

DEWEY DESTIN'S SEAFOOD RESTAURANTS

9 Calhoun Avenue
Destin, Florida
32541
(850) 259-2801

November 16, 2015

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
620 South Meridian Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1600

Dewey Destin's Seafood Restaurants are a restaurant group with two restaurants located in the heart of Destin, Florida. We specialize in serving the freshest in locally-harvested fish to our customers. Our restaurants currently employ over 150 people in Northwest Florida and continue to contribute significantly to the state's tax base. Our continued success is completely reliant on the procurement of fresh local fish, harvested sustainably, from healthy fish stocks because local fresh seafood differentiates us from our competition. The arrival of invasive lionfish threatens our fisheries with an imminent threat of collapse and, in turn, the viability of our businesses.

As an avid spear fisherman myself, I saw the rapid changes on our local reefs in real time and took the earliest steps I could in sounding the alarm throughout our local community. We've sponsored and hosted lionfish derbies and given public testimony to the threat our fisheries face. However, the time of sounding the alarm to alert the public and our regulators has long since passed and now it is time for action.

I understand there are numerous efforts to mitigate the impact and expansion of lionfish, but mechanical removal of the fish by divers appears to be the only method that shows any promise of controlling the lionfish population. Therefore, incentivizing divers to consistently and continuously remove lionfish becomes the formula for our regulators to develop. Divers incur a substantial financial burden to harvest native fish. Ms. Candy Hansard has developed a long-term plan for motivating divers to remove lionfish by utilizing a reward that does not come from the state's coffers and does not evaporate when budgets are cut or political will diverts to other crises. Rewarding divers with increased access to native fish, which already motivate them to absorb the costs of accessing our reefs, will promote the harvest of lionfish, exponentially, as native fish tags perpetuate additional opportunities to harvest lionfish. We support this plan and we encourage the Commission to consider adopting it, or some similarly-calibrated, version.

We support the Commission's long-term efforts to develop a commercial fishery for lionfish, but in the short-term, an immediate and substantial effort to remove these fish must occur before it becomes too late.

Warmest Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dewey E. Destin, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

Dewey E. Destin, Jr.