

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: July 17, 2019
Subject: Blackfin Tuna – Draft Rule

Purpose:

Obtain approval for a draft rule that will create species-specific regulations and a new blackfin tuna rule chapter, 68B-62, Florida Administrative Code (FAC).

Summary:

Blackfin tuna is a pelagic species found in both state and federal waters. There is no stock assessment for blackfin tuna and there is limited information on the biology of this species. In recent years, staff has heard concern regarding the fishery, particularly from southeast Florida and the Keys. Blackfin tuna does not currently have any species-specific fishing regulations but is subject to the statutory default recreational bag limit of 100 pounds when fishing in state waters. Blackfin tuna is not managed by the federal fishery management councils or the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Highly Migratory Species Division (HMS).

The blackfin tuna fishery is predominantly recreational with 92-95% of total harvest coming from the recreational fishery in recent years, and fishing practices vary throughout the state. In order to better understand how the fishery operates and gather public input on potential management considerations, staff held seven public workshops around the state and solicited input online. Stakeholder feedback varied but many anglers and charter captains expressed support for implementing reasonable regulations for the species.

Based on the increasing interest in this fishery, concerns from anglers, and taking into consideration both the known and unknown biology and behavior of blackfin tuna, staff proposes implementing species-specific bag and vessel limits of two fish per person per day or 10 fish per vessel per day, whichever is greater, statewide. Additionally, staff proposes extending these regulations into federal waters.

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

Staff Recommendation:

Approve the proposed draft rule.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Melissa Recks, Section Leader, Division of Marine Fisheries Management