



## Florida East Coast Shrimp Bed

Consent Agenda Item #4 – Draft Rule

September 2, 2015

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Division of Marine Fisheries Management

Version 1

This document summarizes a proposed draft rule to amend the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) Florida East Coast Shrimp Bed regulations, 68B-31.0156, Florida Administrative Code (FAC). The proposed draft rule would modify the boundaries of the area off northeast Florida that is open to the commercial harvest of food shrimp during April and May. The proposed modifications to the western boundary line for the allowable harvest area would expand the harvest area slightly, making it easier for the shrimp fishery in the region to operate, and is not expected to negatively impact the shrimp resource.

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# Shrimp Fishery Background



## Commercial Shrimp Fishery

- Regulations differ for bait and food shrimp
- Managed regionally based on differences in the resource and fishery practices

## East Coast Shrimp Bed

- Includes all state waters from Nassau County to St. Lucie County on the Atlantic coast
- Seasonal closure to commercial harvest of food shrimp
  - April and May
  - Closure requested by the industry
  - Allows shrimp to grow to a marketable size
  - Alternative to a size limit



Florida's shrimp fishery is consistently among the most valuable commercial fisheries in the state, providing commercial fishermen with \$40 - 60 million in ex-vessel sales each year. Some species are targeted for either food or for use as bait, while other are targeted for both purposes. Because food shrimp typically need to be larger than bait shrimp to be marketable, the regulations for the two fisheries (bait shrimp and food shrimp) differ. In addition, due to variations in the distribution, life histories, and habitat use of the various species involved in the fishery, and differences in the fishery practices around the state, the commercial fishery is managed regionally, with regulations varying among the regions.

The East Coast Shrimp Bed includes all state waters off the north and central portions of the east coast of Florida, and ranges from the Florida-Georgia border through St. Lucie County (Nassau, Duval, Clay, Putnam, St. Johns, Flagler, Volusia, Seminole, Brevard, Indian River, and St. Lucie counties). The vast majority of the East Coast Shrimp Bed waters are closed to the commercial harvest of food shrimp during April and May. Shrimp use estuarine and other inshore waters as juvenile habitat and tend to be small in these areas during April and May. The two-month closure, which was originally requested by the industry, allows shrimp destined for the food market to grow to a larger, more profitable size before they are harvested and effectively substitutes for a minimum size limit.

As shrimp mature they move out of bays and estuaries. Thus, shrimp found in offshore waters during April and May, including those in adjacent federal waters, tend to be larger. Federal waters off of the East Coast Shrimp Bed are open to harvest during April and May. Therefore, the portion of Florida's food shrimp fleet that operates in the region is still active in federal waters during these months when the season is closed in state waters.

The map shown on this slide depicts the extent of the East Coast Shrimp Bed, including a feature of the state waters boundary line off the St. Johns River mouth, referred to by the industry as "the bubble." The next few slides will explain the importance of "the bubble" with respect to the current seasonal closure and this proposed draft rule.

## Region Under Consideration for Change



State waters line off St. Johns River curves outward creating a "bubble"

- A portion of this "bubble" is open to shrimping during the April-May closure
- Exception to seasonal closure created at industry request in 1995
- Shrimp in this area are of marketable size
- Exception allows shrimp boats operating in adjacent federal waters to trawl across state waters in the outer edge of the "bubble" without picking up their gear



The state waters on the Atlantic coast generally extend three nautical miles from the coast. However, in the case of the St. Johns River mouth, the state waters boundary extends three nautical miles from the offshore jetties that stabilize the entrance to the river. This creates a seaward curve in the state waters boundary in the region. The curvature of this line is referred to by shrimpers in the region as the "bubble."

In 1995, the Marine Fisheries Commission created an exception to the April-May shrimping closure for a portion of the "bubble" at the industry's request. Shrimp in this area were believed to be large enough to be marketable, as were those in adjacent federal waters, and it was easier for the shrimp fleet to operate if they could trawl through the "bubble" when fishing in federal waters instead of having to pick up their nets or trawl around it.

The map on this slide shows the state waters boundary line off the St. Johns River mouth and the area of state waters within the "bubble" that are currently open to harvest of food shrimp during the seasonal closure (hashed area), as established by the Marine Fisheries Commission in 1995. This open portion of the "bubble" includes all waters east of the line 81° 20' 00" W Longitude. This boundary for the open area was chosen because it is easily defined according to navigational charts.

## Industry Requested Change

NE Florida food shrimp fishery has requested an expansion of the allowable fishing area

- Commercial harvest of food shrimp currently allowed east of 81° 20' 00" W Longitude and north of 30° 20' 00" N Latitude
- Rocky bottom reportedly interferes with trawling in open portion of the "bubble"
- Advances in navigational aids means boundaries do not necessarily need to coincide with longitudinal and latitudinal lines

**Industry request: include the entire bubble in the allowable fishing area**

- Would require moving the boundary approximately one mile to the west



Representatives of the shrimp fishery in northeast Florida have requested the Commission consider expanding the area open to harvest of food shrimp in their area to include the entire "bubble."

The current rule allows for harvest of food shrimp during April and May from the portions of the "bubble" that are east of 81° 20' 00" W Longitude and north of 30° 20' 00" N Latitude. The map on this slide shows these reference lines, plus the state waters boundary line, and the resulting area of state waters currently open to harvest of food shrimp during the seasonal closure (area represented by single hash lines). Advances in navigational aids now make it unnecessary to define fishing boundaries along pre-established longitudinal and latitudinal lines.

The industry has requested they be allowed to shrimp throughout the entire "bubble" during the two-month closure so that they can trawl continuously across the entire area. This change would require moving the western boundary of the area open to fishing between 0.5 – 1 mile to the west.

Staff is proposing to create a new western boundary of the area open to food shrimping in state waters during April and May by creating a straight line that cuts directly across the base of the "bubble" and approximates a straight line three nautical miles off the mouth of the St. Johns River. This would move the western boundary less than a mile to the west and expand the fishable area slightly, in response to the industry request.

## Anticipated Impacts of Requested Change

### No anticipated resource impacts

- No sustainability concerns

### Benefits to the food shrimp industry

- Change would make it simpler and more practical for the shrimp fleet to fish in the area

### No anticipated user conflicts

- Shrimp fleet already trawls the entire “bubble” during other months
- Area under consideration is not commonly used by other fishers

### No concerns related to the Net Limitation Amendment

- Limitations on the size of nets do not apply in any portion of the “bubble”



The proposed expansion of the allowable fishing area is not expected to have any negative impacts to the shrimp resource in the region. The seasonal closure was originally implemented to maximize the economic efficiency of the fishery by preventing the harvest of smaller shrimp (which commonly occur nearshore waters this time of year) that have not yet reached a marketable size, not to address sustainability concerns. Additionally, shrimp throughout the “bubble” are expected to be similar in size to those found in adjacent federal waters and large enough to be profitable for the food market.

The proposed change would benefit the food shrimp industry in the region. Expanding the allowable fishing area would make it simpler and more practical for the fishery to operate in this area because fishers could trawl across the entire area when moving from federal waters on the north side of the “bubble” to federal waters on the south side of the “bubble,” instead of having to work around the current boundary.

Staff do not expect any user conflicts to develop as a result of the proposal. While the proposed change would result in a slight expansion of the allowable trawling area during April and May, it would not expand the shrimping grounds in general because the shrimp fleet already trawls the entire “bubble” during other months of the year. In addition, staff do not believe this area is commonly used by other stakeholders, so the rule change is not expected to displace other user groups.

Finally, limitations on the size of nets that can be used in state waters only extend to one nautical mile from shore on the Atlantic. The “bubble” area being considered for opening under this proposal is more than one nautical mile offshore. Therefore, there are no Net Limitation Amendment concerns associated with this proposal.

## Proposed Draft Rule

### 68B-31.0156 Florida East Coast Shrimp Bed: Repeal of Section 370.156, Florida Statutes; Seasonal Food Shrimp Production Closure; Exception; Definition.

Expand the allowable fishing area as requested by the shrimping industry

- Allow commercial harvest of food shrimp throughout the entire “bubble” during April and May by creating a new western boundary for the open area
- Remove reference to the intersection of 81°20'00"W Longitude and 30°20'00"N Latitude



The proposed draft rule would modify 68B-31.0156, FAC, to expand the area open to commercial harvest of food shrimp during the April-May seasonal closure of the East Coast Shrimp Bed. The proposed rule would allow shrimping throughout the region off the mouth of the St. Johns River known as the “bubble,” as pictured on the above map. The proposed rule would create a new western boundary for the open area defined as a straight line extending from 81°20.392'W Longitude, 30°26.658'N Latitude and continuing to 81°20.325'W Longitude, 30°21.469'N Latitude and remove the reference to the intersection of 81°20'00"W Longitude and 30°20'00"N Latitude that is currently found in the rule.

## Staff Recommendation

### Approve the draft rule to expand the area open to shrimping during the seasonal closure of the East Coast Shrimp Bed

- Allow shrimping during April and May in all state waters of the “bubble” off the St. Johns River mouth
- Create a new western boundary for the open area so that open area encompasses the entire “bubble”
- Make the rule effective as soon as possible (prior to April 2016)

*If approved by the Commission, the rule will be noticed and filed without further hearing*



Photo courtesy of Marie Thomas



Staff recommend the Commission approve the proposed draft rule to expand the area open to shrimping during the seasonal closure of the East Coast Shrimp Bed by allowing shrimping during April and May in all state waters of the “bubble” off the St. Johns River mouth. Staff recommend making the rule effective as soon as possible and no later than April 1, 2016.

Staff are requesting Commission approval to advertise the proposed amendment and file for adoption as soon as possible. If the rule amendment is approved for both advertisement and final adoption, Commission staff will file the rule for adoption as allowed by 120.54(3), Florida Statutes, without further public hearing.

Staff have evaluated the rule under the standards of 68-1.004, FAC, and found it to be in compliance.