

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: July 22, 2020
Subject: Draft Rule – Flounder

Purpose:

Obtain approval for draft rules to modify flounder regulations found in 68B-48, Florida Administrative Code (FAC).

Why:

An FWC Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) stock status update found there has been a decline in the fishery statewide and that flounder on the Atlantic coast of Florida is likely both already overfished and continuing to experience overfishing. Management changes are needed for this fishery to be sustainable for the future.

Top Points:

- 1) Flounder is managed as a multi-species complex of gulf, southern, summer, and fringed flounders.
- 2) Recreational harvest averages more than 90% of annual statewide landings, primarily by hook-and-line or gig/spear.
- 3) Flounder are primarily landed in state waters but, there is an offshore fishery that operates in federal waters when flounder aggregate to spawn.

Affected Parties:

Recreational and commercial harvesters, for-hire guides, and other businesses that participate in or rely on this fishery.

Summary:

Florida's flounder fishery is a popular inshore fishery and in recent years staff has heard a variety of concerns from anglers and requests for management changes to address those concerns. Given the results of the recent FWRI stock status update and public feedback received so far, staff held virtual public workshops, virtual small group meetings, and gathered additional feedback through various online methods on a proposal for potential changes to regulations.

The proposed draft rules outlined below are intended to reverse the current downward trend and improve the long-term sustainability of the flounder fishery.

- Increase the minimum size limit to 14 inches total length (recreational and commercial)
- Reduce the recreational daily bag limit to 5 fish per person
- Establish a November closure for recreational harvest
- Establish a commercial trip and vessel limit of 150 fish when using allowable gear, except in November
- Establish a November commercial trip and vessel limit of 50 pounds when using allowable gear
- Extend all FWC flounder regulations into federal waters

If approved, staff will return for a final public hearing at the October 2020 Commission meeting.

Staff Recommendation: Approval of the proposed draft rules.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Krista Shipley, Division of Marine Fisheries Management