

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners

From: Dr. Thomas Eason, Director, Division of Habitat and Species Conservation

Date: November 16, 2016

Subject: Consent Agenda, Proposed Nile Tilapia Rule Change

Purpose:

The proposed draft rule amendment will modify Chapter 68-5, Florida Administrative Code (FAC) to change the conditional species allowances for Nile tilapia to incorporate a Rule exception similar to that of the blue tilapia.

Summary:

All species of tilapia in the genera *Tilapia*, *Sarotherodon*, *Oreochromis*, and *Alcolapia* are exotic to Florida and on FWC's Prohibited Species list and may only be permitted for public exhibition and research under Rule criteria, with the exception of four species: blue tilapia (*Oreochromis aureus*), Wami tilapia (*O. urolepis*), Mozambique tilapia (*O. mossambicus*) and Nile tilapia (*O. niloticus*). These species are listed as Conditional and may only be permitted for use in commercial aquaculture, commercial sales, public exhibition and research.

Due in large part to their abundance and wide geographic distribution in the wild in Florida, a Rule exception was made for blue tilapia.

- Per Rule 68.5002 (1)I, Blue tilapia may be possessed, cultured and transported without a permit in Citrus County in the North Central Region and all counties of the Northeast, South and Southwest Regions.

Nile tilapia and blue tilapia are difficult to differentiate, and have been found to have hybridized both in the wild and in aquaculture facilities. Species identification of blue-Nile Hybrids can be almost impossible without genetic testing for confirmation. Because of these difficulties, aquaculture facilities and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) staff that inspect these facilities are challenged with being able to verify that stock are truly blue or Nile tilapia. Proposed rule changes include exempting both blue and Nile tilapia from possession, culturing, and transport permit requirements in the Northeast, South, Southwest and North Central regions.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends approval of the draft rule amendment and that it be advertised and filed for adoption without further hearing, unless requested by a member of the public.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Kristen Sommers, Division of Habitat and Species Conservation.