

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: October 7, 2020
Subject: Draft Rule – Flounder

Purpose:

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

Why:

Management changes are needed for this fishery to be sustainable long-term.

Top Points:

- 1) A Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) stock status update found that flounder on the Atlantic coast of Florida is likely overfished and undergoing overfishing and there has been a decline in the fishery statewide.
- 2) Recreational harvest averages more than 90% of annual statewide landings.
- 3) Flounder are primarily harvested from state waters but there is an offshore, federal waters fishery that largely targets spawning flounder.
- 4) Staff is presenting a second draft rule proposal based on additional public input and further consideration of the fishery.

Affected Parties:

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

Summary:

Florida's flounder fishery is a multi-species, popular inshore fishery and in recent years staff has heard concerns from anglers and requests for management changes to address those concerns. Given the results of the recent FWRI stock status update, staff developed a potential rule proposal and held virtual public workshops, virtual small group meetings, and gathered feedback through various online methods. At the July 2020 Commission meeting, the Commission approved a series of proposed draft rules intended to improve the long-term sustainability of the fishery and directed staff to continue working with stakeholders on allowable bycatch of flounder in federal waters.

Although stakeholder support remains mixed, staff will present a second draft rule proposal for consideration based on additional public feedback and further consideration of the fishery:

- Extend FWC flounder regulations into federal waters
- Increase the minimum size limit to 14 inches total length (recreational and commercial)
- Reduce the recreational daily bag limit to five fish per person
- Establish a recreational Oct. 15 – Nov. 30 closed season
- Establish a 150-fish commercial trip and vessel limit for allowable gear except from Oct. 15 – Nov. 30
- Establish a 50-fish commercial trip and vessel limit for allowable gear from Oct. 15 – Nov. 30
- Update the incidental bycatch limit for non-allowable gear to 50 fish (currently 50 pounds)
 - Create a trawl-specific incidental bycatch limit for federal waters of 150 fish except from Oct. 15 – Nov. 30, 50 fish from Oct. 15 – Nov. 30

Staff Recommendation: Approval of the proposed draft rules.

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