



April 15, 2020

Mayor Dave Kerner  
Palm Beach County  
301 North Olive Ave. Suite 1201  
West Palm Beach, FL 33401

Dear Mayor Kerner-

The American Sportfishing Association and Keep Florida Fishing thank you for your ongoing leadership during this extremely challenging time of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. We understand the difficult decisions you continue to face reacting to constantly changing conditions to prioritize public safety while also attempting to minimize disruptions to the economy and social wellbeing. We also appreciate your consideration of how to reopen the county, balancing the community's economy and safety.

As the nation's recreational fishing trade association, the American Sportfishing Association (ASA) represents the businesses that support America's \$125 billion recreational fishing economy. Florida's more than 4 million recreational fishermen contribute \$11.5 billion to the state's economy, supporting over 106,000 jobs, with much of that activity centered in the southern part of the state. Florida anglers also support conservation in excess of \$56 million through fishing license fees and excise taxes on fishing equipment and motorboat fuel. Excise taxes, as matched and distributed through the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), help pay for infrastructure that allows access to fishing and boating, such as boat ramps.

In addition to its tremendous economic impacts, recreational fishing is also a strong part of Florida's culture. Particularly during this pandemic, recreational fishing provides an ideal means for individuals and families to get outdoors and boost their physical and mental health in a way that is compatible with social distancing guidelines. This is evidenced by Governor DeSantis designating fishing as an essential activity in Executive Order 20-91, and FWC Executive Order 20-09 requiring at least 50 feet between recreational boats and no more than 10 people on board.

As you consider modifications to Palm Beach County's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we ask that you consider the following:

1. Ensure that recreational fishing-dependent businesses, such as fishing tackle manufacturers and retailers, are allowed to remain open under proper safety and social distancing guidelines. In addition to the health benefits of being outdoors, recreational fishing provides an important food source for many

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individuals who harvest what they catch. Therefore, closing businesses that support recreational fishing not only limits participation in this safe and healthy activity, but also removes a means of acquiring food.

2. Reopen fishing access sites, including boat ramps, marinas and parks, as soon as it is safe to do so. While we understand the need to close certain areas, particularly those that were readily overcrowded or required active staffing, in general most public lands and waters and their access points can remain accessible in accordance with social distancing guidelines. Given the FWC Executive Order 20-09 specifying safe recreational boating distances and capacities on the water that was issued subsequent to Palm Beach closures, enforcement could be focused on the water for persons violating those requirements instead of on access points where anglers and boaters are focused to quickly get their vehicles, boats and trailers in and out of the water. Further, other options could be considered such as phased-in re-openings, coordinated on-the-water enforcement with FWC, and public statements and/or actions to close access points if social distancing requirements are not strictly adhered to. Coordination between nearby counties should also be considered.

We understand the challenge in striking the right balance between public safety and allowing access and appreciate your attention to these requests. Maintaining responsible levels of recreational fishing business and activity is not only important to provide stability and public safety during this unprecedented crisis, but also to help ensure a speedier recovery. The sportfishing industry stands ready to assist you however we can.

Sincerely,



Kellie Ralston  
Southeast Fisheries Policy Director

cc: Palm Beach Board of County Commissioners