

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: Gulf Greater Amberjack Federal Consistency

Purpose:

The purpose of this item is to request Commission approval of a proposed rule change that would increase the recreational greater amberjack minimum size limit in Gulf state waters from 30 inches fork length (FL) to 34 inches FL. This proposed rule change would create consistency between regulations in Gulf state waters and pending federal regulations in Gulf federal waters.

Summary:

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) recently approved new management measures for Gulf greater amberjack based on the latest stock assessment which indicated Gulf greater amberjack continue to be overfished and undergoing overfishing.

The Council reduced annual catch limits, reduced the commercial trip limit, and increased the minimum size limit for recreational harvest from 30 inches FL to 34 inches FL. The purpose of the increased size limit is based upon the life history of greater amberjack where at 30 inches FL, only 11 percent of female greater amberjack are sexually mature; whereas at 34 inches FL, 85 percent are sexually mature. Increasing the minimum size limit allows more fish to reach sexual maturity and possibly spawn before being harvested. The proposed rule change does not include the commercial trip limit change made by the Council because FWC rules require commercial fishermen harvesting greater amberjack to have a Gulf federal commercial reef fish permit and commercial harvesters must follow federal rules as a condition of the permit.

Public comment on this topic at Council meetings supported a 34-inch FL recreational minimum size limit.

If approved, the rule would be filed for Gulf state waters only if the recreational minimum size limit change for Gulf federal waters is approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce.

Staff Recommendation:

Approve the proposed rule to increase the recreational minimum size limit for greater amberjack harvested in Gulf state waters from 30 inches FL to 34 inches FL so that state and federal rules are consistent. *The proposed rule language is attached.*

Staff Contact and/or Presenter

Martha Bademan, Section Leader, Division of Marine Fisheries Management