

# MEMORANDUM



**To:** Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners  
**From:** Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management  
**Date:** November 17, 2016  
**Subject:** Bully Nets – Draft Rule

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## **Purpose:**

Staff will present draft rules to create an open-access commercial bully net endorsement to be issued in conjunction with a harvester's existing crawfish (lobster) endorsement. This new bully net endorsement is intended to address concerns about the recent increase in participation in the commercial portion of the bully net fishery and to obtain additional information about the fishery and maintain the viability of this traditional method of commercial harvest.

## **Summary:**

Bully netting is a method of lobster harvest carried out by commercial and recreational fishers, primarily in the Keys and southern Miami-Dade County during the first few months of the regular lobster season. It occurs at night and requires clear, calm water. At the September 2016 Commission meeting, Commissioners heard a review and discussion of concerns from stakeholders regarding increased participation in the lobster bully net fishery and requests from participants in the commercial fishery for increased regulation, specifically in the form of a limited access endorsement program. Staff has been hearing a variety of concerns about changes in this fishery since 2014. The concerns that have been raised include negative impacts to the economic viability of the commercial fishery with increasing participation and the potential for the bully net fishery to be used as a cover for illegal lobster harvest, especially if growth in the fishery remains unchecked. In addition, stakeholders have brought forward concerns regarding user conflicts between recreational and commercial bully netters and other members of the public.

Based on the current status of the fishery and the variety of input received at several public meetings and workshops held in south Florida during 2015, staff have developed a proposed draft rule to implement the following management actions:

- 1) Creating an open-access commercial bully net endorsement associated with the commercial crawfish (lobster) endorsement that would help provide better data on this sector;
- 2) Requiring commercial bully net vessels to be marked with their bully net and crawfish endorsement number, so as to be readily identifiable as participants in the commercial bully net fishery;
- 3) Prohibiting the possession or use of trap pullers on bully net vessels to prevent fishers from using the bully net fishery as a cover for illegal activity;
- 4) Prohibiting simultaneous possession of commercial quantities of lobster and scuba tanks or other underwater breathing apparatus unless the harvester possesses a Crawfish Dive endorsement (CD); and
- 5) Launching a "Respectful Bully Netting" outreach campaign to address user conflicts among the recreational and commercial sector and other members of the public.

## **Staff Recommendation:**

Staff recommend approving the proposed draft rule implementing the five proposed management actions described above and will return for a final public hearing at the February Commission meeting in Crystal River.

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

Melissa Recks, Section Leader, Division of Marine Fisheries Management