

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners

From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Division of Marine Fisheries Management
Gil McRae, Director, Fish and Wildlife Research Institute

Date: June 25, 2015

Subject: Strategic Discussion: Marine Fisheries – Forage Fish

Purpose:

Staff will provide an overview of FWC’s research and management of forage fish. The presentation will review historical and ongoing research on forage fish species as well as relevant management tools and practices currently used to successfully manage these species in Florida. Staff suggests the adoption of a resolution to confirm the importance of forage fish in Florida and FWC’s commitment to continue monitoring and management of these species.

Summary:

Forage fish are important lower level elements of marine food webs and provide the link between plankton and predator species. Their populations naturally fluctuate in number and geographic location in response to environmental conditions. In Florida, forage fish have been managed and monitored extensively and effectively for over 20 years, making our state a leader in the nation. FWRI monitors these species through fisheries independent and dependent monitoring programs. These programs include offshore and inshore trawling and seining surveys to assess the abundance and distribution of Florida’s marine species, as well as monitoring fish landings for those forage fish species that are commercially harvested. The information obtained from these programs is used to evaluate these fish populations through complex ecosystem computer models. Current, long-term management measures include statewide gear limitations and species-specific regulations that have reduced harvest of forage fish by more than half since the mid-1990s. FWC’s attention and dedication to forage fish species have resulted in stable or increasing populations and is a success story in effective research and management practices for these species. A resolution would confirm FWC’s commitment to continued forage fish monitoring and management.

This agenda item is being presented for the Commission’s information. A resolution regarding forage fish could also be considered for adoption by the Commission.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommend maintaining current management measures and monitoring programs, which are extensive and effective. Staff also recommend the Commission consider adopting a resolution to confirm the importance of forage fish species in Florida and to reiterate the Commission’s commitment to continued monitoring and management of these species.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

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