

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: July 22, 2020
Subject: Draft Rule – Atlantic Bluefish (Consent Agenda)

Purpose:

Obtain approval for draft rules to modify bluefish regulations found in 68B-43, Florida Administrative Code (FAC).

Why:

A 2019 federal stock assessment found that Atlantic bluefish is overfished and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) has requested all Atlantic states implement more restrictive bluefish regulations.

Top Points:

- 1) The Atlantic bluefish fishery is managed in federal waters off Florida by the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (Mid-Atlantic Council) and management in state waters is coordinated by the ASMFC.
- 2) In late 2019, the Mid-Atlantic Council reduced recreational bag limits in all Atlantic federal waters.
- 3) Florida recreational bluefish landings average more than 25% of U.S Atlantic coastwide landings.

Affected Parties:

Recreational anglers and for-hire guides who catch bluefish.

Summary:

Bluefish from Maine through the Atlantic coast of Florida are a single stock that migrates seasonally and is primarily found in Florida waters during winter months. They are commonly caught from beaches and piers and are often bycatch. Although few Florida anglers harvest bluefish for food, Florida has among the highest recreational landings of any Atlantic state, with the majority of Florida landings occurring in state waters. A 2019 federal stock assessment found that Atlantic bluefish is overfished. The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires that an overfished stock must be rebuilt within 10 years. Based on the assessment results and the estimated recreational harvest overage for 2020 and 2021, the Mid-Atlantic Council and ASMFC Bluefish Management Board approved more restrictive recreational bag limits in federal waters. ASMFC has requested that states implement similar regulations for state waters.

In response to ASMFC's request and angler input, the proposed draft rule would change the bluefish bag limit in state waters along Florida's Atlantic coast from Nassau through Miami-Dade County to 3 fish per person per day. Stakeholder feedback towards the proposed regulation was generally positive.

Staff Recommendation:

Approval of the proposed draft rules. Staff also recommends the proposed changes be advertised and filed for adoption without further hearing, unless requested by a member of the public.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Krista Shipley, Division of Marine Fisheries Management