

July 27, 2016

Via email to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council: gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org

Kevin Anson, Chair
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
2203 N. Lois Avenue, Suite 1100
Tampa, FL 33607

RE: Oceana's Written Comment on Lionfish Containment Device Testing

Dear Chairman Anson:

Two species of lionfish, *Pterois miles* and *P. volitans*, were introduced into the Atlantic Ocean via the aquarium trade in the 1980's¹. Native to the Indian Ocean, lionfish are capable of becoming sexually mature within their first year of life and will spawn throughout the year, producing millions of eggs annually². Adult lionfish feed on nearly all juvenile reef fish including economically important species such as snappers and groupers³. It has been estimated that dense lionfish populations can consume more than 460,000 prey fish per acre per year and can reach densities of over 200 adults per acre¹. Lionfish have been observed in all Gulf States and occupy a current range from Massachusetts to Texas⁴. This range expansion of lionfish is adding stress to already highly stressed coral reef ecosystems.

Since 2010, reports of lionfish captures in deep set lobster traps (100-300 feet) in the Florida Keys have become commonplace⁵. This prompted the Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen's Association and the Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation to develop a proposal to research Lionfish Containment Devices (LCD) to establish a commercial species-specific trap fishery. If successful, this fishery would enhance the removal of invasive lionfish thereby preserving other commercially important fish species. In addition, a viable fishery would create supplementary income for fishermen and provide another increasingly popular food fish for consumers.

¹REEF Lionfish Fact Sheet. Available at:

http://www.reef.org/reef_files/Lionfish%20quickfacts.pdf

²Morris, J.A., Jr. 2009. The biology and ecology of invasive Indo-Pacific lionfish. Ph.D. Dissertation. North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC. 168p.

³Morris, J.A. Jr, and J.L. Akins. 2009. Feeding ecology of invasive lionfish (*Pterois volitans*) in the Bahamian archipelago. *Environmental Biology of Fishes* 86:389-398.

⁴Invasivore Lionfish Profile. Available at:

<http://invasivore.org/2011/02/species-profile-lionfish/>

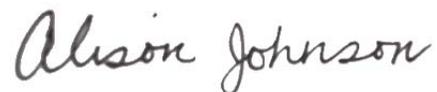
⁵Bill Kelly, Executive Director Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen's Association personal communication.

The LCD proposal intends to test a number of trap designs in four regions including Murrell's Inlet, SC; New Smyrna, FL; Marathon, FL and Tampa, FL. However, it is currently pending review by NOAA to allow LCD placement in Florida waters. The proposal is seeking an Exempted Fishing Permit to test a total of 400 traps (100 each at the four different locations) with modified funnels targeting Lionfish.

Oceana supports this LCD Exempted Fishing Permit proposal and urges the Council to push this project forward provided all requirements for Essential Fish Habitat conservation are satisfied. Oceana encourages the Council to request a briefing from the participants in the study at a future date to hear the results and consider how this could be part of future management of the region's fisheries.

Not only does controlling and using invasive lionfish protect the ecosystem, it will also benefit both the fishermen and consumers by providing supplemental income and an alternate food source.

Sincerely,



Alison Johnson
Southeast Campaign Manager
Oceana, Inc.

Oceana is the largest international advocacy organization focused solely on ocean conservation. We run science-based campaigns and seek to win policy victories that can restore ocean biodiversity and ensure that the oceans are abundant and can feed hundreds of millions of people. Oceana victories have already helped to create policies that could increase fish populations in its countries by as much as 40 percent and that have protected more than 1 million square miles of ocean. We have campaign offices in the countries that control close to 40 percent of the world's wild fish catch, including in North, South and Central America, Asia, and Europe. To learn more, please visit www.oceana.org.

From: Dr Dive <drdive@drdive.com>
To: douglassboyd@yahoo.com
Sent: Thursday, August 9, 2012 7:57 PM
Subject: Recent Lionfish Resolution / FWC

Mr. Boyd,

Attached, please find a copy of a recent order published by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission regarding Lionfish Harvest and exemptions to licensing laws. I encourage the Council to take or support similar action at the Federal level to reduce or eliminate restrictions on lionfish harvesting in Federal waters.

In particular, I hope the Council will take steps to allow commercial charter vessels currently lacking Federal reef and pelagic permits to carry paying customers, and gear as specified in the attached order, into Federal waters to hunt and harvest lionfish.

I appreciate your attention to this request, and look forward to positive action. I am happy to share any information or discuss the matter with you, in support of the request.

Capt. Jim Meyers
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STATE OF FLORIDA
FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Order No. EO 12-12

Lionfish Harvest

The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission of the State of Florida, acting under the authority of Article IV, Section 9, of the Florida Constitution, through its Executive Director under Delegations of Authority Paragraph 17 and Paragraph 22, hereby allows for harvest of invasive non-native lionfish without a fishing license under the following conditions:

1. A Florida recreational fishing license is not required for fishing for lionfish provided harvest is only with the following gear:
 - a. Pole spear
 - b. Hawaiian Slings
 - c. Other spearing device specifically designed and marketed exclusively for lionfish
 - d. Hand held net.
2. The harvest of lionfish with hook and line or as bycatch in other legal gear is permissible for commercial and recreational licensed or license-exempt persons.
3. Possession of more than 100 pounds of lionfish shall not be considered a commercial quantity as defined in s. 379.361(2)(i)1., F.S. There shall be no limit for recreational or commercial harvest for lionfish.
4. This order does not allow for spearing in areas where spearing is prohibited.
5. This order shall go into effect upon execution and remain in effect for one year.

Specific Authority:
Law Implemented:

Article IV, Section 9, Florida Constitution
Article IV, Section 9, Florida Constitution
and 120.81(5), Florida Statutes

Effective Date:

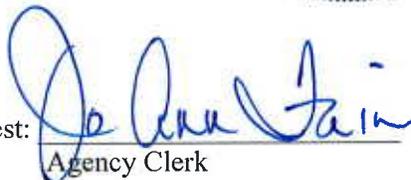
Upon execution.



Given under my hand and seal of the Florida
Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
On this 3rd day of August 2012.


Nick Wiley, Executive Director

Attest:


Agency Clerk