

# MEMORANDUM



**To:** Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners  
**From:** Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management  
**Date:** May 1, 2019  
**Subject:** Spotted Seatrout – Draft Rule

---

## **Purpose:**

Provide an overview of the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) spotted seatrout (seatrout) stock assessment and stakeholder feedback received and obtain approval for draft rule amendments to recreational fishing regulations for seatrout.

## **Summary:**

Spotted seatrout is one of Florida's most popular inshore fisheries. The fishery is dominated by the recreational sector, but also supports a small commercial fishery throughout the state. Seatrout do not move much between estuaries, making them susceptible to localized declines, but also responsive to a regionally-specific management approach. Seatrout are dependent on aquatic vegetation during specific life stages and susceptible to environmental events like harmful algae blooms and rapid changes in salinity.

Seatrout are managed in four zones across the state (see attached map). The population status within each zone is assessed using a measure of population health known as Spawning Potential Ratio (SPR), which measures the effect of fishing on the reproductive capability of the population. FWRI's recent stock assessment suggests that seatrout status is not meeting the Commission's management target of 35% SPR in several of the management zones. SPR does not capture effects of environmental impacts and seatrout abundance. Angler feedback suggests seatrout abundance in several parts of the state has declined.

Based on the stock assessment and localized fishery concerns, staff will propose the following draft rules intended to increase the SPR in zones not currently achieving the management target and to provide high-quality seatrout fisheries throughout the state:

Statewide: Prohibit guides from keeping a bag limit on a for-hire trip.

### Northwest

- Reduce bag limit from 5 to 3 fish
- Re-establish winter recreational closure:  
February

### Southwest

- Reduce bag limit from 4 to 3 fish
- Prohibit harvest above the slot size limit

### Northeast

- Reduce the bag limit from 6 to 5 fish

### Southeast

- Reduce bag limit from 4 to 2 fish
- Prohibit harvest above the slot size limit

If approved and directed, staff will return for a final public hearing at the July 2019 Commission meeting.

## **Staff Recommendation:**

Approval of the proposed draft rules.

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

Melissa Recks, Section Leader, Division of Marine Fisheries Management