

**The Future of Saltwater Fishing
A Vision for Florida's Marine Resources
August 3, 2007**

Executive Summary

Developing a Vision

The first Marine Fisheries Summit was held on November 18, 2004 to begin charting a future course for managing and protecting the marine fisheries resources of Florida. Thirty five invited stakeholders representing commercial fishing, recreational fishing, research and environmental interests, and other agencies met as a group and began identifying marine fisheries issues and concerns. During this initial meeting, participants also broke into 3 subgroups representing recreational fishing, commercial fishing and research/environmental interests. Each subgroup was asked to schedule follow-up meetings and further develop their respective visions for presentation at a future summit meeting.

The subgroups met individually during February 2005, identified areas of consensus on key issues, and prepared a set of recommendations to be presented at a second Marine Fisheries Summit meeting. On November 1, 2005 the three groups reviewed their respective recommendations together and identified areas of consensus. Written reports were submitted by each of the three subgroups. These summaries contain detailed comments and background support for their respective positions. Although each subgroup report differed in emphasis and level of detail, several major themes and issues were identified among them. Outside facilitation services for the meetings were provided by Group Solutions, Inc., who also assisted Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) staff in compiling and synthesizing the information received. A draft vision document was developed and made available for public review and additional comment. Public comments at workshops and additional email and written input received during January and February 2007 provided a reinforcement of the major themes and this additional thinking has been incorporated into the final report.

A Vision Statement for Florida

A vision statement, based on the input of participants, is a reflection of the large-scale issues where representatives of the

recreational angling, commercial fishing, environmental, and scientific communities were able to reach consensus.

In 10 years, Florida will have sustainable and productive fisheries that fulfill the broad range of resource user interests and provide substantial economic benefits for Florida. To protect what we have and maintain sustainable fisheries, Florida must have excellent water quality, sufficient, high-quality habitat, and effective control of resource harvest levels.

Stakeholders identified and discussed a wide range of issues that focused on five priority areas. Although specific interest groups in the marine fisheries arena may have had different interpretations of what strategies or actions need to be addressed, these broad areas resonated among Florida's stakeholders.

Priority Areas for the Future

Improve Habitat Enhancement and Protection
Improve Interagency Coordination
Enhance Funding and Staffing
Improve Management and Research Coordination
Develop Ecosystem Management as a Tool

PRIORITY ONE

Improve Habitat Enhancement and Protection—Although the main focus of the summit process was marine fisheries management, stakeholders continually emphasized that marine and coastal habitat issues will control the outcome of our management efforts in Florida. There is widespread agreement that the FWC will have to take an active role in identifying critical habitat needs for species of interest and work proactively and aggressively with other agencies, stakeholders and local governments to maintain an environment suitable for marine fisheries resources to live and thrive.

Water quality issues in particular were identified as virtually inseparable from fisheries habitat and species productivity needs. Also, understanding and managing the impact of fresh water flows to estuarine systems will be critical to successful management of marine fisheries.

Examples of this concern reflect regional and local perspectives of stakeholders around the state:

- The high value of ***east coast estuaries and lagoons*** for important recreational species like red drum and snook, and their susceptibility to water quality and runoff impacts.

- The impact of **Lake Okeechobee discharges** on the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries.
- Dredging and **beach renourishment in southeast Florida** is damaging nearshore reefs and rocks.
- Diving, boating and water quality **impacts on the living coral reefs of the Keys**.
- The widespread concern that **red tide in southwest Florida** is worsening in nearshore waters because of runoff and nutrient loading.
- Coastal **population growth along the Gulf Coast and panhandle** of Florida and its impacts to estuaries and economically important resources like blue crabs, stone crabs, shrimp and scallops.

Strategies and Actions—Consistent with the FWC Strategic Plan, we will:

- Improve our resource leadership position in Florida by clearly communicating the long-term needs of our marine fisheries resources and the linkage to a high-quality environment.
- Develop proactive, integrated research that anticipates emerging issues and ensures positive resource outcomes.
- Increase stakeholder involvement and interaction on emerging issues to proactively reduce resource conflicts.
- Initiate partnerships as a means to address the big resource issues facing Florida.

Specific actions:

- Develop databases and information systems that are widely accessible and help to identify critical marine fisheries habitat.
- Develop habitat enhancement tools such as artificial reefs and restoration techniques for coastal and marine ecosystems.
- Develop integrated water management practices through partnerships with other regulatory agencies.
- Develop stock enhancement in a cost-effective and scientifically-based manner to help restore or enhance selected fisheries.

PRIORITY TWO

Improve Interagency Coordination—No single agency can be successful in the future without engaging local, state and federal partners in that effort. Specific needs include more coordination and collaboration in coastal zone protection and management of freshwater flows to estuaries. Collaboration will be needed with federal, inter-

state and international partners, other Florida government agencies and regional water management districts.

Stakeholders believe the FWC must seek a larger, more active role in partnering with other agencies to influence water management and use, the management of fisheries in adjacent federal waters, and to integrate marine fisheries interests into the management and protection of state submerged sovereign lands and coastal ecosystems.

Some examples of this need have been highlighted:

- More direct and influential ***involvement with state water management agencies*** to integrate marine fisheries and coastal habitat concerns.
- The need for greater regional coordination and ***management of large watersheds affecting Florida's upper Gulf Coast***.
- The need for the State of Florida to have greater control and ***influence over federally managed fisheries***.

Strategies and Actions—Consistent with the FWC Strategic Plan, we will:

- Initiate partnerships as a means of addressing the big resource issues facing Florida.
- Expand our knowledge of who our customers are and how to better serve them.

Specific Actions:

- Develop staff and resources to work more closely with and more directly influence federal fishery management agencies.
- Focus attention on agencies with regulatory processes or priorities that hinder or limit marine fisheries management and protection.
- Provide information and tools for stakeholders and interested citizens so they may garner more support from local, state and federal agencies that are affecting marine fisheries resources.

PRIORITY THREE

Enhance Funding and Staffing—Florida residents must realistically determine the level of taxpayer investment appropriate for the long-term maintenance of a six to seven billion dollar commercial and recreational fishery. Additionally, the tourism and environmental values associated with healthy, abundant marine resources add to that economic value. Long term strategies must be developed to raise

public awareness and support for the levels of funding necessary to protect this valuable resource.

Some of the specific issues highlighted in the visioning process:

- ***Florida's recreational fishery has a large and growing economic impact in Florida.*** A comprehensive evaluation of that fishery is needed to determine the resources needed to maintain and enhance recreational fishing for the future.
- The ***FWC does not have sufficient resources to monitor and influence the management of marine fisheries through the federal regulatory process or in Congress.***
- ***Law enforcement salaries and staffing are insufficient*** to ensure resource protection.
- ***Everyone using or benefiting from the resource should share in the cost*** of managing and protecting it.
- License ***fees have not kept pace with management needs.***
- Citizens and stakeholders need to contribute to management and protection at the local level. ***Agencies cannot do it all.***

Strategies and Actions—Consistent with the FWC Strategic Plan, we will:

- Initiate partnerships as a means of addressing the big resource issues facing Florida.
- Develop proactive, preventative enforcement programs that enable FWC to avoid potential and emerging problems.
- Build a collaborative workforce built on professionalism, with the skills and resources needed to maximize their effectiveness.

Specific Actions:

- Seek additional grant dollars to enhance fishery management and research activities.
- Provide information and direction to stakeholders who wish to advocate for increased staffing and funding of marine fisheries management activities.
- Continue working with the Legislature to increase revenues from license and permit fees, and to minimize the number of persons who do not pay for their use of Florida's marine fisheries resources.
- Increase staffing in support of marine fisheries stock assessment, data analysis and regulatory management.
- Seek federal funds needed to support collaborative state-federal fishery management activities.
- With partners, seek additional funding for artificial reef development, and the deployment of large vessels for fishing and diving enhancement.

PRIORITY FOUR

Improve Management and Research Coordination—There is broad agreement that more research is needed for better management of marine fisheries. However, future research must be more targeted to match management needs. For example, specific information needed to better develop ecosystem management objectives may involve focused research on predator-prey interactions of targeted species. Other areas of research tied to management needs include evaluations of the “as-is” and “should-be” conditions for selected species. This information would then be applied to identifying the resources needed to maintain and enhance Florida’s saltwater fisheries over the next ten to twenty years. Stakeholders identified a number of key issues:

- Fishery Management Plans must be prepared that ***identify and direct future management needs to ensure the sustainability of the fishery.***
- Specific and ***measurable management benchmarks are needed*** to manage the most important species.
- A comprehensive evaluation of Florida’s saltwater fisheries is needed, including ***more complete socio-economic information for decision-making.***
- Data collection for ***monitoring fishing effort needs to be significantly improved.***

Strategies and Actions—Consistent with the FWC Strategic Plan, we will:

- Develop proactive, integrated research that anticipates emerging issues and ensures positive resource outcomes.
- Initiate partnerships as a means of addressing the big resource issues facing Florida.
- Develop fully integrated, leading-edge resource management programs.

Specific Actions:

- Develop management benchmarks for Florida’s most important fisheries.
- Expand current fishery strategic plans to include more detailed projections of fishery management needs, and include management benchmarks.
- Expand agency capabilities to collect and analyze socio-economic information related directly to marine fisheries resources.
- Continue to improve and modify stock assessment techniques and methodologies.

- Work at the state and federal levels to improve commercial and recreational harvest data collection. This includes development of electronic reporting, and improvements to recreational harvest data collection that are already underway.
- Direct research priorities where specific management questions need to be answered.
- Develop a mechanism (including an annual science/management forum) to provide input to managers who are developing long-range plans for fisheries management.

PRIORITY FIVE

Develop Ecosystem Management as a Tool—While not everyone can agree on what is meant by the term “ecosystem management”, or how it may be applied to fisheries management, there are clearly linkages between the marine resources being harvested or enjoyed and the complex factors affecting those resources. These linkages necessarily include human impacts of growth and development, habitat requirements and availability, and a better understanding of marine ecosystems. A better understanding of those complex relationships will be needed to manage for the future. The FWC, stakeholders and other management partners will need to work closely to develop an integrated, adaptive ecosystem management framework that includes marine fisheries.

Example needs identified by stakeholders:

- Ecosystem management requires ***coordination among federal, state, and local managing agencies***, which is often lacking.
- There is a need for better ***planning and coordination between researchers and managers*** to identify the information needs to manage at the ecosystem level.
- Ecosystem management means more complete scientific information is needed, which will be ***critical to influencing habitat protection and enhancement***.

Strategies and Actions—Consistent with the FWC Strategic Plan, we will:

- Initiate partnerships as a means of addressing the big resource issues facing Florida.
- Develop fully integrated, leading-edge resource management programs
- Integrate all of our activities in furtherance of sustainable populations of species, protection of critical habitat, and high quality environmental resources for the enjoyment of Citizens.

Specific Actions:

- ❑ Broaden fisheries management thinking to include attention to watersheds, and what can be done to manage them for the benefit of Florida's marine ecosystems.
- ❑ Develop action plans to minimize the impact of non-native species on Florida's marine ecosystems.
- ❑ Develop and implement fishery strategic plans that recognize and address ecosystem function.
- ❑ Identify fishing and boating activities that are measurably damaging marine ecosystems and act to minimize or eliminate those impacts.
- ❑ Develop clear criteria for evaluating marine protected areas as a tool for fisheries management.

Other Fishery Management Issues

Stakeholder Communication—A common sentiment expressed throughout the vision development process was that communication between the managing agencies and stakeholders needed to be significantly improved. Commercial interests in particular believe that managing agencies must continue to develop stakeholder input and involvement. Although the FWC is acknowledged to have made great strides in involving stakeholders in decision-making, continued and expanded emphasis on communication is needed.

Specific Actions:

- ❑ Schedule regular summits or workshops to provide opportunities for stakeholders to interact with each other and with managing agencies.
- ❑ Improve and expand commercial fishing outreach tools, including newsletters, emails, and web-based information.
- ❑ Develop and publicize outreach messages through partners, private organizations, and stakeholder interest groups.
- ❑ Continue to develop and improve upon the use of workgroups as a mechanism for stakeholder involvement.

Access to the Water—This is recognized as a significant and growing problem for all users of the resource. While there are no ready solutions, all agree that commercial docks, fish processing sites, public boat ramps and marinas are declining in number. This will greatly affect the future of saltwater fishing in Florida.

Specific Actions:

- ❑ Work actively with local governments and other partners to maintain or provide new access points to marine areas. These would include commercial docks, public ramps and fishing piers.
- ❑ Complete a comprehensive socio-economic analysis of fishing and fishing-related uses and the needed infrastructure to maintain those uses over the next 20 years.
- ❑ Continue to develop and foster grant opportunities for access-related projects.

Allocation of Resources--Developing a consensus vision is difficult in an arena with diverse and often competing user groups. While recognizing that Florida's marine fisheries resources should be available to all who want to use and enjoy them, this vision process also recognized that future management must address these competing uses in the face of an ever-shrinking resource.

Specific Actions:

- ❑ Establish policies, criteria and processes for determining allocation of the recreational and commercial harvest of fish and shellfish.
- ❑ Use more complete socio-economic information in analyses of allocation among user groups.
- ❑ Monitor license fee trends and participation and evaluate allocation based on those trends.
- ❑ Consider the value of seafood and seafood products to all Floridians when considering commercial harvest allocations.
- ❑ Consider the value of abundant and diverse marine ecosystems to Floridians who wish to view and enjoy them. This may limit the harvest or removal of animals from the water.
- ❑ Commission a detailed report of recreational fishing trends in Florida, including tournaments, non-resident fishing and the charter sector, the potential impact on biological resources, and including any recommendations regarding restrictions on participation or effort.
- ❑ Commission a detailed analysis (pros and cons) of marine protected areas, ocean zoning, and limited access privileges (individual fishing shares) as mechanisms to allocate limited fishery resources in the future.

Outside Influences--Achieving a stakeholder-driven vision for the future of Florida's marine fishing resources creates two unique challenges.

First, successful management of our fisheries may ultimately be influenced by forces beyond our control:

- Human population growth and associated impacts.
- Declining overall interest or support for marine fisheries resource protection by a growing and aging population.
- Economic forces that continue to limit and diminish access to the waterfront.
- Limited public funding.
- National and international (Caribbean basin) effects on local marine resources.
- Global warming.

Second, future trends in fishery management and fishing cannot be easily predicted. Significant among these are:

- Growth of Aquaculture industries and their effect on commercial harvest of wild product.
- Increasing reliance on imported seafood and its impact on domestic commercial fishing.
- Changes in gear and technology that increase fishing selectivity and fishing pressure.

While the current stakeholder vision doesn't address these strategies in detail, they must be integrated into future planning and ultimately will become components of maintaining sustainable marine resources.

Conclusion

A shared vision to protect the future of Florida's marine fisheries resources will only be accomplished through the collaborative efforts of fishers, conservation interests, scientists, and a concerned public. Nearly all of the actions identified in this report will be undertaken by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in partnership with these interests. Many actions are already underway or will be incorporated into the Division of Marine Fisheries Management's annual workplan. Division staff will report annually to the Commission on our progress in implementing actions to further this vision.

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Appendix – Subgroup Documents

- **Research and Conservation Subgroup Recommendations**
- **Commercial Fishing Subgroup Recommendations**
- **Recreational Fishing Subgroup Recommendations**

FLORIDA'S MARINE FISHERIES: A Vision for the Future

Research and Conservation Working Group

Members: Jerry Ault and Bill Lindberg (Co-Chairs)
David White, Leroy Creswell, Ken Leber,
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LONG-TERM MARINE FISHERIES VISION STATEMENT:

- I. In 10 years, Florida will have high value, sustainable and productive recreational and commercial fisheries that fulfill the broad range of resource user interests and provide substantial economic and sociopolitical benefits for the State. The range of this vision includes:
 - A. Sustainable intact ecosystems to sustainable fisheries production.
 - B. Strong commercial fishery industry inputs into the state and regional fishery economies, including the seafood and marine life trades.
 - C. World-class recreational fishing opportunities indicated by high numbers of world records for saltwater line class and saltwater fly fishermen.
 - D. High catch rates with high probabilities of catching many large fish targeted by the fishery sectors.
 - E. World-class.
 - F. World-class ecotourism, non-extractive diving opportunities, education and "armchair explorer" opportunities to observe and appreciate special aquatic habitats (coral reefs, nearshore reefs, estuaries, salt marsh, sea grass) via glass-bottomed boats, kayaks, special dive and educational programs, the media, etc.
 - G. Retention of the remaining pockets of old-Florida coastal cultures.
- II. To get there, Florida will focus on ecosystems to ensure fishing "like it used to be", with quality experiences, high economic value and sustainable seafood production, to conserve the "principal" of our resource base so that future generations can benefit from the "interest" accrued. This focus will require:
 - A. Effective coordination with the SAFMC and GMFMC, the National Park Service, the USCRTF, the ACOE, NMFS Habitat Division, and the USFWS.

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- B. Fully integrated fisheries, water quality and habitat assessment approaches, with a systematic and comprehensive view of mapping, monitoring and assessment of multispecies resources.
- C. Thinking beyond Florida, with proactive efforts to assist and strengthen management of inter-State and international upstream and downstream sources and sinks, which will prove highly cost-effective for assisting Florida fishery management.
- D. Financial support mobilized specifically for this broader ecosystem approach.
- E. State agencies, universities, private laboratories, and NGO partners pulling together to advance Florida's resource conservation management plan.
- F. Programs and policies focused to produce optimal benefits on a 20-50 year planning horizon, as presently perceived by the collective wisdom.
- G. A 10-year examination (starting today) to determine the efficacy of no-take marine reserves designed to help offset growing resource problems associated with burgeoning human population growth in Florida.
- H. A capacity for outside researchers to bring forth new ideas in the spirit of increased communication among management decision-makers, FWC scientists and University researchers.
- I. An annual open forum of all relevant parties (managers, scientific community, commissioners, NGOs, etc.) to critically review the state management objectives and decisions, and to provide guidance on future strategies.

Managing Sustainable Fisheries

- III. As recommended by the National Ocean Policy Commission, effective fisheries management should be coordinated within and among all levels of government. For Florida, this will require:
 - A. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to be the lead State agency responsible for marine fisheries management, *per se*; however, ...
 - B. State-level marine fisheries management must be increasingly coordinated with inter-state and Federal fisheries management, as noted in II.A.
 - C. FWC marine fisheries management must be explicitly integrated with the Department of Environmental Protection's management of submerged sovereign lands, coastal ecosystems and environmental quality, and the five Water Management Districts' management of freshwater quality and quantity, particularly

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minimum flows and levels and water reservations as it is delivered to marine ecosystems throughout the state.

- IV. The State of Florida will achieve an integrated and adaptive ecosystem management framework that includes marine fisheries. This will require:
- A. All parties to have defined ecosystem metrics and models for Florida resource management, for both consumptive and non-consumptive uses, to include:
 - 1. An ecosystem macro-model that allows integration of key biophysical processes over space and time scales, and levels of nested fisheries and related non-fisheries models.
 - 2. Advances in coastal ocean observing systems and emerging coastal science efforts to develop a capacity to correlate fisheries data (both fisheries-independent and –dependent) with environmental data, and to integrate biological data with physical components in a cost-effective way.
 - 3. Water quality and quantity measures to be connected to the range of important integrated coastal ecosystem and fisheries measures.
 - B. An evolution towards ecosystem-based fisheries management integrating fish, invertebrates, physical processes, habitats and humans, including:
 - 1. A better understanding of the impacts of harvests of one species on other species in the food web (e.g., consequences of shrimp harvesting), as well as harvest impacts on essential habitats.
 - 2. Studies of life histories, species interactions and habitats across the ecosystem in an integrated way; multispecies fisheries-independent sampling in a more broadly designed network, for example, to rapidly transition FIM (fishery independent monitoring) into FIEM (E=ecosystem).
 - 3. Concerted efforts to understand which habitats are essential, how they are essential, and what will be likely consequences of habitat change to fisheries (e.g. from dredging in nursery and spawning habitats from shoreline development, etc.).
 - C. Broader types of fisheries-dependent data to make adaptive management decisions and support models sufficient to answer pressing questions, including:
 - 1. Monitoring focus that extends beyond the commercial fishing sector, with substantial increases in the accuracy and precision of recreational effort and catch data.
 - 2. A redefined MRFSS approach to Florida recreational fishing to be more spatially explicit, including the spatial distribution

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- and fishing power of the fleets (confidence in the MRFSS data needs to be improved).
3. Inclusion of marine life trade landings into ecosystem based models.
- D. Closer coordination and collaboration among resource managers and scientists, including:
1. FWC and Florida universities leveraging the State's intellectual capital and helping to bring Federal research dollars to bear on issues of importance to the management and research infrastructure of the state.
 2. Greater stakeholder input by partnering with NGOs.
 3. Appointment of Commissioners with specific expertise in resource management, and a balance of political/constituent representation.
 4. Synergy between state (especially FWC and DEP) and federal (e.g., NOAA and NPS) resource management efforts; truly integrated programs need a great deal of interaction for optimum results.
 5. Dedicated joint planning efforts on shared resources (e.g., reef fish) to integrate all aspects of science and management.
 6. More opportunities for science to percolate up through the management system; including collaborations between agencies and universities (e.g., Tortugas assessment, Steinhatchee Fisheries Management Area, snook and red drum stock enhancement evaluations, etc.).
- E. More effective fisheries management practices, including applications of the following:
1. Traditional management practices (e.g., bag, vessel and trip limits; minimum and maximum size limits; closed seasons and areas; gear restrictions; slot limits; fishing effort restrictions), which are necessary (i.e., need to do it/them), but not sufficient (i.e., may not solve the problem).
 - a. What is needed is a systematic process of science and management that is equipped to track and evaluate changes in the ecosystem after some major fishery management actions have been undertaken. For example, like those mentioned above or more recent innovations like the net ban (circa 1995) or the implementation of marine reserves in the Florida Keys, etc.
 - b. If we take a big management step to accomplish some goal, then we **MUST** be prepared to ensure that we build in the necessary research and monitoring follow-up actions up front to determine that the desired objectives on which the decision was based are met.

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- c. We must also systematically evaluate the efficacy of a particular measure so that we have some objective reason to use it wisely as a management tool to reach resource goals.
2. Marine protected areas may be necessary but not sufficient (MPAs = all managed areas, and not just no-take zones).
 - a. No-take MPAs could be important tools when used selectively and judiciously as part of a scientifically based ecosystem management strategy, otherwise they have the potential to redirect fishing mortality with unintentional and unknown consequences.
 - b. Effective habitat protection is needed within and outside of MPAs for robust performance (for the many species that undergo ontogenetic cross-shelf migrations).
 - c. Regions upstream of Florida, particularly in Mexico, Belize and Cuba, may provide high numbers of larvae (e.g., snappers, groupers, lobsters, corals and associated reef fauna) and migrating adults (e.g., tarpon, kingfish, barracuda) to help replenish coastal Florida. Proactive efforts and policy to assist and strengthen management of these upstream sources will prove highly cost-effective long term tools for assisting Florida fishery management.
3. Marine stock enhancement efforts are expensive and the effectiveness is largely unknown.
 - a. Well-designed stock enhancement efforts could be an important management tool when used selectively and judiciously as part of a scientifically based ecosystem management strategy. Otherwise, the approach has the potential to create subsidized put-and-take fisheries and not meet resource management goals.
 - b. Stocking of saltwater (estuarine) species in inland ponds should be explored as the potential exists to establish valuable urban fisheries in areas where local marine fish habitats have been severely degraded.
 - c. Consideration should be given to aquaculture of species important to the marine life trade.
4. Artificial reefs may be important tools when used selectively and judiciously as part of a scientifically based ecosystem management strategy.
 - a. Otherwise they have the potential to increase fishing mortality while other fisheries management practices seek to limit or reduce fishing mortality.
 - b. They are not a silver bullet despite their popularity.

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- c. Reef design and placement should fulfill clearly specified objectives, and have substantive follow-up assessment programs.
- 5. Catch-and-release fishing for designated gamefish contributes to resource sustainability, particularly with proper handling
 - a. Potentially important for reef fishes, assuming proper handling and low catch-and-release mortality.
 - b. Strong relationship to tourism.
 - c. Potentially important for research tools (e.g., acoustic telemetry, satellite passive archival transmitting PAT tags, and conventional tagging studies).
 - d. Will become increasingly important as human population growth continues in Florida. Some fish stocks now have bag limits of 1 per day; human population growth with a relatively short doubling time (< 20 years) may force some fisheries to catch and release in the absence of limited entry or very high license fees.
- 6. Strong and perceptive law enforcement is absolutely necessary, yet at present apparently not sufficient.
 - a. Without enforcement, traditional management practices and prospective MPAs will be ineffectual.
 - b. Compliance also requires an underlying conservation ethic fostered by education and enlightened self-interests.
- 7. Other issues:
 - a. While all the traditional fisheries management tools listed above remain necessary, the integrated use of these tools must be achieved within a management framework that substantially offsets the tragedy of the commons, including marine zoning, limited access and limited entry for both recreational and commercial sectors.
 - b. Currently uncommon approaches deserve more consideration in Florida. For example, slot limits have worked for snook, and make sense for a variety of species that would benefit from a release of fishing mortality from their largest and most reproductively significant life stages.
- B. Benefits of an ecosystem-based, adaptive management approach to marine fisheries management will include:
 - 1. Anticipating changes and the needs for management actions, while reducing the risk of unintended consequences from management decisions that are either made or deferred.
 - 2. Leveraging of Florida's substantial intellectual capital to cost-effectively improve the "best scientific information available" for marine fisheries management, and more effectively

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- integrate fisheries management with other resource management decisions.
 - 3. Fewer jobs lost. More robust local economies.
- V. To overcome the burgeoning human population and impacts of increased fishing effort, Florida will need:
- A. A new approach to its recreational sampling/information system that includes and integrates fisheries-independent and fisheries-dependent data survey designs. This will vastly improve the assessment process and management decision-making capabilities.
 - B. Multiple sources of truth (e.g., scientific, philosophical/ethics, legal, socio-economic) to make complex decisions (e.g., MPA efficacy).
 - C. Data collection framed within an adaptive process; timely review and analysis of data; critiques of approaches to meet objectives with precision and accuracy; recognizing the costs to achieve specified levels of precision.
 - D. To identify and engage the clients (end-users) early in the management process (e.g., the public or the people of Florida and future generations), to be proactive in management rather than reactive). Comprehensive and strategic decision making will address non-consumptive as well as fisheries issues.

Public Needs

- VI. The public will become aware of Florida's marine fisheries issues and needs, and provide support to address them through science-based management. This will require:
- A. Highly coordinated educational and outreach programs, such as:
 - 1. The educational potential of the FWC and Florida Sea Grant Extension Program (representing all public and private universities and not-for-profit research institutions) jointly planned, implemented and evaluated for effectiveness.
 - 2. An internet portal created as a forum for openly accessible debate of fisheries issues by advocacy groups (industry associations, NGO's, etc.).
 - 3. A regular series of public lectures held jointly (e.g., FWC and FSG) around the state to inform the public of marine fisheries management requirements, needs & milestones, including challenges and opportunities.

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- B. Targeting audiences for marine fisheries management and conservation messages, including:
 - 1. Traditional fishing sectors (various commercial and recreational user groups);
 - 2. Conservation organizations and NGOs;
 - 3. Other marine resource stakeholders, e.g., scuba divers, ecotourism concessionaires, surfers, turtle groups.
 - 4. Urban and suburban populations, in general;
 - 5. School-age children (middle and high schools, Scouts, 4-H, etc.)
 - 6. Print and electronic media outlets (e.g., outdoor writers; newspaper, TV, worldwide web, etc.); and,
 - 7. Chefs associations; (seafood) restaurant associations.
 - 8. Consumers, i.e. restaurant and fish market patrons, aquarists, boat owners, etc.
 - C. Objectively knowing and communicating the importance and significance of all marine resource sectors, including:
 - 1. Commercial fishing for seafood consumption, which is very important for the non-fishing tourist and resident consumer.
 - 2. Recreational fishing, the economic through-put of which is extremely important to Florida. The economic value of recreational saltwater fishing in Florida (> \$7 billion in 2004) far exceeds that in any other state in the US and, for that matter, anywhere else in the world. Recreational fishing opportunities are very significant in quality-of-life discussions and a major economic sector and fiscal generator for the state that may dominate today's economies and will likely to increase its importance over time.
 - 3. Non-consumptive public viewing and enjoyment, which is substantial and increasingly significant for Florida's urbanizing population, e.g. low-impact ecotourism, and help to broaden Florida's moniker as potentially the "Dive Capitol of the World."
- VII. The protection, preservation, and management of Florida's marine resources will be paid for through:
- A. License fees for all headboat, commercial, professional guide-based, and recreational fishing sectors based on the objectively derived fair-market values and costs of restoration/monitoring of impacts.
 - B. Fair-market values established by objective economic analyses comparing Florida fisheries to national and international norms and competitors.

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- C. Access fees (e.g., boating licenses, ramp fees, and special area entry) reflecting fair-market value for non-consumptive uses of marine resources.

Needed Marine Fisheries Research

VIII. Facilitate and support scientific research necessary for sustainable marine fisheries management over the next 20 years, and beyond. This will require:

- A. Resolving the egregious under-staffing and under-funding of critical functions, which may require major reorganization of FWC/FWRI and substantial new partnerships to fit the new vision. Florida needs a resource investment with a critical ecosystem focus! Including funding for ecosystem management on sovereign submerged lands.
- B. Considerable research toward “habitat” maps that define the distribution and quality of habitats that support resource productivity; acknowledging not all habitats are ‘created equally’.
 - 1. This will require identification of new metrics to describe spatially explicit resource production.
 - 2. Such maps are fundamental roadmaps for development of optimal sampling programs to support monitoring, assessment and modeling efforts.
 - 3. Quantify what quantities and qualities of major habitats have been degraded or lost, and what continues to be degraded or lost. Use this protocol to predict what the relative points of no return are for key habitats and/or populations.
 - 4. Improve information on the distribution of human impacts and the interaction with spatial productivity of fishery resources.
 - 5. Greater focus on managing “places” rather than just species, e.g., state aquatic preserves, national parks, and coral reefs.
- c. Monitoring, assessment and modeling evaluations of the impacts of fishing on ecosystems. These studies will include impacts of various gear uses; removal of both predator and prey species; changes in species, sex, size population-dynamic relationships; loss of keystone species; and other trophic-level interactions (e.g., herbivores/carnivores, direct and indirect effects).
 - 1. Standardize and statistically-optimize methods for sampling designs, data collection and monitoring, while allowing for the evolution of more effective quantitative methods.
 - 2. Develop full accounting of all the costs and benefits of various resource management decisions.

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3. Evaluate the impacts of catch-and-release fishing, and develop practical methods for minimizing catch-release mortality.
 4. Work with fishers to identify fishery spawning aggregation sites around the state, and then physically validate these areas.
 - d. Develop and integrate the capabilities of advanced technologies, e.g.:
 1. Remote sensing methods (e.g., LIDAR, acoustics, etc.) for synoptic resource surveys and abundance estimation capabilities, to compliment more traditional *in situ* monitoring efforts.
 2. Satellite or airborne remote monitoring of the fleets (recreational, commercial, and dive boats), including any vessel on the water involved in exploitation of fishery resources.
 - e. Design and implement spatial assessment models that integrate biophysical dynamics, spatial resource productivity and humans as these will be increasingly needed to assess and manage the rising complexity of resource management issues in Florida.
- IX. Effectively link marine fisheries research to marine fisheries management:
- A. Marine fisheries research should specifically address both short-term and long-term management needs, yet be operationally independent from fisheries management decision-making to ensure scientific objectivity and credibility.
 - B. Marine fisheries researchers, resource managers and decision-makers should have a high level of communication, with commitments made to regular forums for exchange and debate.
- X. Adequately fund marine fisheries research:
- A. Fund broader research objectives that map into conservation needs. Science will advise managers and the Commissioners. Data credibility continues to be a problem and liability for Commissioners.
 - B. Decide on problem sets that are of broad interest to constituencies (e.g., efficacy of marine reserves). In addition to basic State resources, groups like NGOs need to come up with fiscal resources, so that state and industry partners can match these. We haven't been creative enough to move this process forward. There are a lot of untapped sources for funding.

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- C. All users of marine fisheries resources (i.e., commercial and recreational, consumptive and non-consumptive) should be taxed through fishing licenses, permits and other user fees. Funds generated by use taxes should be directed only for use in fisheries research, and to enforce fishery regulations. Every person that fishes in Florida marine waters (resident or non-resident, boat or shoreline) should be licensed by the State. Blanket license programs for guides and head boats should be converted to purchase of licenses for every angler.

Recreational Fisheries

- Encourage/discourage increased participation:
- Identify potential “recreational only” fisheries:
 - Identify potential “catch and release only” fisheries
- Importance of maintaining/improving access to recreational fisheries
 - Saltwater recreational fishing is a major economic benefit to the State of Florida, on a par with the citrus industry. We must strive hard to protect this industry, the largest valued recreational fisheries in the country.
- Other issues:

Commercial Fisheries

- Encourage/discourage increased participation:
- Identify “commercial only” fisheries:
- Importance of maintaining/improving access to commercial fisheries
- Other issues: Support for “working waterfronts?”

Habitat

- XI. Protecting marine fisheries habitat is absolutely important, yet not sufficient without adequate controls on fishing mortality (including by-catch and catch-and-release mortality).

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- A. FWC should play a central role in protecting marine fisheries habitat, comparable to that of DEP without supplanting DEP's existing authority, including:
 - 1. Developing more information on ecological effects of fishing.
 - 2. Assuring greater protection for coastal habitats (wetlands, estuaries, seagrass, nearshore reefs, offshore reefs).
 - 3. Cooperating much more closely with NMFS, FWS and ACOE biologists doing the frontline permitting of coastal construction activities.
 - a. State-level CZMA consistency reviews provide little substantive input to these important decisions and FWC experts are largely separate from these decisions.
 - b. Meanwhile, Florida coastal habitats are continuously eliminated year by year, in large part through the federal permitting process.
- B. Habitat restoration projects are important where ecosystem function has been impaired by habitat loss or damage, assuming the functional equivalence of restored habitat is objectively known
- C. The cost for functionally robust and measurable habitat restoration should be borne by the entities most responsible for the habitat loss. Mitigation? Impact fees for permitted discharge of nutrients, storm water and other pollutants into waters of the state?
- D. Water management issues (e.g., releases, flows, and storage; red tide; water quality) are inseparable from fisheries habitat and stock productivity issues.

We believe that these concepts expressed will contribute to the science and management process to build sustainable fisheries in Florida. Thank you for letting us participate in the development of the vision for the future of Florida's marine fisheries.

FLORIDA'S MARINE FISHERIES
Summit for
A Vision for the Future
A Project of the Florida Fish & Wildlife Commission

My name is Bob Jones. I have been executive director of Southeastern Fisheries Association for the past 42 years. We are a 501 (c) 6 non-profit fisheries trade association headquartered in Tallahassee, Florida. We were founded in 1952 in Jacksonville, Florida

I make this presentation today on behalf of the following trade associations: Southeastern Fisheries Association (**SFA**), Seafood Restaurant Coalition (**SRA**), Southern Offshore Fishing Association (**SOFA**), Organized Fishermen of Florida (**OFF**), Monroe County Commercial Fishermen's Association (**MCCF**), Fishing For Freedom (**FFF**) and Florida Fishermen's Federation (**FFF**),

MANAGING SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES

IDENTIFY THE AGENCY/AGENCIES THAT SHOULD LEAD MARINE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT IN FLORIDA.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) was granted the constitutional authority to manage the fish and wildlife resources of the state. There should be no argument on which agency should lead.

CHANGES NEEDED TO THE CURRENT MANAGEMENT APPROACH:

The major change needed is to include more input from those affected by the FWC rules. Fish management is all about "Who Gets The Fish" so each interest group makes sure their views and desires are known without considering other points of view. This type of management puts the pressure on the commission to separate rhetoric from fact without having the benefit of information or ideas that could come out of meetings where all sides worked together in a civilized manner. If the management approach cannot be changed to accommodate joint meetings then the commission should appoint advisory committees for each fishery under its authority to discern the real situation. The commission always has the final decision.

IMPEDIMENTS TO CHANGE

"Status quo is always the last to go." The fact the commercial fishing industry is so diverse and independent; it makes it difficult to bring all groups together for the common good. Hardened and uncompromising positions on specific regulations are the biggest impediment to change. Too many times in the past, efforts of cooperation and sharing of data has led to more strenuous regulations. There is not enough confidence in the procedures of the FWC to give the commercial fishing industry a sense of equity or fair play at this point in time, but it is getting better.

BENEFITS OF CHANGES:

FWC decisions based on facts lead to regulations more acceptable to all users. If there is a way to have input and to debate points of view long before the final decision is made and voted on, then everyone is better off.

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HOW TO OVERCOME FLORIDA'S BURGEONING POPULATION AND THE IMPACTS OF INCREASED FISHING EFFORT:

This is a problem concerning everyone because our population will continue to grow. There will be no increased fishing efforts by the commercial fishing industry in the coming years. All commercial fisheries are under strict rules and commercial fishing is not a growth industry. Additionally, we are losing our infrastructure at an alarming rate due to waterfront development all over Florida. The population growth in Florida will continue to adversely impact our marine resources as more and more coastal development occurs and more recreational fishing boats and participants enter the fisheries.

EFFECTIVENESS OF BAG, VESSEL AND TRIP LIMITS:

Because there is no closed season on recreational fishing in state waters other than some reef fish, snook and redfish, bag limits can slow the catch to some degree. The problem with bag limits is there's no cap on the number of fishermen who can catch the bag limit, so reductions will not occur as long as new entrants continuously increase capacity to catch fish. There aren't many management measures to be considered when you list them so bag, vessel and trip limits are sometimes the only real option if the goal is to reduce mortality. Vessel and trip limits are used more on commercial fishermen but more and more regulations are taking into consideration what large numbers of recreational fishermen on one boat can kill per day.

EFFECTIVENESS OF MINIMUM AND MAXIMUM SIZE LIMITS:

I'm really not sure how many undersized fish that are caught and released actually survive. I doubt any that have been gut-hooked or handled roughly survive. If you lip hook a small fish and take the time to remove the hook and gently put the fish back in the water there is a chance of survival unless you are catching red snapper off Apalachicola and the porpoises are near your boat. Anecdotally speaking, I have seen five undersized red snapper in a row caught and consumed by porpoises as the snappers were put back in the water. In the charter boat fishery in Texas, there are studies showing over 50 undersized red snapper are caught for every red snapper that is legal. This begs the questions of size limits and it might be better to allow the first 10 fish to be kept regardless of the size. However, the anglers would have to buy into this and not keep on fishing hoping to catch bigger fish and throw back the smaller ones. How many fish caught in Florida waters have a maximum size limit other than redfish?

EFFECTIVENESS OF CLOSED SEASONS AND AREAS:

This might be the best way to slow down the harvest but it does seem to set up a private fishing ground for poachers who steal fish from a closed area or during a closed season for the thrill of it or for selling the fish at premium prices through the back doors of restaurants. If fishermen buy into a closed season or closed area and help to keep the poachers out it seems to work well. In commercial fishing, we have 3,000,000 acres of bottoms in the Tortugas shrimp grounds closed to all trawling. It has been closed for over 30 years, yet we still have poachers who insist on making just two or three drags in there when they feel they can get away with it. For these violators, especially recidivists, we do have fines at a high level, which deters most people.

EFFECTIVENESS OF GEAR RESTRICTIONS:

A dead fish is a dead fish. Most gear restrictions have been put in place for economic and socio/political reasons, not as conservation tools. Gear restrictions are actually fishermen restrictions and the driving force for more restrictions usually come from

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fishermen who do not use the particular gear being restricted. If the purpose of gear restrictions is to reduce catch, they are very effective. If the purpose is to prevent efficiency in harvest, they are effective. If the purpose is to ban gear under an allocation protocol, gear restriction is effective for whatever type gear wins that particular political battle.

EFFECTIVENESS OF MANAGING FISHING EFFORT:

Management of fishing effort is the main tool for achieving a desired harvest level, especially for the commercial fishing industry. Quotas, limitation on number of permits, closed areas and closed seasons all work to reduce commercial harvest. Where there is a bag limit for recreational fishing and no cap on the amount of pounds that can be caught this management effort is not effective.

EFFECTIVENESS OF MARINE PROTECTED AREAS:

Marine protected areas have been important to the Florida shrimp industry. Setting aside the 3,000,000 acres as a no trawl area tends to help the juvenile shrimp reach maturity and provides more potential spawning to perpetuate the pink shrimp resource. From our perspective the marine protected area in the Florida Keys is critical for the sustainability of that shrimp resource. The closed grouper spawning areas off the west coast of Florida is another good example of a marine protected area. There are law enforcement problems in both these areas, as there are always a few poachers who would rather go into a closed area than obey the law, but that is why we have law enforcement officers. Marine Protected Areas are highly controversial, particularly in the recreational community. There is a Presidential executive order mandating marine protected areas and there is a special division of NOAA committed to establishing marine protected areas in federal waters. Marine protected areas will be very effective if properly managed to stop all illegal fishing inside the boundaries of the MPA.

IMPORTANCE AND ROLE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT TO MARINE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT:

Law enforcement is the most critical element in marine fisheries management. It's sad to say but if there is no law enforcement there will be no conservation of the marine resources. There is nothing better than to be under fair, tough, impartial law enforcement officers. There is nothing worse than to be under unfair, arbitrary or selective law enforcement where personal bias exists. From our perspective the best law enforcement officers are those who can have a cup of coffee with us in the morning but issue us a citation in the afternoon if we violate a law.

OTHER:

There should be an ongoing educational process between law enforcement officers and those who come under their authority. More effort should be given to public workshops with all user groups. Some workshops would be for an individual user group and other workshops should be a combined meeting of all users. There is no reason we can't all lay our "knives and guns" outside the meeting room and attempt to engage in controversial subjects in a civil manner. Anyone who can't engage in a civil manner would be asked to leave the room.

PUBLIC NEEDS:

HOW TO INCREASE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AWARENESS AND SUPPORT FOR FLORIDA'S MARINE FISHERIES RESOURCES:

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There is public involvement through the FWC Commission meeting process but most of those present are the ones being impacted by proposals brought before the Commissioners. Media covers controversial actions of the FWC, but just doing a good job for a resource that lacks controversy reduces the public's awareness of what is going on. As far as getting support, efforts must be made to bring all users together to work on developing some consensus issues. As long as there is harsh enmity between user groups, any chance of getting more support is weakened.

IDENTIFY GROUPS TO TARGET WITH MARINE CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT MESSAGES:

It appears all known marine resource groups are being contacted by FWC on a variety of issues. Maybe a more focused set of messages could be put on the FWC website for all groups and individuals to peruse.

IMPORTANCE OF COMMERCIAL FISHING FOR FOOD CONSUMPTION:

The commercial harvest of our marine resources is the only way non-boaters and tourists can share in the bountiful supply of sustainable Florida seafood. Federal landing statistics have been kept on commercial harvest since 1895 and are available for review. Fresh Florida seafood is advertised in all marketing programs and is one of the reasons tourists come to our state. Florida seafood restaurants are concerned that their ability to purchase fresh seafood is being compromised. They feel they are being left out of the management protocols and are calling for more efforts to protect their supply of seafood. Seafood consumers are the real silent majority.

IMPORTANCE OF RECREATIONAL FISHING:

Recreational fishing is important to the state of Florida. While sport fishing does not create wealth, it does bring money earned in other endeavors to hundreds of communities. Most of all it gives individual anglers the opportunity for pleasant water related experiences. I'm sure the spokesman for the recreational user group will highlight the importance of recreational fishing. Suffice to say the commercial fishing industry supports recreational fishing as one element of harvesters. We consider charter/party boats commercial fishing platforms, but we consider the patrons on the boats as recreational fishermen.

IMPORTANCE OF CATCH AND RELEASE FISHING:

Catch and release of fish that have not been gut hooked can result in the opportunity to catch that fish again. We are not sure catch and release of coastal migratory pelagics such as king mackerel and Spanish mackerel save many fish. Catch and release fishing might be more effective in lakes and freshwater environments but we don't know that for sure.

IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING MARINE RESOURCES FOR PUBLIC VIEWING AND NON-CONSUMPTIVE ENJOYMENT:

Most members of the public get to view marine resources at Sea World and other tourist attractions where large numbers of people can see large numbers of fish. Most people we know want to catch edible finfish and eat it themselves or sell it to someone who will prepare it for others to eat. It is important to have opportunities to view marine resources, especially porpoises, manatees, turtles, corals or anything else in the water of interest in their natural settings as well. State Parks are available for viewing and non-consumptive use and we support this privilege for people.

HOW THE PROTECTION, PRESERVATION, AND MANAGEMENT OF FLORIDA'S MARINE RESOURCES SHOULD BE PAID FOR:

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Inasmuch as the citizens of Florida voted to combine the management of all fresh and saltwater fish and animal resources, the General Revenue Fund should support the basic operation of the Florida Fish & Wildlife Commission as long as the resources are available to all the public. Should there come a time when all commercial fishing and therefore all non-boater consumption of seafood is banned, then the total cost of the FWC operation should be paid by licenses and user fees from those interest groups that end up with all the fish and wildlife. It might become necessary to amend the constitution to mandate the legislature support our natural resources including general fund dollars.

MARINE FISHERIES RESEARCH

IDENTIFY THE MARINE FISHERIES RESEARCH NEEDS FOR THE NEXT TEN YEARS:

1. A better method to measure the recreational effort and catch.
2. More stock assessments with the caveat all stock assessments are peer reviewed.
3. Develop a net that harvests marketable size fish that also protects the resource.
4. Determine why there are more red tide episodes occurring and what can be done about it?
5. Impacts on marine resources from pollution.
6. More quickly turn around research on the importance of coastal wetlands.

HOW MARINE FISHERIES RESEARCH SHOULD BE TIED TO MARINE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT:

There should be no regulations placed on any user group without using the best scientific information available from government agencies. Management must be geared towards sustainability of all marine resources and allocation between boaters and non-boaters must be fair and equitable and based on science. Any rule enacted must have a sound scientific basis.

HOW MARINE FISHERIES RESEARCH SHOULD BE FUNDED:

Florida General Revenue Funds should support the basic operation of the Florida Wildlife Research Institute as long as the resources are available to all the public. Should there come a time when all commercial fishing and therefore all non-boater consumption of seafood is banned, then the total cost of the research institute should be paid by licenses and user fees from those interest groups that end up with all the fish.

RECREATIONAL FISHERIES:

ENCOURAGE/DISCOURAGE INCREASED PARTICIPATION:

There are many issues working against growth in the recreational sector such as loss of working waterfronts and access points, cost of fuel, lower bag limits, increased price for boats, motors, trailers and the electronics necessary to fish offshore. There are so many diverse regulations you practically have to be a lawyer to fish. Yet, participation in Florida fisheries is going to increase as long as more people move to Florida.

IDENTIFY "RECREATIONAL ONLY" FISHERIES:

There are already ample fisheries set aside for exclusive recreational fishing such as billfish, redfish, snook, permit and bay scallops. By having 100% allocation this

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means only those with boats and time to go fishing share in the resource, which constitutionally belongs to ALL the people.

IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING/IMPROVING ACCESS TO RECREATIONAL FISHERIES:

Recreational fishing is being impacted by loss of working waterfronts. Marinas are being closed to the public and reopened as gated communities for those in the higher economic strata. The economic impact of recreational fishing is important to a wide spectrum of businesses. They need to have access to the water.

COMMERCIAL FISHERIES:

ENCOURAGE/DISCUourage INCREASED PARTICIPATION:

We encourage increased participation from young people even though commercial fishing is a difficult way to make a living. We are an historical and necessary part of the food-producing sector and without us the ability to produce a healthy food product for nonboaters would disappear and the benefits of eating Florida seafood would be available only to those with boats, motors, time and access.

IDENTIFY “COMMERCIAL ONLY” FISHERIES:

We believe all fisheries should be open to all user groups. The re-allocation of fish resources that have been primarily recreational fish would give a very small percentage to commercial fishermen based on historical participation, but no user group would be prohibited from catching a certain fish unless everyone was prohibited from catching that species of fish.

IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING/IMPROVING ACCESS TO COMMERCIAL FISHERIES:

Working waterfronts is our number one access problem. Working waterfronts are more critical to the commercial industry than the recreational industry because of the size of the commercial fishing boats which includes charter and party boats. Most recreational boats can be trailered to alternate launch areas but commercial boats are already greatly limited as to where they can unload their catch.

HABITAT:

IMPORTANCE OF PROTECTING MARINE FISHERIES HABITAT:

Habitat protection is the number one requirement to maintain any sustainable fishery. As grasses and wetlands are dredged, developed or polluted, fishing declines. The cumulative impact of coastal development has not been fully calculated but when it is, will it be too late to reverse? You can't fill in a wetland, put a thousand houses on it and then wonder why fishing isn't like it was in the "good old days."

ROLE FWC SHOULD PLAY IN PROTECTING MARINE FISHERIES HABITAT:

FWC's role should be the most important and most proactive of all state agencies. How can FWC protect the fish without protecting where they live, spawn and grow up? FWC should state their position on support of development in coastal communities because it building is a major part of the Florida's economic engine. But the development must occur where it does not permanently pollute or destroy fish habitat. It is an accepted fact that "salt marshes and estuaries provide essential habitat for 75% of the fish caught commercially and 80/90 percent of the fish caught

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recreationally.” The question then, “Is there anything more important to the sustainability of our fish than the protection of habitat?” For us the answer is NO.

IMPORTANCE OF HABITAT RESTORATION PROJECTS:

Preventing lost habitat must take priority over restoring habitat. If FWC is going to really restore habitats, it must look at areas of sufficient size to make a real difference and should pay scientists and other professionals to carry out the work under proven protocols. Small habitat restoration projects are good for a photo op and make the participants feel good because they are doing important work, but this kind of limited activity will never be able to reach the level needed to protect fisheries.

HOW HABITAT RESTORATION PROJECTS SHOULD BE PAID FOR:

It should be paid for by whatever entity destroyed the habitat along with ample funding from the General Revenue Fund of the state.

IMPORTANCE OF WATER MANAGEMENT ISSUES (E.G., RELEASES, FLOWS AND STORAGE; RED TIDE; WATER QUALITY);

Water quality has an important impact on fisheries. While the FWC does not have exclusive authority in all the areas of water management, there should be a monthly meeting of a task force to work on solving specific local and statewide problems.

IMPORTANCE OF MARINE FISH STOCK ENHANCEMENT EFFORTS:

If we can protect the wetlands and coastal areas, keep the water from pollution and manage the annual harvest on a sustainable basis is there really a need for marine fish stock enhancement? Most stock enhancement seems to be on redfish, a stock that is not undergoing overfishing. Wouldn't this money be better spent for wetland protection?

IMPORTANCE OF ARTIFICIAL REEF CONSTRUCTION AND MONITORING PROGRAMS:

Artificial reef construction has been a boon to many communities. Under the current FWC rules, great oversight is given to the placement of reefs and the state actively monitors these locations. There should be more dialogue between FWC and the commercial fishing industry on where artificial reefs are placed. There is an ongoing debate over whether artificial reefs attract fish from other areas or that they actually aid in the process of producing more fish. Whatever the real answer, artificial reefs are very important to many anglers across Florida.

LONG-TERM MARINE FISHERIES VISION STATEMENT:

WHAT SHOULD OUR VISION BE FOR FLORIDA'S MARINE FISHERIES IN 10 YEARS?

In the year 2015 Florida could have in excess of 21 million residents, probably making it the third largest state by surpassing New York. The number of tourists could double by then depending on the economy. Most people who retire to Florida prefer to live on or near the coast.

At the current rate of growth there could be 2 million registered sportfishing boats, which create lots of problems in the near shore marine environment. Commercial fishing will be about the same level it is today as all commercial fisheries have

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regulations to protect species from overfishing, through quotas, permit caps, closed seasons and closed areas.

Our vision is positive and if we can manage coastal development and prevent further destruction of wetlands we can maintain viable fisheries in Florida because most species are short-lived and all they need is clean water, sunshine and food.

Thank you.

Bob Jones, Executive Director
Southeastern Fisheries Association Inc.
September 28, 2005

FUTURE OF FLORIDA MARINE FISHERIES

RECREATIONAL FISHING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) must develop a comprehensive evaluation of Florida's saltwater recreational fishery and determine the resources needed to maintain and enhance Florida's multi-billion dollar saltwater recreational fishery for the next 5, 10 and 20 years.
2. Fisheries management plans must be adopted to protect the resource and provide for projected future needs. Such plans must include specific and measurable biological goals.
3. FWC must establish policies, criteria and processes for determining allocation of recreational and commercial take of specific fish or shellfish. Information on biological and economic aspects of fisheries management, public trust responsibilities and license fees would be used to determine allocation.
4. The FWC must develop and implement measures to have more influence over the management of fisheries in federal waters off of Florida when more than 50% of the total harvest is taken off of and landed in Florida. In cooperation with the Governor and Florida's Congressional delegation, the FWC must work to change federal fisheries law to give greater management authority and control to the State of Florida.

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5. The FWC must support and encourage the continued development and placement of artificial reef habitat which will create habitat and enhance the marine resources of the state.
6. The FWC needs to be actively involved in the state and federal actions involving dredge and fill, water quality and other permit issues to protect marine fisheries habitat.
7. The FWC must increase staff and other resources in the Division of Marine Fisheries to a level which honestly represents a commitment to managing. Florida's five and a half BILLION DOLLAR saltwater recreational fishery.

Attachment – FWC Economics of Fish and Wildlife Recreation (2004)