

# MEMORANDUM



**To:** Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners  
**From:** Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management  
**Date:** July 22, 2020  
**Subject:** Final Public Hearing – Stone Crab

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**Purpose:**

Obtain final approval for rule amendments to modify stone crab regulations found in 68B-13, Florida Administrative Code (FAC).

**Why:**

Commercial stone crab landings show a long-term decline in harvest and stone crab is likely undergoing overfishing. Management changes are necessary to improve the stone crab population and build resiliency in the fishery.

**Top Points:**

- 1) Stone crab is one of Florida's most valuable fisheries (average annual dockside value of \$29 million).
- 2) Average commercial landings have declined by approximately 22% (712,000 pounds) since the late 1990s, an estimated loss of \$8.3 million in potential revenue at current market prices; however, increasing market prices have offset the declining landings.
- 3) Staff worked heavily with industry on rule proposals.

**Affected Parties:**

Commercial and recreational stone crab harvesters, wholesale and retail seafood dealers, restaurants, and other businesses and communities that rely on the stone crab fishery.

**Summary:**

Florida's stone crab fishery is one of the oldest fisheries in the state and is unique in that only claws are harvested. This fishery operates statewide and is important to both commercial and recreational harvesters. Stone crabs are susceptible to environmental events and high fishing mortality affects the ability of the stone crab stock to rebound. Staff held small group meetings with stone crab fishery stakeholders starting in early 2020 to gather feedback on a potential rule proposal. In May 2020, staff presented a series of draft rules intended to increase the stone crab population and build resiliency in the fishery and has continued gathering input from stakeholders since then through two virtual public workshops and small group meetings, phone calls, emails, and the FWC Saltwater Comments webpage.

Staff propose the following final rule amendments, including updates since the draft rule hearing, to increase the stone crab population and add resiliency to the fishery by reducing harvest, reducing release and bycatch mortality, and reduce fishery interactions with egg-bearing females late in the season:

- Shorten the stone crab season to end on April 15 instead of May 15
- Extend the post-season trap retrieval period from 5 days to 10 days after the season ends
- Require an escape ring at least 2 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" in diameter in all plastic and wood stone crab traps before the 2023/2024 stone crab season
- Increase the minimum claw size limit by <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" from 2 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" to 2 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub>"
- Limit whole stone crab possession to two checker boxes no larger than 3' x 2' x 2' or 12 cubic ft. each

**Staff Recommendation:**

Approval of the proposed final rules, including publication of the necessary Notice of Change, to be effective October 1, 2020.

**Staff Contact and/or Presenter:** Krista Shipley, Division of Marine Fisheries Management