

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: April 25, 2018
Subject: Sharks – Review and Discussion

Purpose:

Provide information on sharks and an overview of shark-related topics important to Florida. Staff will seek Commission direction on addressing the public's shark-related concerns, with a focus on shore-based shark fishing.

Summary:

Sharks play a vital role in marine ecosystems as top-level predators that help keep other fish populations at healthy levels. Sharks are long-lived, slow to mature, and have few offspring, which makes them vulnerable to fishing pressure. Unsustainable fishing practices led to rapid declines in shark stocks along the U.S. Atlantic coast in the mid-1970s through the early 1990s.

In the early 1990s, Florida took a leadership role in shark conservation by implementing strict commercial and recreational regulations, including a prohibition on shark finning (the removal of shark fins at sea and discarding the rest of the shark) and a bag limit of one shark per person per day for both recreational and commercial fishermen. Additional shark fishing regulations, including a prohibition on harvest for 26 species have been implemented for Florida waters since that time. Although many shark populations are still overfished internationally, populations along the U.S. Atlantic coast are rebounding due to state and federal fisheries management measures.

Sharks are high profile, high interest species with passionate stakeholders advocating for diverse management actions and philosophies. Increased public interest in shark conservation, combined with recovering shark populations, increasing human use of coastal areas, and media attention surrounding sharks has led to a variety of developing and ongoing conflicts in Florida. Staff will lead a discussion of these various issues, including shark bites, sharks interfering with fishing activities, shark fin sales, shark feeding, humane treatment of sharks, and shore-based shark fishing. Staff will also request Commission direction on management of the shore-based shark fishery, given the high level of interest in and conflict around the topic.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends continuing to stay engaged on all Florida shark-related issues and working with tournaments and shore-based anglers to improve conservation practices of this fishery and reduce user group conflicts. If directed by the Commission to explore regulatory options for the shore-based fishery, staff recommends holding public meetings with affected stakeholders prior to developing recommendations.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Jessica McCawley, Division of Marine Fisheries Management