

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: September 8, 2016
Subject: Consent Agenda: Atlantic Gray Triggerfish – Draft Rule

Purpose:

Staff will present proposed draft rule changes for Atlantic gray triggerfish that would continue Atlantic gray triggerfish regulations that were put in place by the Commission via Executive Order in late 2015.

Summary:

In 2015, the Commission approved a federal consistency action to increase the recreational and commercial size limit for Atlantic gray triggerfish from 12 to 14 inches. The Commission also increased the statewide import size limit to 14 inches since the minimum size limit in the Gulf of Mexico was already 14 inches. The Commission and South Atlantic Fishery Management Council increased the size limit prior to the release of a stock assessment at the request of stakeholders who were concerned about gray triggerfish.

At the September 2015 Commission meeting, a member of the public brought forward concerns about the increased minimum size limit and the lack of public comments on this issue from Florida fishermen south of Ponce Inlet. Staff subsequently reached out to fishermen on the east coast, particularly south of Ponce Inlet, for more information. Fishermen indicated they catch large numbers of gray triggerfish in state waters south of Ponce Inlet, but few are over 12 inches in length. Many felt the 14-inch minimum size limit resulted in large numbers of discarded fish and was not appropriate for Florida state waters, especially in south Florida.

In response to this public feedback, the Commission decreased the minimum size limit back to 12 inches and implemented a 10-fish recreational bag limit in Atlantic state waters via Executive Order. The 10-fish recreational bag limit was set as a conservation measure. This Executive Order was written to expire on October 31, 2016, so the Council and Commission could revisit gray triggerfish regulations following completion of the 2016 stock assessment. This assessment is now complete, but was rejected for use in informing management decisions. At this time, it appears that the South Atlantic Council will maintain the 14-inch minimum size limit for gray triggerfish harvested from federal waters.

Because the Executive Order that modified Atlantic gray triggerfish regulations expires on Oct. 31, 2016, the Commission should consider whether to continue the 12-inch minimum size limit and 10-fish recreational bag limit in state waters.

Staff Recommendation:

If approved, staff recommends publishing the following draft rules and filing for adoption without further public hearing unless one is requested:

- 1) Decrease the recreational and commercial minimum size limit for gray triggerfish harvested in Atlantic state waters from 14 to 12 inches fork length (FL);
- 2) Decrease the minimum size limit for importation and sale of gray triggerfish from 14 inches to 12 inches FL;
- 3) Set the bag limit for gray triggerfish harvested recreationally in the Atlantic Ocean at 10 fish per person per day.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Jessica McCawley, Director, Division of Marine Fisheries Management