

Dear Commissioners-

Thank you for your sound management of Florida's fish and wildlife. I am contacting you regarding your upcoming decision about the management of Florida pompano, African pompano and permit.

Your staff experts did an outstanding job of gathering public input and opinion through the series of statewide workshops and video-conferences on the pompano/permit issue over the past year and a half. The resulting staff recommendations indicate that a majority of Florida's pompano and permit fishermen approve of allowing individuals to harvest their legal bag limit of permit or African pompano by hook and line or spearfishing gear.

I agree with these staff recommendations. Chairman Barreto himself mentioned, at the Clewiston meeting, that he saw no reason that a spearfisherman, following the same limits as any other fisherman, should be excluded from harvesting his or her limit of one permit over 20 inches. The phrase "a fish in the cooler is a fish in the cooler" was mentioned several times at that meeting, where the preliminary vote on this issue passed.

Not only do these recommendations provide fairness in allowable gear, they will simplify the enforcement process for state and county agencies. With a 20" minimum length and 1 per angler/2 per boat limit in place, this species will continue to thrive while allowing Florida sportsmen of all kinds to take a reasonable catch home for dinner.

Further, spearfishing gear is arguably the most ecologically friendly fishing gear, with a bycatch that approaches zero and no effect on undersized fish. There is virtually no discard mortality associated with spearfishing. A light tackle angler, however, can fight numerous fish to exhaustion, and then release them near potential predators such as sharks and goliath grouper. A diver selects, stalks, and shoots a single fish, avoiding any undersized fish. Spearfishermen make up a tiny fraction of the total permit/pompano user group, with the total spear catch being extremely small compared to that of hook and line.

According to FWC staff biologists, none of these three species is even remotely in trouble per the most recent data. They have not been subject to an increase in pressure, nor have they been found to be endangered in any way. In fact, this issue seems to be fueled primarily by a group of catch and release only fishermen who would like you to force their personal preference on all of Florida's fishermen regardless of the lack of true need, which I believe, is unfair. I hope you will too.

The FWC resources being spent on this issue would be, in my opinion, better spent on other fisheries which have documented problems, not catering to the personal preferences of a small group of fly-fishermen.

To recap - I support ALL of the most recent staff recommendations and commend the staff for their diligence throughout this process.

Sincerely,