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July 5, 2023

Michelle A. Johnston, Ph.D.
Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary
4700 Avenue U, Bldg. 216
Galveston, TX 77551

Dear Dr. Johnston,

On May 25th, 2023, the Flower Garden Banks Sanctuary Advisory Council approved the below recommendations from the Wahoo Working Group. The Wahoo Working Group was formed at the February 2, 2023 Sanctuary Advisory Council Meeting when local fishers addressed their concerns about lack of wahoo management within sanctuary boundaries and the Gulf of Mexico. The Sanctuary Advisory Council voted to create the Wahoo Working Group to explore and understand wahoo interaction and aggregation within Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary. The recommendations presented by the working group were approved with an unopposed vote. The recommendations were split into regional-level and sanctuary-level recommendations which are included below. The sanctuary-level recommendations are actions that can be made within the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries whereas the regional recommendations will need to be presented to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council. The Flower Garden Banks Sanctuary Advisory Council respectfully requests that you convey the information in this letter to the Director of the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries.

The following is the text of the recommendations as approved:

Regional-level recommendations

FGB SAC recommends that the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC) consider developing a Fishery Management Plan for wahoo in the Gulf of Mexico because this aggregating species currently has no regional management and is under increasing fishing pressure in the region. Wahoo should be considered a priority for future management and assessment due to its social and economic importance. FGB SAC recommends that the GMFMC consider employing empirical harvest control rules and bag and size limits, as well as other effective management strategies similarly employed to manage other data-limited species.

As research on wahoo is limited, FGB SAC recommends the prioritization of research that can support effective management of the species. This includes studies on age and growth, reproductive and early life history information, and

movement and connectivity studies as well as focused research to understand the drivers of aggregation formation and improved recreational harvest reporting.

Key Points:

- A regional Fisheries Management Plan is needed for wahoo
 - Empirical harvest control rules can be effective for managing data-limited stocks
- Additional wahoo research is needed
 - Age and growth
 - Reproduction and early life history
 - Movement and connectivity
 - Environmental/temporal drivers of aggregation
 - Recreational harvest rates
 - Historical harvest

Sanctuary-level recommendations

Flower Garden Banks Sanctuary Advisory Council (FGB SAC) recommends wahoo should be considered a priority for sanctuary management and recommends Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS) consider regulations to manage the take of this species inside the sanctuary boundaries. This aggregating species currently has no regional management and is under increasing fishing pressure in the region. Due to its effectiveness and ease of enforcement, FGB SAC recommends the implementation of a possession limit inside sanctuary boundaries and recommends to limit catch to two fish per person for commercial and recreational fisheries, with no size limit. FGBNMS should consult with NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement to explore potential effective regulations.

Furthermore, FGB SAC recommends that improved understanding of migration patterns, habitat use, aggregations (e.g., environmental/spatiotemporal drivers) drivers, and harvest rates of wahoo within FGBNMS should be research priorities

Key Points:

- Wahoo possession limit inside FGBNMS
 - Two fish per person
 - No size limit
- Wahoo research needs
 - Migration patterns and habitat use
 - Factors influencing aggregation
 - Harvest rates

Sincerely,

Jake Emmert

Digitally signed by Jake Emmert
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Jake Emmert, Chair
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