

# MEMORANDUM



**To:** Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners  
**From:** Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management  
**Date:** October 7, 2020  
**Subject:** Federal Consistency – Atlantic Reef Fish Hook Requirements

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**Purpose:**

Obtain approval for rule amendments to modify hook requirement regulations in 68B-14, Florida Administrative Code (FAC).

**Why:**

Hook requirement consistency with federal regulations in Atlantic state and federal waters will reduce regulatory confusion, improve survival of released reef fish, and promote best fishing practices.

**Top Points:**

- 1) This action will make Florida rules consistent with recent changes in federal regulations.
- 2) Mortality of released fish is one of the most significant management challenges facing reef fish.
- 3) Reducing discard mortality through proper fish handling, correct gear use, and mitigating barotrauma may contribute to increased health and fishing opportunities of reef fish stocks.
- 4) FWC encourages voluntary usage of descending tools when needed and other best fishing practices.

**Affected Parties:**

Those who recreationally or commercially fish for reef fish from a vessel in Atlantic state waters.

**Summary:**

As of July 2020, anyone fishing for reef fish in Atlantic federal waters must 1) have a descending device aboard the vessel, 2) use only non-stainless-steel hooks, and 3) use non-offset circle hooks north of 28° N. latitude. These best fishing practices should increase survival of released fish and improve fish stocks.

Consistent hook regulations for Atlantic state waters can help reduce regulatory confusion, improve survival of released fish, and allow regionally important fisheries to continue. Non-stainless-steel hooks degrade faster in the marine environment compared to stainless steel, ultimately increasing a fish's chance for survival if the hook cannot be removed. Use of circle hooks generally minimizes hook-related mortality of reef fish. However, allowing use of other types of non-stainless-steel hooks south of 28° N. latitude accommodates south Florida fisheries in which circle hooks may actually increase hook-related mortality.

Use of descending devices can promote survival of fish suffering from barotrauma, but is not always necessary in shallow state waters. Voluntary use of descending devices in state waters allows fishermen to choose release tools/techniques that best fit their circumstances.

**Staff Recommendation:**

If approved, staff will follow the state's federal consistency process for adoption provided by section 120.54(6), Florida Statutes without further public hearing, effective January 21, 2021.

**Staff Contact and/or Presenter:**

Kristin Foss, Biological Scientist IV, Division of Marine Fisheries Management