

# MEMORANDUM



**To:** Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners

**From:** Jessica McCawley, Director, Division of Marine Fisheries Management

**Date:** August 10, 2015

**Subject:** Barracuda – Final Public Hearing

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**Purpose:**

The proposed final rules would create a new chapter for great barracuda, Chapter 68B-60, Florida Administrative Code, and establish a size limit for the recreational and commercial fisheries, as well as recreational bag limits and commercial trip and vessel limits in south Florida to address local population concerns in the region.

**Summary:**

In recent years stakeholders have expressed concern about the population status of barracuda in south Florida, particularly from Martin to Monroe counties. Stakeholder consensus and some of the available data suggests that there has been a localized decline in barracuda in the Keys and southeast Florida. Staff presented a review and discussion of stakeholder concerns and available data for barracuda at the November 2014 Commission meeting, after which staff conducted public workshops and analysis of additional data in early 2015.

At the June 2015 Commission, staff presented a draft rule to create a new rule chapter for barracuda to include (1) a recreational bag limit of two fish per person, (2) a commercial daily trip limit of 20 fish per person, and (3) a harvest slot limit of 15 to 36 inches fork length. Staff recommended that these new rules apply only in south Florida (Collier to Martin counties) where localized declines are likely to have occurred. At that meeting, the Commission directed staff to amend the proposed rule to include a 20 fish commercial vessel limit and return for a final public hearing at the September 2015 Commission meeting.

Since the June Commission meeting, staff has heard additional input on the proposed rules, including requests from some charter captains in the Keys to allow their customers to take one barracuda over the proposed maximum size. After careful consideration of the request and additional feedback from other stakeholders about the concept, staff has decided not to incorporate that request into the staff recommendation. Thus, the staff recommendation has not changed.

**Staff Recommendation:**

Staff recommends adopting the proposed final rules that will establish the following:

- Recreational bag limit = 2 fish per person per day
- Commercial trip limit = 20 fish per person per day
- Commercial vessel limit = 20 fish per vessel per day
- Slot limit = 15 to 36 inches fork length (recreational and commercial)
- Apply above conservation measures regionally (Collier, Monroe, Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach, and Martin counties)

**Staff Contact and/or Presenter:**

Melissa Recks, Section Leader, Analysis and Rulemaking, Division of Marine Fisheries Management