



# THE FLORIDA SENATE

Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1100

**COMMITTEES:**

Appropriations Subcommittee on Education, *Chair*  
Appropriations  
Education Pre-K - 12  
Ethics and Elections  
Health Policy  
Higher Education  
Rules

**SENATOR DON GAETZ**

1st District

November 19, 2015

Mr. Brian Yablonski  
Chairman  
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
620 S. Meridian Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Commission,

Thank you for the important steps you've taken in recent years to reduce the predatory lionfish population and thereby help protect the fisheries which mean so much to Florida's culture, environment and economy.

As you know, notwithstanding the actions you have supported, the lionfish population throughout our state waters continues to explode, creating a rapidly growing crisis that threatens the health and sustainability of our native fisheries. The FWC's own publication, "Be the Top Predator," states, "The lionfish has the potential to significantly impact recreational and commercial fishing and the overall economy of Florida."

Above and beyond all of the other important values of our fisheries, the economic value exceeds \$20 billion and supports, directly and indirectly, some 200,000 jobs in our state. The deeply harmful lionfish invasion affecting our fisheries was brought to my attention in 2012. Since then, the Legislature has provided increased funding to the FWC to address this crisis. However, the problem continues to get worse, not better.

Many of my constituents in coastal Northwest Florida have joined me in support of the Emerald Coast Reef Association's Lionfish Population Control Pilot Program proposal which is now before you. This proposal is simple, sustainable, extremely low cost and does not draw down FWC's material or human resources. In my view, the plan will work and I can see no reason to deny its implementation.

Candy Hansard, head of the Emerald Coast Reef Association, has been consistent, relentless and selfless in her efforts to save our native fishery since the lionfish was first discovered off the Northwest Florida gulf coast in 2010. I have every confidence that she and

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Senate's Website: [www.flsenate.gov](http://www.flsenate.gov)

**ANDY GARDINER**  
President of the Senate

**GARRETT RICHTER**  
President Pro Tempore

November 19, 2015

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her organization will be able to make real progress in eradicating the lionfish once this plan is supported by the Commission.

In the interest of preserving our native fishery and all of the advantages and attributes it brings to our state, I strongly encourage the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission to support the ECRA proposal.

You may be certain of my advocacy for FWC now as has been the case during my entire tenure in the Senate.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Don Gaetz", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Senator Don Gaetz