

## NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## COMMISSIONERS SUPPORT FWC IN FINDING OUT THE CAUSE OF RECENT FISH DEATHS AND ABNORMAL BEHAVIOR

**FLORIDA KEYS, FL** – The Monroe County Board of County Commissioners are in full support of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) in its quest to find out the cause of the recent smalltooth sawfish deaths and spinning fish abnormalities happening in the Florida Keys.

“We know there is a lot of frustration in the community not knowing what is going on,” said Commissioner Michelle Lincoln. “We are all extremely concerned about our ecosystem and what is causing this to happen.”

FWC is working with stakeholders and nonprofits to investigate the abnormal behavior and sawfish deaths. Rep. Jim Mooney led the effort to secure \$2 million in State funds this budget cycle for the FWC to determine the scale and scope of the ongoing fish mortality and disease event in Biscayne Bay, Florida Bay, and the Florida Keys. The FWC will contract with nonprofits to assist with data collection and analysis, and employ local fishing guides to assist with data collection.

“We are fully supporting our State scientists and experts in working as quickly as possible to discover what is happening,” said Mayor Holly Merrill Rashein.

### What FWC knows so far:

1. There have been 21 documented smalltooth sawfish deaths to date.
2. Based on fish necropsy data to date, there are no signs of a communicable pathogen and specimens were negative for bacterial infection. Additional sawfish tissues are still being processed for analysis.
3. Dissolved oxygen, salinity, pH, and temperature are not suspected to be the cause of the fish behavior or kills.
4. To date, Red Tide toxins (brevetoxins) produced by *Karenia brevis* have not been detected in water samples.
5. At this time, the cause of the abnormal behavior and mortalities is not known, and efforts to collect and analyze samples are ongoing.

### How you can help:

**Sawfish:** Report all healthy, sick, injured or dead sawfish to FWC’s Sawfish Hotline at 844-472-9374 or via email at [Sawfish@myfwc.com](mailto:Sawfish@myfwc.com) with the date, time and location of the encounter, estimated length, water depth and any other relevant details. Under the Endangered Species Act, it is illegal to catch, harm, harass, or kill an endangered sawfish. It is also unlawful to possess, sell, carry, or transport sawfish or parts of sawfish—such as the rostrum (snout). While some fishermen catch sawfish as [bycatch](#), they

can follow [safe handling and release guidelines](#) to quickly and safely release incidentally captured sawfish

**Fish Concerns:** If you see abnormal fish behavior, fish disease, and fish kills, submit a report to FWC's Fish Kill Hotline either through the web form [MyFWC.com/ReportFishKill](http://MyFWC.com/ReportFishKill) or by phone 800-636-0511.

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