

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: May 1, 2019
Subject: Red Drum, Snook, and Seatrout: Southwest Florida Update – Staff Report

Purpose:

Review and discuss updated fisheries monitoring information for red drum, snook, and spotted seatrout populations in southwest Florida relative to localized impacts from a prolonged red tide bloom and request direction on potential further management actions.

Summary:

A red tide event began offshore of southwest Florida in November 2017 and persisted in the region through mid-February 2019. Stakeholders expressed concerns about the status of the red drum and snook fisheries in portions of southwest Florida prior to impacts from this red tide event. In an abundance of caution, short-term changes were made by Executive Order (EO) in August 2018 to make the red drum and snook fisheries catch-and-release only within the portion of southwest Florida where red tide-related fish kills had been most prevalent. In September 2018, these measures were expanded north to include Tampa Bay (including all of Manatee, Hillsborough and Pinellas counties) and Pasco County, and were extended through May 10, 2019 to allow time for researchers to monitor these fisheries for signs of decline or rebuilding. In February 2019, additional catch-and-release measures were implemented for seatrout larger than 20 inches in southwest Florida by EO based on stakeholder concerns about potential impacts from red tide.

FWRI staff has continued to conduct monthly sampling to monitor the red drum, snook, spotted seatrout, and other fisheries in southwest Florida. These monitoring data can be used to estimate potential red tide-related impacts to these fisheries by comparing recent changes in abundance to long-term averages in Tampa Bay, Sarasota Bay, and Charlotte Harbor.

Staff will present proposed management actions to further conserve local red drum, snook, and spotted seatrout populations impacted by red tide in southwest Florida as follows:

- Continue catch-and-release measures currently in place for red drum and snook from the Pasco – Hernando county line through Gordon Pass in Collier County for one year by EO
- Make spotted seatrout catch-and-release only with no commercial harvest from the Pasco – Hernando county line through Gordon Pass in Collier County for one year by EO

Staff will continue monthly monitoring of local red drum, snook, and spotted seatrout populations, and if approved, would return to the Commission with an update in early 2020.

Staff Recommendation:

Approval of the proposed management actions.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Jessica McCawley, Director, Division of Marine Fisheries Management