

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: October 2, 2019
Subject: Blackfin Tuna – Final Public Hearing

Purpose:

Obtain final approval for a rule creating species-specific recreational harvest limits for blackfin tuna in 68B-62.001, Florida Administrative Code.

Summary:

At the July 2019 Commission meeting, the Commission approved a draft rule to create species-specific regulations for blackfin tuna 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 published a notice of proposed rule that would create a bag/vessel limit of two blackfin tuna per person per day or 10 blackfin tuna per vessel per day, whichever is more, for state and federal waters.

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 recreational anglers are subject to the statutory limit of 100 pounds per person when fishing in state waters. Blackfin tuna are not managed by the federal fishery management councils or the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Highly Migratory Species Division.

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.

Staff Recommendation:

Approval of the proposed final rules to be effective January 1, 2020.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Melissa Recks, Section Leader, Division of Marine Fisheries Management