



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Snook Workgroup Meeting #5

March 6, 2007

8:00 am to 5:30 pm
Courtyard by Marriott
St. Petersburg, Florida

REPORT

Welcome/Agenda Review

The meeting was opened by Jessica McCawley, Division of Marine Fisheries Management, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, who welcomed everyone and directed members to their meeting packets to review its contents. She then turned the meeting over to the Facilitator, Janice Fleischer, FLASH Resolutions.

Members in attendance:

Tom Fraser - Ft Myers
Sue Cocking - Miami Herald, Journalist
Sawyer Smith - Ft. Myers, Tournaments
Richard Grathwohl - Florida Keys, Florida Guides Association (FGA)
Pat Kelly - West Coast, FGA
Ken Leber- Mote Marine Laboratory
Danny Guarino - Tampa, FGA, Guide (alternate for Dave Markett)
Rick Roberts - Snook Foundation Director
Wade Thompson - Bradenton, Tournaments
Butch Constable - Jupiter, FGA, Guide
Tom Twyford - West Palm Beach Fishing Club
Curtis Bostick - Marco Island, CCA
Gary Borland- West Palm Beach, Jupiter
Howard Wells - Sarasota, Coastal Conservation Association West Coast
Ted Forsgren - Statewide, CCA
Kevin McCole - alternate for Ron Riley

FWC Staff in attendance:

Jessica McCawley, Division of Marine Fisheries Management (DMFM)
Jasmine MacPherson, DMFM
Ron Taylor, FWRI
Luiz Barbieri, FWRI

There were no Observers in the audience.

AGENDA REVIEW

Report of Proceedings
Snook Workgroup Meeting #5
March 6, 2007
Prepared by Janice M. Fleischer, J.D., FLASH Resolutions

Ms. Fleischer reviewed the Agenda for the day's activities (**Exhibit A**). She explained the Objectives of the day's meeting were to:

- Have the Workgroup members hear reports on the public meetings held and the Staff report to the Commission.
- Have an update on the Snook Stamp Bill and the Shoreline Exemption.
- Discuss the issue of chumming and mortality rates as noted by the Commission.
- Review the alternatives for the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts and decide if the Workgroup wanted to narrow them down.
- Discuss Workshop member attendance at the upcoming additional public workshop and the final Commission meeting.

All Reports of Proceedings of the Committee, Discussion and Public Guidelines and Committee related information, can be found on the FWC website at <http://myfwc.com/marine/workgroups/index.html>

As an issue of awareness, the Facilitator reminded members of their responsibility to support to the outside public whatever measures are agreed to by the Workgroup by consensus or successful vote. If a member feels his/her constituency still has concerns or differing opinions, that should be brought up during a meeting, not as a separate item outside the meetings. It was also recognized that several Workgroup members have large and diverse constituencies and that gaining their full approval may not be possible. A discussion ensued and the following comments were recorded:

1. At the last meeting of the Workgroup, CCA was not present so was not aware of the details of the matters discussed at that meeting
2. If any constituency group comes out with recommendations different than this Workgroup, it dilutes the work of this group.
3. Members of this group need to be able to say they support the work of this group or not.
4. As a fishing guide who gives up days of fishing, we miss days when we are here and the work we do here is very important. We should all be supporting the decisions this group has made.

PRESENTATION: PUBLIC WORKSHOP REPORT / SURVEY RESULTS (EXHIBIT B**)**

Jessica McCawley delivered a presentation on the results of the FWC public workshops and the online snook survey.

Member Comments:

1. Ft. Pierce anglers had organized meetings prior to the public workshops so they could present a unified front.
2. Jessica: there will be another Ft. Pierce workshop with a more detailed data presentation to try to get them to understand the data better.
3. Whenever someone opposes a position they always question the data.
4. The bottom line may be that the Ft. Pierce anglers may not want to hear the data.
5. At the public workshops there was an option of "no change".
6. In Islamorada, the guides had a conflict of other meetings so the number of people who showed up was very small.
7. How can you increase the number of people who come to the meetings?

- a. Get public outreach folks to check calendars for conflicts
- b. Get press release in paper if at all possible
- c. Make sure the notices are put in places where they will be seen
8. Usually people don't show up if they are apathetic or supportive.
9. Ft. Pierce was an anomaly; all other areas were supportive.
10. Staff did a wonderful job presenting; Jessica and Ron really put a lot of wonderful effort and did an excellent job.
11. Luiz: re: Ft. Pierce: we have not done a good enough job to present the facts to them
 - a. We need to explain what 40% SPR really means
 - b. FWC does not have a very strong presence in the Ft. Pierce area, that is why we are going back to help them understand
12. There have been no live interviews from Ft. Pierce area in the last 2 years.
 - a. So we need to get more of our (FWC) folks there
13. Most Ft. Pierce anglers are shore based, very few on water.
14. In other areas, the data fits with the information; i.e. anglers see less fish in the water in all other areas; whereas, in Ft. Pierce the anglers see lots of fish (for other reasons) so they don't know why we are making changes statewide.
15. We need to make them understand that this process is about projecting into the future; the stock is not in crisis now, but will be in the future.
16. Luiz: This situation needs to be evaluated with snook and red fish; we need to be more proactive not reactive.
17. Ft. Pierce is one of the best snook fisheries in the world so it is hard for them to understand any restrictions.
18. We need to make the Ft. Pierce folks understand their fortune is others misfortune.
19. Susan Cocking wrote an excellent article after our last meeting.
20. Ranger at Chucaloshi (sp?) said out of 200 boats only 8 had snook; shows that numbers are down.
21. You need to portray the 40% SPR in a different way so they "get" the message that there are fewer fish in the water now and we want to get more fish in the water.

PRESENTATION: REPORT TO COMMISSION (EXHIBIT B-CONTINUED)

Ms. McCawley continued her presentation with a report on the Staff's report to the Commission at their February Meeting in Destin. She handed out unofficial minutes of the Snook discussion at the February Commission meeting. (Exhibit C)

One item that was questioned by a Commissioner was the issue of "chumming" and increased mortality to released fish due to predators (dolphin, birds) being drawn to the area by the practice of "chumming". This Commissioner wanted the Workgroup to consider whether some recommendation was needed on this issue. The Workgroup members engaged in a detailed discussion.

Member Comments:

1. Do we have any studies that look at effect of chumming on mortality?
 - a. no
2. So whatever we recommend will have no data behind it; maybe we should recommend a study and not just for snook, other fish, too.

3. Live bait, dead bait; it is just a technique.
4. This is a huge issue.
5. If dolphins come around, I move away.
6. If you reduce chumming, you will reduce the number of fish caught; this is the wrong end of the continuum rather than looking at the beginning.
7. Chumming is too big an issue to tackle.
8. It is unenforceable, no one will admit they are chumming for snook, you can say you are chumming for bait fish.
9. The Commission is not being consistent.
10. The Commission was talking about chumming in the context of catch and release fishing.
11. Put it as part of educational stuff; not a rule.
12. Recreational angler does most of the chumming; catch and release, education is the key.
13. What form of fishing is not chumming??? Even a hook with bait is chumming.
14. Futile to recommend eliminating chumming.
15. A recommendation should be in the form of education.
16. Ethical question of when you get up and move if other predators come around.
17. If you handle the snook right, the survival rate should be the same, if your ethics are wrong and you don't move then there is a problem.
18. Predators are there to eat the fish, whether you see them or not is another issue, you will only see them if you are catching the fish and release them.
19. Predators get their share of snook no matter what.
20. No one here is opposed to chumming.
21. Lack of law enforcement officers in the field, the need for more.
22. You don't need chum to have predators come to eat the fish.

At this point, a member suggested tabling this issue so the group could discuss the Atlantic and Gulf Alternatives.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Rick Roberts made a comment on behalf of someone who had requested he do so.

Members of the public are encouraged to submit their comments in writing on the comment cards provided at each meeting or email the Facilitator; Janice Fleischer (janice@flashresolutions.com) within the first week following the meeting and those comments will be included in the Report.

THE ATLANTIC AND GULF ALTERNATIVES: A REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

Ms. McCawley reviewed the results of the public meetings once again and asked the members if they thought it would be beneficial to narrow the Atlantic and Gulf options before the Staff reported back to the Commission. Members made the following comments and decisions:

Atlantic Coast:

1. Should we have different seasons on each coast?
2. If you fish each coast, it is the anglers responsibility to know the legal fishing seasons on each coast.
3. Should we select some slot options for both coasts?

4. If you go to different regulations, it will be better for fish populations; we should be going to regional fishing regulations.
5. One of the reasons we chose 35b is because the likelihood is much higher of achieving it. 35b seems like the best option for the Atlantic coast.
6. We must think about how many folks actually fish both coasts, (not many) and if they do they go with a guide who knows the rules so this is not an issue re: different regulations on each coast.
7. What is the actual effect of size limits and closed seasons on fishing public?
8. On west coast, Anglers seem to indicate they want a "healthy" fishery, not just an "adequate" fishery.
9. We have seen how public responds, they would line up behind what they have indicated, so we should go with the one that was the most popular by the public.

Suggestion for consensus: *Keep 35b as the preferred option to the Commission on Atlantic Coast:*

5	4	3	2	1
10	0	6	0	0

Consensus achieved

Gulf Alternatives:

Discussion

1. We should go with the consensus of stakeholders as long as it is within our parameters.
2. CCA majority of folks would prefer to narrow the slot instead of changing the closed months.
3. CCA meeting folks were not as familiar with process and data as this group; we should stay with our recommendations and CCA may come around and agree with us.
4. Maybe February should be closed because it is too easy to catch the fish that month.
5. Recognize that West coast workshops and online went for the most restrictive option.
6. 40f speaks to Florida stakeholders; 35c goes to tourists who come to Florida to get fish to eat.
7. You can fish 12 months of the year (catch and release), you are only restricting keeping fish for eating.
8. Florida Keys Guides are for the betterment of the snook even if it means more closed seasons.
9. 35f more restrictive than 40f but keeps the slot limit the same size on both coasts. If they want slot same on both coasts then Commission should choose 35f or 35c, but 35f fits with same closed months.
10. We should narrow down to 40f itself; slot limits on both coasts should be left to the Commission; 35f is more restrictive.
11. CCA might have something with 35c.
12. Need to plan ahead of yourself or you will be further behind.
13. We should indicate to Commissioners that slot size should be their decision.
14. Is 40% a lofty goal, why would we be going to 44%, maybe CCA has something here.
15. Remember, these numbers don't happen overnight, we never get what we want, if we go to 40f now, we at least should get ahead so you don't get behind.
16. Common sense is same regulations on both coasts; May is prime spawning month so we should close it on both coasts, go with 40g and 40f.

17. 40g and 40f are consistent on both coasts.
18. The only new item is the CCA recommendation, we should not go outside of anything we already decided.
19. Commissioners did not talk about slot sizes or any of the options at the February Commission meeting.
20. It is likely that at the Commission meeting, you will have many anglers arguing for no changes at all; that is why it is important for this group to come to the Commission meeting in April.

Suggestion: *Gulf Coast: Preferred recommendation of Option 40f:*

5	4	3	2	1
6	1	5	4 Sawyer Smith Butch Constable Wade Thompson Ted Forsgren	0

Consensus not achieved

Comments following first ranking:

1. This would imply that there will be an alternate to this Option and we don't want an alternate.
2. I like Option 35c better, more closely aligned with Atlantic.
3. Option 35c is more uniform and less restrictive.
4. Could easily go with 35c to be less confusing, however would like to remove February.
5. Remember what we are doing, we are talking about when we can kill fish, not just when we can eat them.
6. We should only have one recommendation, not more than one alternative.
7. The West Coast has said they want more stringent rules, why are we changing our recommendation?

Second suggestion: *Gulf Coast: Preferred recommendation of 35c:*

5	4	3	2	1
1	2	6	3	3

Consensus not achieved

It was decided to have the Workgroup go to vote on sending only Option 40f as the preferred alternative.

Vote on 40f as preferred alternative:

Yes: 13 No: 0 Abstain: 3 PASSED

The Members then resumed their discussion of chumming:

Suggested wording of **recommendation on chumming:**

It is the opinion of the Workgroup that live and dead bait chumming cannot be, nor should be, prohibited, restricted or enforced, but rather, anglers should be educated about proper handling and release techniques,

as well as dealing ethically with situations that would significantly increase release mortality (i.e. dolphin predation).

First ranking on above wording

5	4	3	2	1
5	6	5	0	0

Consensus achieved

More commentary about how Commission will react to recommendations of this group:

1. We are staying with 40f because it has a higher chance of success of achieving the 40% SPR than Option 35c does.
2. Your voice really counts with the Commission.
3. It is very important that this group goes to the Commission meeting in support of the recommendations of the Workgroup.
4. Should we draft a letter as the Snook Workgroup explaining why/how we came to these choices?
5. We should not second guess what the Commission will do; we should be positive about what we have done and as many of us as can should go to the meeting.

PRESENTATION: REPORT ON SNOOK STAMP AND SHORELINE EXEMPTION LEGISLATION (EXHIBIT B-CONTINUED)

Ms. McCawley continued her presentation with a report on the FWC’s current bills in the Senate and House. The shoreline exemption language is currently located in both the House and Senate bills; however the snook stamp language is not, and would need to be added. The Senate has released draft language and groups outside the FWC are trying to amend the bill to add a snook stamp increase from \$2 to \$10 (Senate bill 1982). The House has not released any bill language yet.

Comments:

1. What is in bill 1982, should we put the snook stamp stuff somewhere else in hopes of getting it passed?
 - a. Jessica - this bill is the FWC’s bill that includes all increases to hunting and fishing fees.

Ms. McCawley then reviewed the next steps and timeline for the Workgroup’s recommendations.

Comments:

1. How do we see what is in the draft rule?
2. Staff will send out a notice with a link when the draft rule is ready.
3. March 24 is the Ft. Pierce additional public meeting.
4. At draft rule stage when Commission looks at the rule, when does public comment occur?
 - a. After the presentation or after Commission exchange.
5. CCA should be able to say what their members think; it is a democratic process.
6. Steve Serfling from Mote Marine just passed away; he was the only person who was ever able to raise snook.

Ms. McCawley reminded members that there will be an additional public workshop for the Ft. Pierce area to endeavor to explain the data in greater detail on March 24, 2007. All members of the workgroup were encouraged to be at the April 12 meeting of the Commission in Tallahassee.

EVALUATIONS

Ms. Fleischer reminded members to fill in their Evaluation forms.

ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned.
