



# WEST PALM BEACH FISHING CLUB

• Established 1934 •

October 27, 2011

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Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
2590 Executive Center Circle East  
Berkley Building  
Tallahassee, FL 32301

Attn: Kathy Barco, FWC Chairman

Dear Commissioner Barco:

On behalf of the over 1,300 members of the West Palm Beach Fishing Club (WPBFC), I offer the following comments regarding the current FWC proposal to modify commercial and recreational fishing regulations for spotted sea trout in Florida.

First, I would like to provide some background on our perspective. The majority of our members fish for trout in the southern region of the state, primarily the Indian River Lagoon and the Lake Worth Lagoon (LWL). We have also organized many fishing outings to Charlotte Harbor and Florida Bay through the years. More than a few of our members have been trout fishing in south Florida for over 50 years. There was a time when the LWL was home to some of the largest sea trout in the state. Many of the WPBFC's all time club records for the species, fish exceeding 13 pounds, were caught in the LWL in the 1950's and 1960's. Trout over 10 pounds in the LWL were not uncommon. Since that time, extensive habitat loss and water quality degradation has negatively impacted sea trout abundance in our area. Commercial gill netting further depleted the fish that remained and during the years that followed trout were rarely caught.

Since the enactment of the constitutional amendment banning the use of entanglement nets, the adoption of tighter recreational fishing regulations and the creation of numerous environmental enhancement projects in our area we have begun to see trout slowly return to the LWL. We view trout like 'the canary in the coal mine' when it comes to the health of our estuary. Seeing their return is a very positive sign. However, the catches remain largely incidental and many of our members who catch trout release them with the hopes that species will become more abundant.

Note that sea trout is usually not the target species in our region. We are blessed with a wide variety of inshore species to fish for, plus our near shore and offshore fishing opportunities are quite accessible and equally as varied. Anglers in the northern regions of the state have fewer options and longer runs to offshore fishing grounds. The beauty of trout fishing in our region, especially the Indian River Lagoon, is that if snook, pompano, redfish, tarpon or flounder fishing is off, you can usually fall back to trout fishing to save the day. This is an attractive quality for the south Florida inshore fishing experience and a valuable asset for numerous fishing guides who need to provide action for their clients.

The WPBFC does not support any expansion of the commercial fishery for sea trout in the southern region of the state, nor do we support lifting the November and December closure for recreational anglers. While we acknowledge that FWC stock

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assessments indicate that trout are exceeding the management goal (35% SPR) in the southern region, the WPBFC believes that the fishery is far from fully recovered in our part of the state. While WPBFC members have witnessed improvements in their trout catches in recent years, we believe that relaxing existing commercial and recreational regulations for trout at this time is premature.

When compared to the expansive trout habitat in the northern regions of the state, the southern region is far more limited in habitat and receives far greater fishing pressure, primarily from recreational anglers. The current economic climate is also likely to keep more anglers inshore, rather than making costly fishing trips offshore. The WPBFC believes maintaining the status quo in the southern portion of the state is not only reasonable, but also appropriate at this time, especially when you factor in the impact our water quality issues have on trout (huge freshwater discharges). Other popular fishing areas in the southwestern region like Charlotte Harbor have similar water quality and intense angling pressure concerns. Furthermore, none of our members are screaming for more trout. Most are content with the current regulations. Because the commercial fishery for trout in the southern region is negligible, we don't believe further commercial expansion is prudent at this time either.

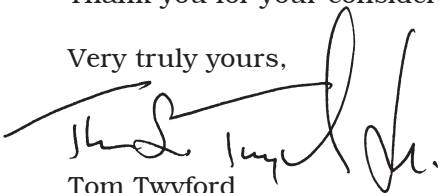
The WPBFC does not support any changes to the allowable gear for sea trout throughout Florida, commercial or recreational. We understand the logistics and practicality of allowing two properly permitted commercial anglers to fish from the same vessel for trout, and we do not have any issue with that proposed change in the commercial regulations. We do question the need to allow the commercial sale of trout during closed seasons. Trout do not freeze well and we see potential abuses if commercial anglers are allowed to sell trout out of season. We see no need to change the commercial sale regulation.

Coastal counties like ours have invested millions of dollars in estuarine habitat enhancement. Those efforts are beginning to show promise. The WPBFC has played an active role by planting mangroves and building oyster reefs at sites like Munyon Island, Ibis Island and Snook Islands in the LWL. Oyster and sea grass recruitment near many of these projects has exceeded expectations. Consequently, we are beginning to see the return of spotted sea trout. Other communities like Sarasota and Tampa have also invested heavily in habitat enhancement. We hope the FWC will not diminish this investment in the trout's recovery in the southern portion of the state.

The WPBFC's 76-year perspective regarding spotted sea trout should not be taken lightly. We urge the commission to not make significant changes to the current commercial and recreational harvest or fishing season regulations for spotted sea trout in the southern region.

Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Twyford', written over a horizontal line.

Tom Twyford  
President

Cc: Pete Schulz, WPBFC Chairman  
John Jolley, WPBFC Scientific Advisor  
Chuck Collins, FWC Regional Director, South Region  
Chris Wynn, FWC Regional Director, Southwest Region  
Rob Robbins, Deputy Director PBC Environmental Resources Mgt.