

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners

From: Martha Bademan, Section Leader, Division of Marine Fisheries Management

Date: June 24, 2015

Subject: Consent Agenda Item: King Mackerel Commercial Regulations

Purpose:

The purpose of this item is to request Commission approval of proposed draft rules that would:

- Set state commercial vessel limits in the Gulf-Atlantic Fishery equal to new vessel limits in adjacent federal waters
- Remove references to specific fishing season dates in FWC rule
- Clarify language that closes state waters to commercial harvest when adjacent federal waters are closed
- Establish a transit provision to allow transport of legally-harvested fish through all closed zones for landing

Summary:

King mackerel commercial harvesters operating in state waters are required to possess a federal king mackerel permit and must follow federal harvest seasons and limits in state waters. Consistent state and federal regulations will help reduce regulatory confusion and ease enforcement.

The king mackerel fishery is highly complex with multiple regions that shift in location throughout the year, and have different commercial trip limits and seasons. The complexity is compounded by the fact that the fishery occurs in both state and federal waters, and that commercial fishermen regularly travel between Atlantic and Gulf waters to harvest king mackerel. Adopting transit provisions and matching commercial trip limits would provide flexibility for fishermen operating in multiple areas and reduce the likelihood of early season closures in some regions. Removing references to specific fishing season dates and clarifying language that closes state waters to commercial harvest when federal waters are closed would simplify and streamline existing FWC mackerel rule language.

The proposed rule changes would create consistency between regulations for king mackerel in state and federal waters off Florida. Since 2013, the South Atlantic Council and Gulf Council have made several modifications to the management of king mackerel that resulted in different regulations for state and federal waters. If these proposed rule amendments are approved, this decision would be final and the rules will be filed without further hearing.

Staff Recommendation:

Approve the proposed rules that establish vessel limits, closes harvest in state waters when adjacent federal waters are closed, removes language that specifies fishing seasons, and establishes transit

provisions. If these proposed rules are approved, they would be noticed and filed for adoption if no additional hearing was requested.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter

Martha Bademan, Section Leader, Division of Marine Fisheries Management