

Councilwoman cheers Whole Foods' use of lionfish

By **DAVID ROGERS**

Daily News Staff Writer

and **ZACH DENNIS**

Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

It's scary-looking, venomous ... and available at Whole Foods.

Lionfish, the invasive species of fish known for having 18 venomous spines and gobbling up native species, is now being sold at the grocery chain, including the market on Palm Beach Lakes in West Palm Beach.

Palm Beach Town Councilwoman Bobbie Lindsay calls Whole Foods' new initiative a win-win.

"I think it's awesome. First of all it's a delicious fish. It doesn't look good on the grill but when you filet it, it's a beautiful white filet," Lindsay said.

Lionfish are native to the Pacific and Indian oceans. Their accidental introduction to Atlantic waters years ago has been disastrous for native species.

In 2009, Lindsay helped establish an annual lionfish hunt (dubbed a "derby") in Green Turtle Cay, Bahamas. She and her husband, Doug Buck, were early supporters of local lionfish derbies and continue to support them.

The foreign predator eats the juveniles of nearly all types of native fish, including those that protect coral reefs by eating algae off their surfaces, she said.

"It's a fish we can't eradicate, but any reduction is helpful," Lindsay said.

The fish is being sold for \$8.99 a pound at Whole Foods through May 31, then \$9.99 per pound starting June 1.

According to Corey Hawkins, supervisor in the Boca Raton store's seafood department, customers have been thrilled



The Palm Beach Post

A lionfish swims in its tank at the South Florida Science Center in West Palm Beach.

with the lionfish offerings. The store has been handing out samples and educating customers on the species throughout the selling time. The lionfish sold in stores have had their spines removed.

More than 14,000 lionfish were removed from Florida waters May 14-15 as part of a removal and awareness festival hosted by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation

Commission. This was many more than the 2,975 removed last year. FWC spokeswoman Amanda Nalley told *The Palm Beach Post* in March that eradicating the species completely isn't likely so they're trying to find alternative methods to use the fish.

Some believe that if the general population gets accustomed to eating lionfish, it will help decrease its numbers in Florida waters.

Lionfish can reproduce year-round with females reproducing every two to four days.

While trying to eradicate the lionfish is a worthy ambition, it's not easy. The fish doesn't normally take to hooks, meaning fishers must spear them or trap them in cages. That isn't an efficient way to catch large numbers at a time.

The next Palm Beach

County Lionfish Derby is set for Aug. 13 at the Loggerhead MarineLife Center in Jupiter. For more information on that and

other regional hunts, visit reef.org/lionfish/derbies

— drogers@
pbdailynews.com
zdennis@pbpost.com

Palm Beach Daily News
Palm Beach County
6270
May 29, 2016