undergoing overfishing. Both the South Atlantic and Gulf councils approved management changes for federal waters based on this assessment. If approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, the federal changes are expected to take effect in early 2017.

Because the stock boundary for Gulf and Florida Keys/East Florida hogfish occurs in the Gulf of Mexico off southwest Florida, the councils agreed to use 25° 09' North Latitude in the Gulf of Mexico (near Cape Sable) as the management boundary for the two stocks. This boundary was suggested by FWC staff because it is used in other fisheries (i.e., pompano) and the surrounding area is seldom fished or transited by fishermen.

To rebuild the Florida Keys/East Florida stock, the South Atlantic Council had to make large quota reductions. They also approved a 16-inch minimum size limit for both recreational and commercial harvesters, a 1-fish recreational bag limit, a May 1- Oct. 31 recreational season, and a 25-pound commercial trip limit for hogfish in federal waters off the Keys and East Florida. Support for the size limit increase and recreational bag limit is mixed. Commercial harvesters largely oppose the trip limit.

For Gulf hogfish, the Gulf Council approved an increase to the minimum size limit from 12 to 14 inches. This change was initially requested by stakeholders and should allow hogfish additional opportunities to spawn before growing to harvestable size.

Staff Recommendation:

Approve the following changes to state hogfish regulations to be consistent with pending federal rules:

- Set the management boundary for Gulf and Atlantic hogfish regulations at 25° 09' North Latitude in Gulf state waters.
- Increase the minimum size limit from 12 inches fork length (FL) statewide to 14 inches FL in Gulf state waters and 16 inches FL in Atlantic state waters.
- Increase the statewide minimum size limit for importation and sale from 12 to 14 inches FL.
- For Atlantic recreational harvest, set a 1-fish bag limit and May 1 – Oct. 31 harvest season.

No changes to commercial trip limits are needed because existing state and federal rules require commercial harvesters to follow federal limits in state waters.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

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