

# MEMORANDUM



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

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

**Date:** February 19, 2020

**Subject:** Staff Report – Snook, Red Drum, and Seatrout: Southwest Florida Update

---

**Purpose:**

Receive Commission direction on potential management actions for snook, red drum, and seatrout populations in southwest Florida.

**Why:**

At the May 2019 Commission meeting, staff committed to providing an update on red tide-related impacts and re-evaluating the current catch-and-release status of these species in southwest Florida.

**Top Points:**

- 1) Snook, red drum, and seatrout are three of Florida's most popular inshore fisheries.
- 2) Recent fisheries monitoring data suggest management changes may be needed to ensure a continued recovery from the 2017-2019 red tide events.
- 3) Staff will recommend extending the Executive Order (EO) currently in place.

**Affected Parties:**

Recreational anglers and for-hire guides that harvest snook, red drum, or seatrout in southwest Florida, as well as commercial harvesters that take seatrout in this area.

**Summary:**

A red tide event began offshore of southwest Florida in November 2017 and persisted in the region through early-February 2019. Stakeholders expressed concerns about impacts to recreationally important inshore fisheries and, based on these concerns, a series of short-term management changes to snook, red drum, and seatrout were implemented via Executive Orders (EO). Currently, snook, red drum, and seatrout are catch-and-release only in a portion of southwest Florida (map in Attachment 1) through May 31, 2020. FWRI staff has continued to conduct monthly sampling to monitor these and other fisheries in southwest Florida. These monitoring data can be used to evaluate potential red tide-related impacts to these fisheries by comparing current abundance to long-term averages in Tampa Bay, Sarasota Bay, and Charlotte Harbor.

Staff will provide an update on the current status of snook, red drum, and seatrout populations in southwest Florida and recommend extending the current catch-and-release measures in place for these fisheries from the Hernando-Pasco county line south through Gordon Pass in Collier County for an additional year, beginning when the current EO expires on June 1, 2020. Staff will continue monthly monitoring of inshore fish populations and, if necessary, return to the Commission with an update in early 2021.

**Staff Recommendation:**

Approval of the management action as presented.

**Staff Contact and/or Presenter:**

Jessica McCawley, Director, Division of Marine Fisheries Management  
Gil McRae, Director, Fish and Wildlife Research Institute