

2015 FWC Marine Fisheries Management Statewide Workshops Summary



During July 2015, the FWC's Division of Marine Fisheries Management held a series of public workshops to gather public input on marine topics and species people think FWC should be working on at statewide and regional levels. These workshops were part of a strategic planning effort to explore innovative approaches to marine fisheries management in Florida. This document contains the results of these public workshops. This document is a summary of information as provided by members of the public at the meetings and does not necessarily reflect FWC management priorities or commit the FWC to any future actions.

Statewide Themes/Species of Interest:

- Regulations for many species are confusing and hard to follow
- Desire to see more law enforcement on the water
- Concerns with regulatory discards
- Support for regional fisheries management within the state of Florida
- Work with other state agencies to improve water quality and habitat for fish species
- Recreational anglers need to come together as a group and think about ways to address issues such as access in recreational fisheries
- Need to address the sale of recreationally-caught species
- Work on improving FWC websites and making the marine webpages more user-friendly

Species: red snapper, red drum, goliath grouper, lionfish, gag grouper

Regional Themes/Species of Interest:

Southeast Florida/Keys

- Ideas for lionfish management, such as bounties, fish traps, and extending the extra lobster for 10 lionfish opportunity year-round
- Mixed opinions on proposed barracuda regulations, with some fishermen feeling the commercial trip limit is unfair and recreational fishermen stating the need for a trophy fishery to continue
- Concerns with the increasing level of lobster bully netting
- Comments supporting change in the dolphinfish fishery such as reducing the bag limit and eliminating the size limit and comments opposing the federal commercial closure
- Need for more education for boaters/anglers visiting the Keys
- Comments about goliath grouper negatively impacting fishing trips
- Support for focused marine reserves in the Keys

Species: spiny lobster, lionfish, mutton snapper, goliath grouper, barracuda, dolphinfish

Southwest Florida

- Concerns over the mullet run and issues with white roe mullet being wasted
- High fishing pressure having negative impacts on species like redfish in Charlotte Harbor
- Increasing shark and dolphin interactions with fishermen
- Desire to see regional management of fisheries within Florida
- Need for recreational anglers to try innovative methods to increase and/or improve data collection, such as phone apps or fish tags

Species: red drum, mullet, red snapper, gag grouper, goliath grouper, blue crab

Panhandle and Big Bend

- Need for recreational anglers to try innovative methods to increase and/or improve data collection, such as phone apps or fish tags
- Concerns with regulatory discards
- Comments supporting change in the cobia fishery, such as slot limits, closed seasons, or an increase to the minimum size limit
- Seagrass loss in the Big Bend
- Concerns over the mullet run and issues with white roe mullet being wasted
- Comments that seine nets because used today are creating a bycatch issue and increasing the mesh size on these nets could help prevent bycatch in net fisheries
- Desire for the FWC to continue to work with oyster fishermen in Apalachicola

Species: red snapper, red drum, greater amberjack, gray triggerfish, cobia, sharks

East Coast

- Comments on poor water quality negatively impacting fish stocks
- Comments about goliath grouper negatively impacting fishing trips
- Concerns over FWC outreach for public meetings resulting in low stakeholder attendance
- Desire to see more artificial reefs to improve fisheries
- Concerns over lionfish populations and the need to educate the public
- Comments about no federal waters red snapper season in 2015 hurting local businesses

Species: snook, red drum, red snapper, goliath grouper, lionfish, bait fish

Long-Term Concepts

- Open fisheries year-round with reduced bag limits instead of higher bag limits and reduced seasons
- Standardizing species bag limits
- Need for increased law enforcement
- Habitat degradation and water quality concerns
- Stakeholder desires vary regionally

- Competing stakeholder interests will continue to limit the Commission’s ability to meet all stakeholder desires
- Improve recreational data collection

Innovative Concepts:

- Manage species groups instead of individual species
- Ways to consider fishery closures differently
- Federal Council management ideas
- Citizen science opportunities
- Lionfish removal ideas
- Non-traditional partnerships that could benefit fisheries management
- Management of fisheries on a more regional basis to match stakeholder desires

Appendix 1: Statewide Workshops Meeting Information

Overall Workshop Attendance: 281

<u>Meeting City</u>	<u>Meeting Location</u>	<u>Meeting Date</u>	<u>Number of Public in Attendance</u>
Key West	Harvey Government Center	July 7	23
Islamorada	Founder’s Park Community Center	July 8	29
Coral Gables	Hyatt Regency Coral Gables	July 9	12
Jupiter	The River Center	July 10	23
Naples	Naples City Hall	July 7	14
Punta Gorda	Punta Gorda City Hall	July 8	33
St. Petersburg	FWRI Auditorium	July 9	21
Crystal River	Crystal River City Hall	July 10	6
Pensacola	Sanders Beach-Corinne Jones Community Center	July 13	8
Destin	Destin Community Center	July 14	11
Panama City	Gulf Coast State College	July 15	5
Steinhatchee	Steinhatchee Community Center	July 16	22
Carrabelle	Carrabelle City Hall	July 28	18
Stuart	Stuart City Hall	July 20	13
Fort Pierce	Garden Club of Fort Pierce	July 21	13
Cocoa Beach	Central Brevard Library	July 22	7
Ormond Beach	Ormond Beach City Hall	July 23	8
Jacksonville	Jacksonville Public Library Southeast	July 30	9
Statewide Webinar	Statewide; staff in Tallahassee	July 27	6

Appendix 2: Statewide Workshops Meeting Notes

Southeast Florida/Keys Florida Meeting Notes

Key West - July 6, 2015

Location: Harvey Government Center

Staff: Jessica McCawley, Martha Bademan, Mason Smith, Krista Shipley, Bill Sharp, John Hunt, Captain David Dipre

Attendance: approximately 23

Questions we need to look into more

How many people in attendance filled out the survey? 7 (11 if you count artificial reefs staff, but not the staff listed above)

Public Comment

Page Haverly: Formerly worked for NOAA and Harbor Branch. FWC spends all kinds of money on beautiful paperwork (outreach materials), spend money on a DVD targeting kids that you can show kids (example of what the video should be about: don't fillet a snook and use as bait). Start young. Old people catch too many fish (on docks), then throw them out when no one wants them (throw out buckets-full) because they were brought up to keep everything. Thinks it's associated with how they were raised but need to stop the cycle and get the correct messages to young kids, maybe with DVDs. Fish have mercury and it often comes from the land. Maybe get messages like that out so that people worry less about their green lawns if they want safe fish to eat (comments related to how much fish a pregnant woman can safely eat, info found in our publications)

John Sahagian (commercial and charter):

- Problems with the logic of some of the size and bag limits. Mangrove and mutton snapper bag limits for example. Mutton = take 10 of a large fish. Mangrove = very prolific around here but only allows 5 even though federal allows 10. Mangrove size limit is too small, needs to be at least 12 inches.
- Dolphinfish: Doesn't see a reason to have a 10 fish limit. Shouldn't have size limit on a very quick growing fish. Get rid of size limit and reduce bag to 5 and there will be less fish killed at the end of the day.
- Feds are "killing" fishers down here. Numbers/data, the "best science" is wrong. Deepwater fishery is closed now. Shouldn't be a closure on blueline tilefish, shouldn't be a 1 snowy grouper down here. Snowy grouper and blueline tilefish are taken together. If people don't go snowy grouper fishing they don't go blueline tilefish fishing, as a result landings go down, "data" shows a "problem" and the blueline tilefish is closed because it's in "trouble" due to low reported landings. Need one snowy grouper per person.
- Should never be a closure for the recreational fishery when the commercial fishery for the same species is open.
- Would like to see a trophy allowance for barracuda in the proposed regulations (no upper size limit). Could even go to a 1 fish bag limit. Barracuda are the "single most mounted fish in the world."
- Shark overpopulation in Keys. "More spots than not where you lose most of your catch" to sharks. Lemon sharks have a zero bag limit but are very prominent. The population numbers are fine. Maybe there should be less prohibited sharks on the list.
- Octopus in crab traps: have had some recent years with a lot in the traps, thinks it may be getting toward the end of a cycle
- Mini-season lobstering: originally set up to reduce conflict between trappers and divers. Recently has increased bully netting. Allows for extreme abuse of bag limit (diving and bully netting by the same individuals). Suggestion: Elimination of bully netting during mini-season.
- Seasonal closures: If you can make a year-long bag limit reduction and eliminate the closure it would greatly help the charter industry.
- "Third rail of sponging." That sponging is allowed at all is hard to believe (due to their filtering capabilities). Is there any point in the future when this might be reduced? (J. McCawley answer: there is a sponge endorsement so we at least know who is doing it. John Hunt: there's been some research done)

Dennis Fowler: Agrees with previous speaker (John Sahagian) 100%. Especially mutton and dolphinfish. Seems like each year he has to go out further and further to get quality fish, but the numbers are there. His main target is mangrove snapper. Goliath grouper love 18+ in mangrove snapper. In his lifetime will he have the chance to catch and eat a goliath grouper? (J. McCawley: there will be a review and discussion at the September Commission Meeting that will discuss the most recent stock assessment.) He really likes the new pullout charts in the recreational regulations, especially on heavy weight paper. Great improvement!

Mark Songer: Representing "Last Stand." (Copy of full statement provided and scanned as a pdf.) Habitat related concerns. Supports wildlife reserves in FKNMS. There needs to be

balanced with recreational and commercial uses in nearshore waters. Concerned about concentrated resource use at popular gathering sites. Recommends permits be required for “compatible uses.” Urges FWC to increase funding for enforcement and education efforts. FWC should maintain strong relationships with other fisheries related agencies (NOAA and FKNMS). Urge FWC to review the environmental impact of marine reserves in the sanctuary and their proven positive impacts on habitat and fish stocks. Urge to support FKNMS plans.

Simon Stafford (full time commercial trapper): Last few years have been downhill for stone crab. Maybe adjust the season or something. Doesn’t think that the trap certificate program addressed the number of traps in the water. Spiny lobster seems to be going well. Would like to see more enforcement with the tags on traps.

Anthony Soldano (charter captain): Barracuda regulations: fishermen asked for it to be addressed and FWC “got it all wrong.” 20 commercial limit is too high, should ban sales entirely. Slot size has “no science to back it up” and doesn’t understand where the slot size came from. He wants to keep a trophy barracuda. Not being able to keep a trophy will hurt charter captains financially. Please try to make the grouper closure less than 4 months.

Mimi Stafford: Echo the first speaker (Page Haverty). If we really want to make change, start with the children. Also strongly urge for more law enforcement. You can have all the regulations you want but if there is no one to enforce it they don’t matter. Law enforcement is “doing the best they can with what they’ve got”

Unknown speaker: How bad is the lionfish? Is it going to “destroy Monroe County”? If you want to get rid of them so bad, put a bounty on them! Act fast, don’t wait too long like FWC did with other things (goliath, barracuda, etc.). Something also needs to be done with goliath grouper because they are eating everything.

Miscellaneous: Input from various speakers in conversational type comments

- Big Pine guys say they haven’t had a good crab season in 2 years. The lionfish mini-season might be good for collecting data.
- Are you also keeping track of injuries from lionfish during mini-season? Things like: Did you get stung? Did you get speared?
- Regarding the special lionfish removal opportunity: The people who are shooting lionfish are just going to take the extra lobster anyway. They’re already going out multiple times/day. He doesn’t think it’ll work (as a lionfish control/education measure). People might kill lionfish if they happen to be there but won’t seek them out.
- Research being done for a fish trap specifically for lionfish: is that research still going on? He couldn’t find information on recent efforts. If there were the ability for him to put some out to target lionfish, he might do that and make the effort to go out and harvest them
- A second for the bounty idea for lionfish (from Page Haverty?)
- Incentive for professionals
- Barracudas: proposed new regulations will shut down the commercial guys. The new vessel limit would barely cover gas. His suggestion: leave it alone. (He’s targeting barracuda on trips, diving, no other species, because he doesn’t have a federal permit)

- Suggest a quota system for the barracuda then close it when it's over. Would need about 133 fish to make money
- She thought the bounty was a good idea until she sat in this room. Sounds good for responsible individuals but lots of people will work around it, get extra lobster before all of the lionfish and re-using lionfish from one day to another. Stings also a concern.
- Maybe extend the Lionfish Removal Opportunity past mini-season into regular season. Less people but multiplied out by the longer period/more days could have the same effect.
- Question about water quality and Cudjoe Key and where FWC weighed in on that. (John Hunt: FWC did not weigh in on that as an agency. John provided as much information as he could about the steering committee for that project and the things being done as he could.)
- We're trying to regrow the coral in the area. Does FWC ever restock saltwater fish?
- Bully net: eliminate bully netting during mini-season
- Why allow sponging? FWC should limit activity to cutting only

Vicki Boguszewski: Thought the suggestion about a reduced bag limit and not having closures was great. Important theme for alignment, research and things are happening on different levels. Federal influences state which influences the county and back up the chain again. Support for a closure, partly because of non-fishing stressors like sea level rise and warming water temperatures.

Antonio A Osborn Jr: (*Comments submitted via comment card*)

- Theft from inshore lobster traps very high; thieves are also damaging traps
- During off-season can commercial fishermen retrieve traps for future use? Can we figure out how to make this legal somehow?
- Do not lessen duration of grouper closure
- Rather than restrictions for barracuda; maybe just close barracuda altogether (similar to tarpon fishery); let them live.

Zane Osborn: (*Comments submitted via comment card*) I think better research needs to be done on barracudas before restrictions are put on them. I suggest a quota system and size limit similar to kingfish.

Islamorada - July 7, 2015

Location: Founder's Park Community Center

Staff: Jessica McCawley, Martha Bademan, Mason Smith, Krista Shipley, John Hunt, Captain Rob Beaton

Attendance: approximately 29 (4 came in after the presentation over)

Miscellaneous notes:

How many people in attendance filled out the survey? 6

Islamorada mayor (Mike Forster) in attendance

Head of village parks and rec in attendance

This meeting had an additional slide about federal fisheries management in the presentation at the request of Vice Chairman Priddy. This slide will be included in the workshop presentation for the other statewide workshops this month.

Public Comment

Richard Turner (commercial lobster and yellowtail fisherman): Gathering data and science, what science is behind the mini-season more lobster for lionfish decision? (Jessica: commissioners were trying to get a message out to 50-60k people in a short time about lionfish removal) He's worried because there isn't any science behind it so what's to stop someone from saying "hey, you know what would be good for the lobster fishery? Not allowing traps in the water." What's to stop that from moving forward? The commercial fishers have a good relationship with NMFS and the Councils. The net ban came about without science because of Karl Wickstrom with a petition and a lot of signatures. He doesn't think the state should take over management of the fisheries because the Councils aren't beholden to an appointed office like the state management (commissioners) is. Bully net fishery is expanding drastically, bringing more and more lobster in per trip. There are thousands of people bully netting now. Trap fishers went through reductions and now there isn't a stop-gap on bully netters entering the fishery. Scared that if we let go of the federal management there won't be enough checks and balances at the state level. Wants more streamlined and simplified regulations (federal and state) and doesn't feel like that's been done. FWC is already hurting for money for law enforcement on the water, how are we going to get funding for additional stock assessments. (Jessica: FWC already does stock assessments for lobster and yellowtail for state and federal waters.) Thankful that FWC is opposing the BNP closure because the closure would force fishermen down into the Keys from those areas. The Councils aren't as slow as they seem, they can change/make a closure in a week and take emergency action and he has faith in them and they do a great job. Going to hurt people who make their money in the summer by doing a summer spawning closure for yellow tail. Traps have been reduced by x% since trap reduction was instituted, what other section/sector has done something like that? Still going through passive reduction. It isn't the same for something like the charter industry. There's never going to be more commercial fishermen than there are now, they've been heavily regulated. Tourist industry has brought in lots of people that use the resource.

George Scott: Lives on the bay, plantation key colony. Used to spearfish. In the 70's there were hundreds of lobster traps out there. Now there aren't many. Why is that? Because they caught all of the lobster! The lobster are gone where he lives. Lobster season is long and goes through hurricane season. If a hurricane comes through then the traps get washed out with lobsters in them and they are lost. Why not have a shorter season, it would increase the price of lobster. Used to be a spearfisher and now the grouper are much smaller (used to be able to spear 50 lb grouper and now you can't find that). He can't find snapper or grouper anymore. Thinks that snook regulations are great. There should be a maximum amount that recreational fishers can take (per boat maybe), no one needs to take 50 fish.

Charles Causey: More an economist who likes to recreationally sport fish. Has been living here 35 years. Looks at the trend in the Keys and where we are headed and he's worried because the whole economy down here is based on the water: commercial and recreational fishing, diving and snorkeling, etc. He wants to keep people coming here. 70% more fishers now in Monroe

County than in 1974. The fishery (commercial or recreational) has declined. He doesn't know what bag limits, size limits, etc should be but he doesn't think that what is being done right now is working and we're heading to a precipice. Have to take something from everyone (doing X is going to make group Y mad and doing A is going to make group B mad, they both have to give some). Need a combo strategy where everyone has to give up something for the greater good to improve fisheries. Bonefish was fixed a few years ago. Mentioned trout and throwing back small fish and release mortality (specifically when hooked in gut). He has bully netters in front of his house at night with loud music and such, the bully netting "problem" needs to be fixed because it's not fair to the trappers or even the people who want to recreationally catch lobster. Something that FWC needs to do but probably isn't a priority for FWC at the moment: trolling zones. Already part of the sanctuary plan. Need to protect the habitat. FWC is already doing a lot to help protect/improve habitat but need to do more in the Keys. There needs to be a mandatory boater safety course. Need more LE on the water in FKNMS. Must have small areas set aside as marine reserves (talking about planning).

Dottie Moses (representing Last Stand): Would like to see cooperation between different agencies (sanctuary, BNP, FWC, refuges, etc). Marine reserves seem to be effective based on science. Supports the science behind it and would like to see the state integrate this into their management. Need more LE. Education is important, also protecting habitat is important. Lots of users, high concentration of users (especially related to events) and thinks that that needs to be monitored more closely.

Peter Frezza: Thinks FWC needs to be exploring the concept of marine zoning much more than they are now. Traditional management techniques only take us so far. Need to start managing in different ways, collaboratively and maybe trying different techniques (closures along with regulation and education). FKNMS has a great knowledge and people have brought forward great ideas for marine zoning and are just trying to make the environment and the fisheries better for everyone. FWC really needs to stay engaged in the FKNMS process that is going on down here (in the Keys), have an open mind, and work with them.

Richie Hanson: Recreational fisher, doesn't actively commercial fish but is the treasurer of the Middle Upper Keys Organized Fishermen of Florida. Something needs to be done about bully netters.

- In regard to closures, we're using a one size fits all and it doesn't work. The Keys are unique. Thanks FWC for how it is catching violators on a limited staff, he thinks that they're doing very well with what they have.
- In regard to lobsters, they move around. Some years Key West is getting tons and Key Largo not any. Sometimes it's on the bay side and not the ocean side. Traps are their livelihood, if they're not catching someplace they're going to move on. The water is the economy in the Keys.
- The dolphinfish and grouper closure (just speaking commercially-wise), trap fishermen may be doing some of this fishing in the off-season to make a living.
- Spawning (temporary) closures are like a tax, there's no such thing. Fishers are afraid that it will become permanent.

Zach Czapek (charter captain): What evidence is there to justify a commercial dolphinfish closure in the Keys when tons of people make their living on providing fresh local seafood? He thinks that there should be a really good reason behind it before a closure is considered. Taking good quality food out of people's mouths. People are going to take a hit because of this closure and it should have been looked at before it was mandated. Dolphinfish are one of the fastest growing fish in the ocean and very reproductive. They see tons of them out there but now there are all kinds of new regulations on them. Handling a live dolphinfish that is a half inch short, measure it, throw it back, at least half of them are dying by the time they get it back in the water. The 20 inch size limit is no good, there should be no size limit because of handling difficulty. 50% or more die after release. Dolphinfish are sustaining the entire Keys. He fights with the morality of throwing back something that he killed, throwing it back for the sake of the law. Feels bad about it when he does it, sometimes has to measure a lot of fish to find a few legally sized fish. He thinks that if the people who created the closure had experience with the fish the regulations would be different. With the closure people are going to import it from another country.

Bill Kelly (FKCFA): The allocation of dolphinfish that is being proposed at the Council in September and conceivably the fishery could reopen in November. The three main issues are water quality, law enforcement, and education. Fishing isn't a problem in the Keys. People are actually looking for smaller bag limits. Recent assessments show key species to be doing well. Issues with the everglades restoration not happening in a timely basis. Warming waters can be seen. FKNMS has 2 LE officers on the water. FWC LE is doing a great job with what they have, but they need more officers and more equipment. Should have publications to help people navigate the marine sanctuary better (at the beginning of the Keys in a booth). Bully netting has become trendy and easy to get into. It needs more regulation. People are hurting private property. A lot of the bully netters who are "misbehaving" are not actually commercial fishermen. They are working with the village council and stuff. They have asked for FWC to make a commercial bully net endorsement (CB) so that people could be identified. Fully supports the endorsement being limited entry like the CD was when implemented. Diver impact has a huge impact on reserves and such but there are areas that that is allowed when fishing is not. There should be carrying capacity studies done on these important (coral) areas to find out how much people should be able to go there (a dive boat of 50 going out 2x/day). Has asked for a regional management plan for SE Florida. Started out much simpler than it has turned into. The state has done an admiral job but they have concerns with Magnuson and the discussion of the state taking authority over certain species. They like the dual-management. Especially concerned with the 5 state plan proposed for red snapper. BNP: the general and fishery management plans have evolved into complex plans, separated by having two plans instead of 1. Sees issues with the potential phase out of commercial fishing. Would take 50k lobster traps and move them into Monroe County which has already gone through trap reduction to reduce congestion. The commercial fishing industry is the second largest employer in Monroe County. Supports the size and commercial bag limit for barracuda. Recently announced that two committees, the House Natural Resources and Small Business Committees, are so concerned with the economics in S. Florida that they are holding field hearings in S. Florida and a tentative date for that is August 3rd. Letter from Nick that withdraws the state support of certain aspects of the general and fishery plan for BNP? Needs to get with Jessica about this. Two for one federal permit in the South Atlantic forces people to go after barracuda.

Steve Leopold (sport fisher and diver, charter captain): Would like to see the state and federal regulations be more consistent with each other. In regard to dolphinfish: in federal waters you can catch the captain/crew limit and in state you can only catch the harvester limit. Need to get things to get more on track. Would like to see the state remove the size limit on dolphinfish, believes it is based on perception not reality. He bets the amount that die from release is closer to 70%. If you count a small fish toward your bag limit, you can still have dinner when you get home. Would support FL reducing the bag limit for dolphinfish (currently 60 fish/boat/day); drop it to 50 even. Thinks most charter fishers would support this. Would like to see FL support a size and bag limit on blackfin tuna (even though it's not FWC's ball game, maybe talk to some people). He thinks the shallow water grouper closure was a great success (for charters). But the hype of the opening day and excessive bag limit allowed by the state hit the population very hard. There's no boat limit. Thinks this needs to be addressed before next year. The talk around town is similar to talk about the "kill them all" mini-season mentality. Eight black or gag plus eight red grouper is too much. Happy to hear that the state pledged to manage the forage fish and monitor the ballyhoo. He thinks it's well managed and great that the state is going to continue to keep an eye on it. For barracuda, thinks the 20 barracuda/vessel limit is too many (disregard, he thought that the 20/vessel was for recreational, not commercial). He thinks that 1/person for a charter is enough.

Tad Burke: Kudos to FWC for stepping up and coming to talk to people. FKNMS is going to deal with zoning; it's coming, it's around the corner. As soon as there's a loophole people are stepping in. Bully netters need to be addressed. Lobster for lionfish, sounds like a great idea, but mini-lobster season is a huge destruction of habitat and now we're allowing more people out there with spears. People are going to get hurt. How can things be enforced if LE is busy with people who got hurt. Have a big lionfish derby, have people to take an online class and have a big day. Give LE more teeth: if someone gets caught with extra lobster (25) once then they've probably done it and not been caught a bunch of times and the current violation/penalty won't deter them. Blackfin tuna needs to be regulated, needs to have a size and bag limit. He supports the size limit for dolphinfish, before the size limit people were taking dolphinfish that were so small that their tails didn't reach the top of the bucket. Mutton bag limit is too high and boat limit is needed. Did a great job on the shallow water grouper closure but the first day out was crazy and huge effect on them after the first day. Maybe give them more protection after the closure.

Julie Dick (works for Everglades Law Center, representing Last Stand and Florida Keys Environmental Fund): FKNMS is updating their management plan and the amount of public input that they're getting is really impressive and they're getting interesting input. Coral cover in the Keys is down 40% in 50 years. There are a number of things that can be done to protect the resources in the Keys. Supports the suggestions for increased enforcement and increased boater safety education. Maybe boater education can help pay for increased law enforcement. Water quality is bad. The closure in BNP is pretty negligible (~6%). There are examples of closures where fish landings increase 90% after the closure. Economic studies show that the Keys could have a huge economic boom from increased reserves. Reserves are a proven method that should really be looked at more and she strongly advocates for it and hopes that FWC can be open to those discussions. She isn't necessarily saying that the reserves should just be no take, maybe

they should look at having no diving as well. The example of Dry Tortugas showed tremendous results, both inside and outside the reserve.

Ken Nedimyer: Been diving down here since 1969. It's a shadow of what it was, you just don't see the fish that you used to see. BNP is most overfished reef area. FWC and South Atlantic Council have done a respectable/admirable job. Need to address the number of recreational fishermen, there needs to be a cap of some sort. Limiting the number of fishermen and marine reserves are both reactive issues that might need to be looked into. FWC is opposed to them but the tools in the tool box are limited and they can't be ignored. Fishing isn't the whole problem but it certainly is part of the problem. Guys who are on the water tell us some really good stuff and we should listen to them. Gripe: loophole in the fishery rules that allows parrotfish and tangs to be harvested and sold for food. This needs to be addressed. Encourage FWC to listen to what the sanctuary is going to be proposing and for the Commissioners to take a good look at it. Some of the things are out of the box and sometimes they're saying the things that other people don't want to say.

Unknown speakers (didn't introduce themselves):

- Dolphinfish closure has to do with a huge increase in dolphinfish harvest in the Carolinas
- Related to the 20 inch dolphinfish size limit: sometimes they come across entire schools of close to 20 inches and just don't even try to catch any, just move on. Seems like a certain time of year that size is almost the only thing they see. Maybe do something with that?
- Suggestion: Occupational license that may have a different limit for a (example) dolphinfish size limit. Would be for charters, people who have to produce fish for clients like charters do.

Mayor Mike Forster, Islamorada: An elected official but also recently a retail dealer and has restaurants. The Keys are the 5th largest tax base for the state of Florida and they feel like they aren't getting enough back from the state based on their tax dollars. Need more education and LE on the ground in Monroe County. Doesn't think that the fees or licenses needs to be raised, they're already paying a lot into it and need to get more back. Doesn't support closures. Would prefer to reduce the bag limit and keep a season open. Carrying capacity for things/areas, need more troll zones to protect seagrass. Reasonable limits for all fishers. Wanted more information on the make-up of the SAFMC and Jessica gave. He thinks that there is an imbalance or else there wouldn't be a dolphinfish closure right now. Sounds like people are repeating the same thing, but it's really consensus and that's what we need to hear. Closure in BNP, believes what the commercial guys there are saying (it will push fishermen south and into Monroe County) and that it will be a problem. Asks that that be kept in mind as well. Maybe have a closed area but not so large.

Suzu Roebbling: FKNMS FAC member and from a commercial fishing family. It's not like it used to be. Too many people. The fish are smaller. Even in a changing climate, marine reserves have been shown to be effective. The resources aren't free, what's their value? Opening day of the grouper season was predictable and sad. How much are the fecund females worth? How many other fish would that fish have produced? Agrees with the fishermen and thinks their input is valuable. There are just too many people, there's no longer a slow season. Barracuda need

regulation. Need ecosystem management. The 2011 FKNMS condition report says that FKNMS is in the worst shape of all national marine sanctuaries.

Brian Carlstrom (superintendent of BNP): Thanks FWC for their assistance in the creation of the BNP plans even though we've agreed to disagree with regard to the closed area.

Dottie Moses (*Comments submitted via comment card*): I agree with limiting dive operators in Monroe County based on carrying capacity of each reef. Too many divers on the reefs. Too many accidents and deaths. Too much damage to the reefs.

Peter Frezza (*Comments submitted via comment card*): A summer spawning season closure on tripletail should be considered. A sensible harvest of snook is 1/angler/season, not 1/day. Too many redfish are being killed by anglers throughout this state; bag limits should be reduced like snook. 15 inch minimum size limit is too short for seatrout. 10 inch minimum size limit is too short for gray snapper. *we can't catch them if they are dead*

Roger Thrasher Family (*Written comments submitted*): I would like to express our thoughts about the change of the stone crab trap size for our 30 year Family Commercial Fishing business. Changing the size dimensions that have been ruled for 60 years for an 8 cu ft down to a 16x20x12 or 3840 cu ft is a drastic change. Let's keep in mind that the Wooden Crab trap has been around much longer than the plastic traps. We're just asking that you please take into consideration the drastic size change, if you need to change the size let's work out something that all the fisherman that fish a wooden Crab trap don't lose their investment in their gear. We would like for you to give us a grace period to fish our gear, the life of a wooden trap is anywhere from 3 to 5 years before you have to replace them. The thought of us having to put these traps to the side, not fish them and build new ones is detrimental and could put us in debt. Myself, and family hope you take our opinions into consideration. Thank you. The Roger Thrasher Family

Coral Gables - July 8, 2015

Location: Hyatt Regency Coral Gables

Staff: Jessica McCawley, Martha Bademan, Mason Smith, Krista Shipley, Captain Mark Hodges

Attendance: approximately 12 (1 more came in with about 5 minutes left, not in the count but did give comments)

Miscellaneous notes:

How many people in attendance filled out the survey? 3

Public Comment

Caroline McLaughlin (National Parks Conservation Association): In recent years there has been a serious decline in fisheries and coral in the area. Coastal development, water quality, marine debris, etc. Traditional fisheries management will not be enough if the trend continues. Marine reserves are proven to work. Encourages FWC to seriously consider the use of national reserves

as a management technique. Support closure in BNP. Closure will still leave ample opportunity for fishing in the park because it is only 6% of the park. Spillover effects of the reserve could improve fishing in the area. Support the gradual phase out of commercial fishing in BNP through “use it or lose it” fishing permits. Everglades National Park, supports mandatory boaters education and would like to see similar proposals in the FKNMS. Supports pole and troll areas. The issue of enforcement is a big one and they’d like to see more resources put forward to enforce the policies that are in place. FKNMS – would like to see more reserves.

Norman Duncan: High usage supports the use of MPAs to ensure sustainability. He doesn’t think that most of the stocks “meet management goals” and he doesn’t think that the management plans are sufficiently addressing the problems. Comment on snapper/grouper, he thinks the answers should be based more on science. The accountability measures, he would like to see what they are.

Michelle Metcalf (Tropical Audubon Society): Strongly supports the marine reserve in BNP and the FKNMS and the baseline monitoring. Marine reserves have been proven, Dry Tortugas and examples in California. Spillover effect, fish outside the reserve are larger and there are more. Supports the closure and the phase-out of commercial fishing in BNP.

(Also submitted comments via comment card): Tropical Audubon Society strongly support the establishment of a marine reserve, no take zone and eventual phase out of commercial fishing within national park and adjacent marine sanctuary. We would like to see current baseline establishment and robust monitoring program implemented to show success rate of the program. We feel these measures are necessary to reverse this decline in fish populations documented by scientists. Established marine reserves in the Dry Tortugas has shown increase fish size. We fully support the establishment of a marine reserve at Biscayne National Park. We look forward to working with you to help protect species within our national park and marine sanctuaries within Biscayne National Park. Thank you for hosting this meeting.

Jerry Ault: Are things “good” in the state? The numbers from FWC have varied from \$7.5B-10B per year for recreation economic activity. Commercial fishing also adds economic value of up to \$1B. What is the state fishery budget? Has to be pragmatic about what can be done with the money that is available. Thinks we should be getting 20% of \$11B (based on the amount that fishing adds to the state economy) for fisheries research. “We don’t have the horsepower to do what needs to be done.” Needs to be brought to the legislature and governor. There need to be more partnerships. Ecosystem based strategies, he didn’t hear it talked about much in the presentation but has in the past. Very concerned with water management problems in South Florida and that there needs to be a higher degree of coordination between the involved agencies at the state level. Whatever happens with (grouper) recommendations should be based on science. The fishery is hammered and probably needs to be shut down year round and a closure not based on the spawning season doesn’t make sense. Hogfish stock assessment says it continues to be overfished and FWC ignores this. He’s not sure that issues like that are being addressed, don’t want it to be pushed to the wayside and the “victories” focused on too much. FWC supported the Dry Tortugas closure but doesn’t support the closure in BNP, which doesn’t make sense. The Tortugas is demonstrating that marine reserves DO work. “It’s the measure of last resort” according to what he’s read/heard from FWC and he disagrees. He thinks we need a network of reserves in Florida to preserve the ecological and cultural viability of our fisheries.

Thinks the state needs to seriously invest in good data for South Florida fisheries since that is what goes into models. How many fisheries in FL have we really assessed? Only a handful. There are lots of things on the marine fisheries agenda but what is the actual cost of accomplishing each of those. There is a broader base of support than FWRI in Florida that could be really helpful if we would allow it.

Marty Arostequi: Has been spearfishing, diving, and fishing in South Florida since he was a teenager (he's almost 70) and he has seen a major decline in fisheries. He is originally from Cuba. Groupers and hogfish mentioned specifically as declining. Can hardly find a legal hogfish anymore. He has fished all over the world. Has reviewed fisheries literature and learned about marine reserves. At first he thought they were crazy but the more he read about it the more he thought they were a good idea. He doesn't understand why FWC is opposed to a marine reserve in BNP. The decline in fisheries is starting to be so extreme that if we don't start thinking about ecosystem management, 15 or 20 years from now it may be too late. Urges FWC to reconsider the position on the closure for BNP. Urge protections for all spawning aggregations for all species but especially for mutton snapper. The fisheries are going to get so bad that people aren't going to come from other places to fish in Florida anymore.

Gil Muratori: Marine reserves work very well in Italy. He has read some of the arguments against the marine reserve in BNP and one of them was that it would prevent boating, which isn't true. He went out yesterday and caught dolphinfish, almaco, etc and he was nowhere near the reserve. The reserve is really just giving the fish a place to rest. He think there should be other places looked at for reserves. FWC is doing great with what they have but there needs to be more money for LE. Fish depend on other fish as prey, no limits on blue runner, grunts, barracudas, and people are taking tons of them and pretty soon there won't be enough prey for the larger fish. He thinks that FWC has a responsibility to the citizens to protect the environment and that every single species should be protected.

Allan Webb: Would like to see the scientific data to support closures, rules, and such. Concerned with coral loss, specifically related to deep dredging of channels and dredge material leaching out onto coral on the way offshore. Port Everglades is the next in line which is a big concern. Florida Power and Light has a big issue with the cooling in the channels and what are they going to do about that. The proposed ideas for digging water out of the aquifer to cool down the canals, would lower the level of the aquifer and opens it up for things like saltwater intrusion and he sees this as a big issue. Also concerned about using water in aquifers to cool equipment. Doesn't know what FWC could do about those issues. (Jessica mentioned that we followed the projects and provided our feedback/comments on them)

Laura LE (Miami Waterkeeper Intern): Supports the BNP closure. Wants to know if there is research being done by FWC for forage fish in Biscayne Bay. (Jessica's response: not specific to Biscayne Bay but surveys are done through our continued monitoring, can be found on our website)

Brian Carlstrom: (same as Islamorada) Thanks FWC for continued work on the fishery and general management plans for BNP.

Unknown (one of the directors of “Friends of Biscayne Bay”): Eliminating commercial shrimping in Biscayne Bay could greatly improve that environment. Bycatch, damage to the environment, etc. Thinks it would also bring back more recreational fishing in the area. Spearing, in the Bahamas: they don’t allow tanks or guns, only slings and free-diving.

Jupiter - July 9, 2015

Location: The River Center

Staff: Jessica McCawley, Martha Bademan, Mason Smith, Krista Shipley, Officer Rob Spanier, Major Camille Soverel, LE (Russo)

Attendance: 23

Miscellaneous notes:

How many people in attendance filled out the survey? 7

Public Comment

Ira Laks (commercial and charter): Delegation of South Florida species like yellowtail and mutton make him worried, partly because of bag limit sales that are allowed by FWC. Does FWC mean to allow bag limit sales of yellowtail snapper? How will FWC set bag limits? Size limits? Can recreational fishers fish into the commercial quota in the gulf? How would the Gulf allocation be handled? It is easier to get into the Gulf fishery and build a catch history – that puts Atlantic fishermen at a disadvantage. What if the Gulf goes to IFQs for yellowtail, etc? Doesn’t want IFQs. He feels that these types of questions need to be answered and are adding to the confusion about delegation and South Florida issues. Bag limits for charter boats when in federal waters might work. There are a lot of things that FWC hasn’t addressed that add to the confusion. Enforcement in Palm Beach County, or extreme lack of enforcement. He’s personally been stopped 3 or 4 times in the last year. He has purposely given them incorrect information to test them and has gotten off. For example, he has shown his vessel SPL with recreational bag limits of snappers on board for each crew member, but a vessel SPL does not cover crew’s recreational license to take snapper. Only an individual SPL can be used as a recreational license. All other fishers on a SPL boat would need a recreational license to fish, they cannot fish under the vessel SPL. Federal dealers have to report within 7 days but state dealers are not. As a federally-permitted charter boat, he can’t harvest a species when it is closed in federal waters (even harvest in state waters) but a state-permitted charter can. Customers come into the dock and see that another vessel kept fish that they couldn’t and they get upset. Recreational boats should not be allowed to sell fish with a retail license. He thinks you can be commercial and recreational on the same trip and therefore he could run his charter boat and take a commercial bag limit and sell it if he wants. There are people operating as charter and commercial without proper permits. FWC rules state that for commercial purposes includes harvest of at least two times the recreational bag limit (this is from rule clean up). Also the state allowing commercial and recreational harvest on the same trip allows state boats to charter and commercial fish on the same trip – this is not allowed federally and is an issue for delegation. The bag limit for bottom fish shouldn’t be 100 lbs for gray triggerfish or porgies. Things like this are why people are afraid of delegating the authority to the State for South Florida species.

They are afraid of losing Magnuson protections, and there are implications for MSA if FWC accepts delegation. (*said later*) Reiterate what some of the charters have said, people don't need to catch their limit if it's something like 10. Spawning area closures are important for aggregating species that have special behavior. The sharks are really populated right now, he's having way more shark interactions than there used to be but sharks are healthy for the ecosystem. Filefish are showing up in "hoards" now and that never used to be the case. Catching your own bait is much more of a problem now. For forage fish, it's not just the type of sand that is used for nourishment but also where they're taking it from because of how bait congregate. Concentrations of bait on the little artificial reefs in 20-30 feet of water makes it easier for predators to get to. Also, then they're spawning in smaller groupings and that might reduce recruitment. Sabiki rigs have made it very easy for people to target a lot of bait. Bait fish do not come together in large schools anymore and this is affecting recruitment. Protecting spawning aggregations is very important.

John Mike Newman: Very few captains have a federal charter permit but they operate out of 3 miles because it is so close on the Atlantic coast. These boats should not be able to fish in federal waters. This handicaps the federal vessel operators who are doing the right things. Forage fish have an issue in Palm Beach County, despite closures and protection from things like purse seines. They haven't had good forage fish populations and they are key to the commercial and recreational sectors. Some people spend all day fishing for bait. Worries that with FWC there are a number of constraints and you can't really manage the grouper complex across the Gulf coast and Atlantic coast. Goliath grouper – worried about FWC allowing harvest. Worried that we really need to look at the scientific data for goliath grouper, the recent (2010) freeze hurt some of the year classes, this is what also hurt the barracuda. Palm Beach is a key spawning area for many species. Thinks the 60% satisfaction (from survey) is about as good as you can do because of the complicated nature of the long length of the FL coast. With the future population growth we're probably going to have to have a lot more rules because there will be so many extra fishers. Educational workshops about things like how to use circle hooks. Had more comments later on about the value of a small fish's value on a reef compared to a large fish, better to take more small fish because the large fish produce SO many eggs and the likelihood of a small fish surviving to adulthood is small anyway. If there were more slot limits or something like only 1 above a certain size, specifically mentions mutton snapper. He has worked with FSU on goliath. There is no value in the small fish. Large fish are very valuable because of their reproduction and fecundity.

Terry Gibson: Grant Gilmore has called this area the "Forgotten Coast." Really need to go by the science in this area because it is really unique and really diverse. He is very concerned about the Indian River Lagoon. Habitat loss and water quality is DEP more than FWC but FWC needs to stand up to them on things more than FWC has been. Habitat loss and water quality issue is preventing FWC from doing their job. Thanks for coming! Dolphinfinch in Atlantic needs to be in sync, people are gaming it, maybe it needs to be an IFQ, they can work well when done right. Took 3 hours to catch bait today, caught two small snook, and was out all day. Death of the reefs from nearshore development and beach nourishment. Thank you for the forage fish resolution. Here the bait is bad, even if it is great in other parts of the state. Pinfish and pigfish are heavily dependent on seagrass and if you don't have it they aren't there. Both of these species are doing poorly. Sharks: lots of them around here. The top down, apex predators have

to be there or else things get out of balance. Goliath are being trained to eat fish. When out on goliath research vessels they find almost all shame-faced crabs in the stomachs and when they do find a fish it has a hook in it. Goliath are very important to the dive community and important for a catch and release fishery. Very pro-science and for science-based management. Something to simplify the black and mutton snapper is protecting spawning aggregations. Time regulations. Maybe then you wouldn't have to have such complicated regulations. Did a great job on Riley's Hump. Riley's has helped mutton snapper more than any other species. For black grouper, yellowtail, and mutton you need to protect spawning aggregations. FWC should protect even small spawning aggregations even if it is temporary during certain times of the year.

Tom Twyford (West Palm Beach Fishing Club): Echo the comments about habitat. FWC is a partner in a project, "Grassy flats." Anytime that FWC can do an ecosystem-based approach to management it is beneficial, especially in Southeast Florida where it is highly urbanized. You can implement all of the size and bag limits that you want but it won't work if there is no suitable habitat or poor water quality. Forage fish: have seen a decline in popular baitfish in the area and it concerns them. They are very concerned about herring and goggle eyes. Encouraged by the FWC forage fish resolution. Interested in deep reef issues, they've done mainly shallow reef stuff in the past, like what is going on off the coast of SC. He thinks that there's an opportunity for the creation of deep reefs (artificial reefs) and they would love the FWC to partner on something like a deep reef concept to help speckled hind and warsaw grouper. Thanks for addressing barracuda. Regulations proposed are a step in the right direction but it needs more. Recreational is fine but the 20/vessel commercial isn't going to do anything to allow the populations to rebound and rebuild local abundance. Should be more in line with cobia [1/person recreational, 2/person commercial, 6/vessel (recreational or commercial)]. Dolphinfin usually falls into federal jurisdiction here but catch them some in state waters and a 10/person bag limit, 60/vessel limit is ridiculous. Way too many fish for a recreational angler in Florida, although they understand why it might be okay for other states like NC because of things like limited windows. 5/person would be more than reasonable recreationally. 60/boat is ridiculous for recreational. 10 mutton snapper/person is excessive, maybe knock it down to 5/person. Would rather see a reduction in the bag limit than for it to be a closed season. Mutton may need a spawning season closure. Spawning season closures can be important but maybe a reduced bag limit is a first step to see how abundance is affected. Sheepshead: they'd support an increase in the size limit and a reduction in the bag limit, maybe even a 5/person. Sheepshead spawning aggregations in the area from Jan-March and are targeted by charters that can't get out farther/offshore. A reduction would give them a chance to get some fish in the boat for the customers but help protect some of the spawners. LE concerns: sad to see when FWC trains officers and then they leave for other agencies (Sheriffs, etc...), legislature needs to address their benefits and such to help incentivize them to stay with FWC. In this area there has been an increase in fishing and diving user groups and some of the user conflicts could be avoided by increased enforcement (example of charter boat, cobia school, and dive boat coming in so that the charter has to leave). Need more enforcement.

Bill Taylor (charter): Operates a large charter boat. Thanks for effort to maintain forage fish. Since 2005 his boat has never caught live bait. In 2004 the "powers that be" brought in dredge to nourish a beach, the dredge washed off, covered habitat, etc. Dust from beach restoration is hurting grass and forage fish. Oysters on pilings out here are dead. Don't even see any

barnacles anymore, sees more algae. His boat isn't even growing barnacles! Enforcement people can't enforce anything because there are so many laws. Paying them more would certainly help some things. Doesn't need 10 mutton or yellowtail per person, these bag limits are too high. No grouper here anymore. Since the beginning of January, they've caught 3 or 4 legal grouper and he is out 10 people/day, twice a day, pretty much every day the water allows. Have to make it easier for the people that have to enforce things. Reduce bag limits because fisheries need help. As a captain he gives gift certificates to people who are willing to release large fish on his boat. Maybe have some slot limits to protect spawners. Didn't need to go to 14 inches for gray triggerfish. It would be easier to manage if we could get the state and federal regulations to match up.

Unknown seatrout fisher: Talk about the flats, he didn't catch many last year (like 3). What he caught were nice and he's releasing all he is catching now. Some good news, there are grasses back in the MacArthur area. He hasn't seen a barracuda problem, he has tons of juveniles around him. Brown sandbar sharks on the reefs: if he hooks 15 muttons, he's only going to get 2 up because the rest are going to get eaten by the sharks. They're all over the place. Maybe do a lottery or something for them in the area. They're hurting the fishery, especially for bottom species.

Doug Kahle: Shark tourism, shark feeding: How can FWC communicate better: he can't get information about why it is illegal in state waters (to shark feed) but people can chum and bring them right up to the shore? It's obviously not about safety. Lots of news from all over the world coming here because of the sharks. FWC won't talk to him, FWC won't talk to the reporters who ask questions about it. The last few attacks have been on spear fishers. Palm Beach has the best shark diving in the world. If FWC is concerned about training sharks, spearfishers are doing that more than anyone. Feels it is discriminating because fishers and spearers can bring them to shore but divers can't feed them. Shark feeding brings in tourism and money to the county and they're doing it in a safe way where the sharks live. Also, the people feeding sharks are not killing them. He'll leave his card for Jessica to get back to him with the answer.

Unknown: Does FWC just manage saltwater fisheries or freshwater as well?
Jessica: FWC manages freshwater as well but that is done by another group.

Unknown jetty fishermen: Speaker is a recreational angler and loves the commercial side of things. Pier fished and jetty fished mostly. People catch undersized fish left and right and there isn't enough enforcement, especially Juno Pier and Jupiter Inlet. All you can do is call a 1-800 number and you never know what will happen. People just don't seem to care. Hardly ever sees people at the docks doing surveys or anything. On the Gulf coast someone is always conducting a survey but he has never been part of a survey on the Atlantic coast. Suggests doing something similar to hunting season where it is like a check-in station where people can report what they see/catch and when.

Unknown fishermen: Sharks: there's obviously a high concentration of them in this area in the spring. Regarding the laws that protect them, a lot of them are highly migratory and have regulations in place to protect them related to that. This might be one of the only places close to the coast where they're in large numbers in a small area but once they leave here, the places they

may be going to places with much lower numbers and the harvest here could affect those local populations greatly.

Unknown lobster diver: Thank you for the extra lobster this year. She doesn't shoot as many lionfish as she used to, but now she might get back into it!

Southwest Florida Meeting Notes

Naples – July 7, 2015

Location: Naples City Hall

FWC Staff present: Dan Ellinor, Kellie Ralston, Tony Bresnen, Nancy Sheridan, Gina Russo, and Tom Graef

Commissioners Present: Commissioner Priddy

Members of Law Enforcement Present: 2 (Major Escanio, Captain Mravic)

Number of Public Present: 14

Public Comment Period

Al Durrett – Owner of Fantails Marina (Sarasota): He noted that 12 charter captains work out of his marina, and in the last 4 years there have been increasing problems with seine netters, with 2 boats every year (3 boats this past year) in particular that come into the area around the marina (nearshore and inshore waters) and fish out all the bait fish. He noted that these fishermen have fished in other states and suggested that the state regulate commercial bait fish harvest by limiting or placing more restrictions on out-of-state harvesters. He noted that without a good supply of bait the charter boats cannot keep customers coming back to the area.

Grady Johnson – Commercial Blue Crab Harvester: He asked about blue crab and mullet. He asked about the issues that the FWC are concerned about relative to those two species.

Staff: The commercial blue issues are centered primarily around Homasassa and Crystal River, because of the mobile nature of the fishery and the effort concentration that can occur in some areas. The mullet issue is the seasonal roe run and how the FWC can address that issue. Staff are working with fishermen and law enforcement in the area on that topic.

He noted that the 1995 net limitation significantly reduced commercial fishing with the resulting 2" stretch mesh limitations. He suggested that there is a need to put a mesh size limitation on cast nets like is already in place for the entangling nets.

Staff: A workshop was held in Cortez earlier this year to bring fishermen and FWC staff together to work on potential solutions.

He noted that seine net issues could be fixed with changing the mesh size and allowing the fishermen to target the appropriate marketable fish. He noted that water quality has a lot to do with the blue crab industry and coastal development has reduced habitat quality.

Kerry Geroy: Her husband is a charter captain. She noted the issues with bait fish in the area. She asked if the bait issue was because of nets or goliath grouper, which have begun to overpopulate this region of Florida. She suggested opening a limited season on goliath grouper because of the large population. She also noted that bottlenose dolphins are also a problem in the area, and are very aggressive and eating released fish.

Staff: Staff are bringing a review and discussion of goliath grouper to the September Commission meeting in Weston. Staff have also begun to hear about dolphins being a problem in this area.

Bruce Butcher: He asked what action is possible for goliath grouper. He also asked about recreational and commercial allocations of species like red snapper. He noted that many of the problems with the red snapper fishery in this area have to do with federal management. He asked if it is possible to change the gag season to have it open during December, which is peak tourist season for the area.

Staff: The Commission will decide how to proceed with goliath grouper in September, and staff are currently waiting on a new stock assessment for the species. The most recent past stock assessment was inconclusive, so hopefully the updated assessment will be able to provide more information. Allocations between commercial and recreational differ by species. Currently, red snapper are allocated 51 percent to the commercial sector and 49 percent to the recreational sector, but that may change in the future. It is also important to note that management is also different for the commercial and recreational sectors. The Gulf Council is currently looking into options to extending the gag season in 2016, and one option would remove the Dec. 3 – Dec. 31 closure.

Other Questions

How is the Port Manatee hatchery doing? How many red drum have been released in this area?

Staff: The hatchery is currently working on red drum and other research projects. This hatchery is the only marine hatchery owned by the state, and is primarily a research facility, but there have been some small releases of red drum in Collier County. The majority of red drum releases were in Tampa Bay for a research project.

Bruce Butcher: When did the information for these workshops come out?

Staff: There was a press release last month, and another regional press release last week. Additional information is also available on the FWC web site.

Emily Porter: Has there been any talk of marine protected areas in this area of the state?

Staff: Not in this area, but there has been some talk at the federal level for other parts of the state, such as Key Biscayne.

Staff: We would like to know the best way to reach everyone. How do you prefer to be contacted?

Comments that the older generation likes physical mail. Sometimes something in the mail is more noticeable than something in email.

Other comments suggested that email is fine.

Al Durrett: Comment suggesting the FWC hold classes or talks at marinas once a year and describe what they do. This could help people spread the word to other stakeholders.

Staff: We have the ability to do these sorts of things with outreach staff. Please get with staff after the workshop about this.

Are stock assessments done regionally?

Staff: Generally, stock assessments are done for the stock's entire range, such as the entire Gulf of Mexico. However, the FWC has regional labs and does collect regional data that is fed into stock assessments.

How is recreational data collected? How will the Gulf Reef Fish Survey help recreational data?

Staff: The MRIP process collects recreational data throughout Florida by angler intercepts and telephone surveys. Staff has been hearing for years that the recreational data that is put into stock assessments is not precise and not an accurate representation of what is happening out on the water. In response, staff worked with fishermen to develop the Gulf Reef Fish Survey. This new program will help improve the precision of recreational data for species like red grouper and gag grouper. Recreational data will likely never be as precise as commercial data from the trip ticket system, but this is a start and staff believes the data will be more reliable.

Emily Porter (*Comments submitted via comment card*): Please consider adding Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in Southwest Florida waters. It's a proven way to increase fish populations. Thank you.

Pat Kirk (*Comments submitted via comments card*): We need to focus on more accurate landings reported commercial and recreational. We need law enforcement to control back door sales. We need to close the gap between Dept. of Ag/FWC and Division of Food/Restaurants.

Punta Gorda – July 8, 2015

Location: Punta Gorda City Hall

FWC Staff present: Dan Ellinor, Kellie Ralston, Tony Bresnen, Nancy Sheridan, Gina Russo, Tom Graef

Members of Law Enforcement Present: Lt. Mike Frantz and Officer Jeff Goggin

Number of Public Present: 33

Public Comment Period

Rhonda Dooley: She noted her concerns over tournament fishing in this area, stating that the Pine Island area typically has several tournaments going on at one time, which creates a lot of fishing pressure in the area. She voiced concerns over the recreational bag limit for blue crabs, stating that the bag limit is too high for recreational harvesters. She also had concerns that recreationally harvested blue crabs were being sold to as tarpon bait, and questioned the legality of that practice. She also noted the problems with too many redfish and snook tournaments in the area and suggested permitting fishing tournaments. She also commented about mullet, noting that there is a need for bigger mesh size for entangling nets.

Staff: Stated that it is illegal to sell recreationally caught blue crabs. To sell blue crabs you need a blue crab endorsement and an SPL. Staff is going to look into this issue with law enforcement to examine the sale of undersized crabs to be used as tarpon bait. For redfish tournaments, the only current permit requirements are if the tournament is a cull tournament. The mullet issue is the seasonal roe run and how the FWC can address that issue. Staff are working with fishermen and law enforcement in the area on that topic.

Jim Knoy (Peace River Audubon Society): He stated his support of the Commission on the continued monitoring of forage fish, and noted he would like more research on baitfish. He stated that there is a lot of ecotourism in this area that relates to birds. He also noted that he would like to stay up to date on any changes at the Commission level.

Staff: All the Commission meeting information is available on the FWC website.

Josh Olive: What was the forage fish decision?

Staff: There was a resolution to continue to monitor species, but no regulations changes to any species.

Gordon Roman: He stated that tournaments need to be regulated more closely. He also noted that blue crab sales are an important topic in this area. He asked about the Port Manatee facility, and asked if the state was planning on releasing more redfish in the area or if the state was considering creating more fish hatcheries. He noted that redfish in this area are on the decline, which could be due to continued coastal development and fishing pressure.

Staff: There are many species being researched at the Port Manatee facility, and the technology needs to be developed to successfully raise sportfish. There is a snook release coming up in a couple weeks, and the facility continues to work on redfish and other species. There are also more hatcheries coming throughout the state, such as the Pensacola hatchery. There is also a redfish stock assessment coming up soon, which should tell us more about the status of the stock.

Josh Olive: He stated that there is a problem with law enforcement in this area. He noted that a lot of people are actively avoiding regulations. He noted the need for stricter penalties, because

people who are caught poaching are typically not doing it for the first time when they are caught. He noted that fisheries management is dependent on people obeying regulations.

Staff: Recent federal waters regulations changes have also added to angler frustration. Staff understands that enforcement is a big issue. Officers are out there daily but have a vast area to cover, so the FWC needs to be creative about how to successfully optimize enforcement.

James Hoffman: Stated that he goes offshore to fish for grouper. He noted that commercial fishermen are fishing illegally in areas.

Staff: FWC officers are federally deputized, and can enforce federal rules in federal waters. Commercial fishermen have VMS on their boats, which means that law enforcement know where these boats are at all times. There is an effort to make cases on offenders, but in most cases legal rules require officers to have offenses occur in their presence. Please keep reporting illegal activity so that officers can establish patterns and potentially make a case.

Robert Lugiewicz (Tackle Shop Owner and Operator): He noted a lack of enforcement in this area, stating that there are local hotspots where people don't get busted. He suggested the need to work with state attorneys to make offenders pay. He also noted confusing wording in regulations, wanting staff to specify the non-offset circle hook requirement in the regulations book. He also suggested having more law enforcement in this area during mullet season, and possibly setting commercial limits and limiting commercial harvest from out of area residents. He stated that baitfish are heavily harvested in this area by recreational anglers every day.

Staff: Staff can work on regulations wording. Staff are working with fishermen and law enforcement in the area on the mullet issue.

John Gettinger: He asked if there are discussions with cities and counties to help with research. He stated that there is an issue with shrimp boats in the area, and suggested that shrimping may be negatively impacting redfish populations in the area.

Staff: Currently, there are only a few active commercial bait shrimping licenses in the area, and current data does not show a lot of changes in redfish populations, but the new stock assessment could provide more information.

Comment from another stakeholder: The spawning redfish populations offshore of Tampa Bay should be helping recruitment in Charlotte Harbor.

Taryn Wadley (Commercial Freshwater Harvester): She noted issues with data collection in recreational fisheries and how data collection is important to producing accurate stock assessments. She also noted the need to improve habitat quality.

Rhett Morris (Fishing Guide): He noted the potential to catch resource violations by putting officers at a boat ramp occasionally. He stated that fines need to be more severe and cost more money for violators. He noted the increase in fishing pressure in this area. He also noted that redfish have not had a closed season in many years, and it's the most important inshore fish in the state, so there is a need to consider a regional closure for redfish in this area. He also noted

that tournaments are a huge issue, and the state needs to push people towards sustainable use of the fishery through a more proactive management system.

Jim Hoffman (Punta Gorda Isles Fishing Club): His comments submitted for the record. In summary, his comments suggest a decline in slot or above red fish and concerns over the health of Charlotte Harbor. His main issues include a lack of angler education, high fishing pressure, needed habitat preservation, the need to reduce the harvest of food supply, the need to continue water quality monitoring, and the implementation of stock enhancement for redfish. He would also would like to see the costs of fishing licenses increase to provide benefit for fishing experiences.

Denise Reppa (Commercial Fisherman): She noted an overabundance of sharks in this area, and the FWC could allow commercial or more recreational harvest of sharks. She suggested looking into extending the opening of bay scallops into this area. She would also like to see changes to the mesh sizes for entangling nets to limit bycatch of juvenile fish, and would like a net advisory board to work on some of these issues. She commented that she does not discard white roe mullet during the mullet run. She asked how staff felt about a net advisory panel. She noted that some fishermen in the area depend on mullet year-round, and the state should consider limited entry for that fishery.

Staff: We want to work with fishermen on education and are working on potential solutions with the commercial mullet industry. There are potential workshops that could occur in the coming months.

Bob Leonard: He commented about not being able to get a snook stamp because he is over 65. He stated that he would like to be able to purchase a snook stamp to provide money for research. He also stated that everyone over 15 should have to pay for a fishing license, noting that there is a need to increase license fees to increase revenue stream.

Staff: We will look into the snook stamp issue for you.

Ralph Jones (Former Commercial/Charter Guide): He commented about terrapin turtles killed because of blue crab traps and noted that whiting have disappeared in Charlotte Harbor due to shrimp boats. He also commented that many regulations are not positively impacting species, stating that a lack of food sources for bigger predators has caused issues for more desirable species. He stated the need to protect species like mullet, shrimp, and blue crab. He stated that redfish are declining in this area, and stated the need for spawning closures for all species.

Rhonda Dooley (*Comments submitted via comment card*): I feel there is too many tournaments especially *several* on weekends for fundraising. Too much pressure on fisheries – should limit them. Juvenile blue crabs being sold at bait & tackle shops for tarpon bait. (Bag limit for recreational users?) And Power Pro line that is being used and discarded – dead turtles and birds. The more you advertise fishing capital of the world – the more pressure on fishery and conflicts on water. Too many people – not enough fish. Just more regulations.

Calandra Barraco (*Comments submitted via comment card*): Boater's Permits should be mandatory to operate a boat, including a boater's safety course. Fishing license restricted to state residents or at least make out of state pay much higher rate. Enforcement must be increased and fined for lawbreakers need to be much higher.

Dan Ferraris (*Comments submitted via comment card*): Need a strategy to increase funding of FWC for enforcement – increase license fee, reduce or eliminate exemptions like age (no 65 age exemption). Manage fishery for sport-fishing not for harvest – too much emphasis on using resource as a grocery cart. Close seasons for redfish to take.

Taren Thomas Wadley (*Comments submitted via comment card*): The state should seek, target and search top notch commercial fishers and collect their data and pay them and re-evaluate FWC data collection process and compare to experienced commercial fishers catches to prove its efficiency. The state should monitor non-native and invasive species overall size structure/target areas of bio-mass and reduce biomass and observe increase of overall size structure and monitor water quality as reduction increase.

St. Petersburg – July 9, 2015

Location: FWRI Auditorium

FWC Staff present: Dan Ellinor, Kellie Ralston, Tony Bresnen, Nancy Sheridan, Gina Russo, Tom Graef

Members of Law Enforcement Present: Lt. Grant Burton

Number of Public Present: 21

Notable Attendees: Paul Matthews, aide to Congressman David Jolly and Emily Muehlstein with the Gulf Council

Public Comment Period

Brad Kenyon: He commented on state noncompliance for the recreational red snapper fishery and the resulting short federal season. He suggested improving recreational data collection through an electronic tag system that could be initiated through a phone app which would be accountable and eliminate derby fishing. He also noted that a similar system could be used for the harvest of goliath grouper. He also noted that sector reallocation will not solve any of the problems in the recreational fishery. He also mentioned scalloping problems due to the fact that he has to trailer his boat to open areas and can't legally leave from or return to his house to scallop.

Staff: Goliath grouper is on staff's radar and there is a review and discussion scheduled for the September Commission meeting.

Taryn Wadley (Commercial Freshwater Fisherman): She asked if the FWC would be better off only using the best commercial fishermen to collect data. She noted that sometimes FWC research on lakes is incorrect. She also noted that mullet is a big issue in this area, and commercial fishermen need help marketing or selling mullet.

Staff: We are happy to pass along this information to freshwater research biologists. Staff is working with industry on the mullet issue.

Robert Wadley (Commercial Freshwater Fisherman): He noted that it is impossible to catch every fish in an area. He asked about the point of managing fisheries if it's impossible to fish out a lake or the ocean.

Staff: There is a need to manage fisheries to prevent too many fish from being removed from a population which could lead to lower reproduction and recruitment of future generations. We will connect you with research staff on this issue.

Mark Coarsey (Commercial Fisherman): He asked why there is no commercial representative on the Commission, and suggested the need for commercial fishermen to have input in Commission decisions. He stated that local people depend on mullet and other species, and people come in from out of town to harvest the resource. He stated that the 2" mesh seine nets are worthless, being inefficient to catch mullet and producing bycatch of other species.

Staff: The Governor appoints each of the Commissioners, so staff does not have control over who is on the Commission. Staff has been working with industry on the mullet issue, and one of the biggest issues is cast net fishermen discarding the dead white roe mullet. The Commissioners do care about stakeholders, and they directed staff to hold these workshops to get input from stakeholders like you.

Mark Lewis (Commercial Fisherman): He noted that cast nets are more efficient than seine nets in catching mullet, but using cast nets becomes tougher to do as you get older. He would like to have a pilot study for a season of the mullet run to test a suite of potential solutions before final rules are put in place.

Bill Tucker (Commercial Fisherman): He requested the FWC provide verbatim minutes for all public meetings (like the Gulf Council does), including workshops and Commission meetings to ensure every comment is captured in meeting minutes. He commented that FWC literature at meetings is not thorough enough, and likes the Gulf Council's method of presenting research data and analysis in the decision documents. He stated that he would like to see a commercial representative on the Commission to give more of a voice to commercial fishermen. He also stated that most of America does not fish for red snapper, and therefore depend on commercial fishermen to provide them an opportunity to enjoy and eat red snapper. He stated his opposition to sector separation and the 5 Gulf States plan, which he viewed as inappropriate because fisheries should be managed collaboratively with stakeholders. He also stated that he felt this plan was devised behind closed doors and created trust issues between FWC and fishers because they did not know about it and had no input in its development. He was also opposed to this plan because he felt that the red snapper IFQ program would be in jeopardy if the red snapper fishery

was removed from federal management and handed over to the states. He stated that the Gulf states going noncompliant caused the short federal season for red snapper. He noted his desire for Florida to promote catch and release fishing of species like red snapper, which is open to catch and release fishing year-round. He noted problems in the recreational red snapper fishery such as high-grading of fish and too many fishermen targeting this species, and suggested the Commission consider pushing for a 1 fish bag limit for the recreational sector, or keeping only the first 2 fish you catch (no discards). He noted the need for more accountability from the recreational sector and need for them to improve data collection and suggested a self reporting app for anglers to report details about their catch. Finally, he noted issues with getting emails through to the Commissioners, and he would like to be able to have a dialogue with the Commissioners on important issues.

Staff: Meeting minutes for public workshops and Commission meetings are recorded and recordings are available to the public. For Commission meetings, video is also available occasionally. The 5 Gulf states plan was not a Congressional bill, but more like a brainstorming session for the Gulf states to give Congressional representations an idea of what the states thought could work if red snapper management was turned over to the states. The Commissioners debated going consistent with the federal season, but felt that the reduction in the number of state season days would only provide a few (1 or 2) additional federal season days. Ultimately, the Commissioners felt that a 70-day season would provide the most fishing opportunities to anglers without significantly impacting the federal season. A 1 fish bag limit has been discussed at the Gulf Council and Commission level, but the vast majority of stakeholders have opposed a 1 fish bag limit because they felt it was not worth it to spend the gas to go offshore for 1 fish. In terms of recreational data collection, the Gulf Reef Fish Survey has been approved and is now a requirement for anglers targeting reef species in the Gulf like red snapper. This is a small step in improving data collection but staff are confident this will help identify who is fishing for reef fish off the Gulf coast of Florida, and allow researchers to contact those people directly for survey purposes. Staff is happy to help you get in touch with Commissioners and make sure your letters make their way to the Commissioners.

Emily Muehlstein (Gulf Council): Is there any idea of compliance with the Gulf Reef Fish Survey? Many anglers are still unaware. She also noted that recreational data needs to be scientifically valid before it can be used, and that can make self-reported data an issue.

Staff: This is an educational process and staff are trying to reach out to anglers through various methods to make sure people are aware of this new requirement.

Frank Chivas (Commercial Fisherman/Restaurant Owner): He stated his support of giving recreational anglers an opportunity to discuss how to solve problems in recreational fisheries, such as improving data collection. He also noted his appreciation for the Commission and the Gulf Council not raising the gag quota. He stated that fishermen appreciate having these meetings to provide feedback. He noted the need to find a use for white roe mullet. He stated that the red snapper IFQ is working, and commented that fishermen that supply his restaurants with fish are now able to keep red snapper instead of discarding them dead by leasing IFQ shares. He also noted his opposition to the 5 Gulf States plan and sector reallocation.

Marty Lee (Commercial Fisherman): He brought up a seine net issue of harvesting mullet and would like to connect head ropes and lead lines on his two nets when harvesting mullet.

Bobby Aylesworth (Fishing Bait Distributor): He stated that the research staff at FWC are fantastic. He also stated that the Commission handled the recent forage fish issue well. He noted that there is an issue with the decline in numbers of bait shrimp available in recent years, and would like for research staff look into that.

Staff: We will pass this information along to research staff.

Elizabeth Fleming (Defenders of Wildlife): She stated her support of the Commission's forage fish resolution, and would like to see more science on forage fish. She asked about the rationale behind the marine life commercial bag limits of dwarf and other seahorses and sea cucumbers. She commented on the need to have sustainable harvest of sharks.

Staff: The commercial harvest of sea horses and sea cucumbers is managed through a limited entry system, and all harvesters must have a Marine Life endorsement. Historical landings information is available for many of these fisheries, including dwarf seahorses. The commercial bag limit for sea cucumbers came about from a scientific study on population density and working with the Marine Life industry. The commercial dwarf seahorse bag limit came from historical landings. Staff is currently working on this issue and will provide her with more information.

Brad Kenyon (*Comments submitted via comment card*):

1). Red snapper – E-tag – year round fishery. Apply for E-tag – use them and apply for new tag until quota is used up.

2.) Closed areas – ie Scallops: Allow through app or GPS people to transverse through closed areas and show you did not catch in closed area.

Taren Thomas Wadley (*Comments submitted via comment card*, also submitted comments at the Punta Gorda meeting): Gain the knowledge of commercial fishermen both salt and fresh for data collection (the ability to catch does not come from a college education it comes from lifelong experienced hot shots). Give the commercial industry 2 men on the Commission so we are not discriminated against. Help sell white roe mullet and subsidize fish companies and feed the hungry schools.

Crystal River – July 10, 2015

Location: Crystal River City Hall

FWC Staff present: Dan Ellinor, Kellie Ralston, Tony Bresnen, Nancy Sheridan, Mathieu Lussier, and Sarah Stephenson

Members of Law Enforcement Present: Lt. Doug Loyed and Officer Thomas Reid

Number of Public Present: 6

Robert Mercer: How was this meeting advertised? Are you surprised by the low number of stakeholders in attendance?

Staff: The workshops were advertised by a statewide press release earlier this month and a regional press release last week. There were also fliers produced, and information about this meeting was in the local paper. An email about these workshops was also sent to every saltwater license holder. This meeting did have the lowest turnout of any meeting on the southwest workshop tour.

Public Comment Period

Phyllis Rosetti: Asked about the potential for RESTORE act money this year for this area. She voiced her concerns about the scallop population in the area, and asked if the state is planning on doing anything with scalloping in this area.

Staff: Some southwest Florida counties are applying for RESTORE act money, and requests for funding must come through the counties. Once money is acquired, these counties could work through state agencies. Currently, the state has no plans for restoration because funding comes through the counties. There will be a scallop presentation to the Crystal River City Council on July 28, and staff is happy to email you more information about this presentation.

P. Desai: What about scallop restoration areas (platform in Kings Bay) not being utilized anymore?

Staff: There was an issue with birds landing on the structure and killing scallops by polluting the water with fecal matter. Recently, the structure was purchased by a private individual, so things many happen in the future with restoration.

Captain Wright: Voiced concerns about flesh-eating bacteria. He asked if this bacteria can enter into scallops and pose a threat to humans who eat scallops. He also asked if there is monitoring of this bacteria by the FWC.

Staff: When you consume scallops, you only eat the scallop's muscle (not the gut), and are less susceptible to these bacteria. In addition, scallops are typically consumed after cooking, further reducing risk. The FWC does not monitor for flesh-eating bacteria, but if a case occurs FDACS will sample the area.

Comment from a stakeholder: What fish stocks are you seeing in Citrus County? He noted that there are many charter captains in the area who depend on fisheries.

Staff: We do not have information on the health of fish stocks for local areas, but the statewide status and trends report produced by FWRI does not indicate any species to be concerned about for this area.

Greg Hoying (Recreational Fisherman): He noted that fishing in this area is not as good this year compared to last year, specifically mentioning less trout, redfish, and snapper in the area this year. He also asked if the state planned on putting out more artificial reefs in this area to improve

offshore fishing. He stated that there are too many blue crab traps in the local river channel. He also asked about the reasoning behind lower bag limits for species like redfish and trout in Florida as compared to higher bag limits for these species in Louisiana.

Staff: While different fish species may appear to be on the decline this year, one year may not be enough time to establish a pattern, so it will be important to continue to monitor fisheries in this area in future years and see if fisheries improve or continue to decline. The state is working with different groups and counties on artificial reef projects, and staff is happy to get you in contact with our Artificial Reef program on this topic. Staff went out today to look at the situation with blue crab traps in the river, and will continue to look into this issue. In terms of lower bag limits here in Florida than in Louisiana, there is a lot more fishing pressure here than in Louisiana.

Comment from a stakeholder who asked if there are any updates on the status of goliath grouper. Staff: There is a presentation to the Commission on goliath grouper scheduled for this fall. Staff is also waiting on the results of a new stock assessment for goliath grouper, which should give us more information on the status of the stock.

Paul Loughridge (Commercial Fisherman/Fish House Owner): He stated his support of the IFQ program, and noted that he is opposed to sector reallocation for red snapper. He also commented on the 2014 red tide event, and stated that it significantly impacted the gag stock. He noted that he has not been able to catch gag grouper in any reasonable number this year. He stated that the results of the 2014 red tide should be considered in future stock assessments for species like red and gag grouper. He noted that he is opposed to the 5 Gulf States plan, because he felt that the IFQ program is working and does not wish to see the state take over management of the commercial industry. He also noted the need to find a better way to manage the recreational red snapper fishery, and suggested phone apps or fish tags as possible solutions to help lengthen to recreational season.

Phyllis Rosetti: She asked if manatees eating seagrass impacts fish stocks that rely on seagrass for habitat. She also asked if the FWC works with aquatic preserves.

Staff: We are not sure what impacts manatees consuming seagrass may or may not have on fish stocks, but FWRI does monitor the amount of sea grass coverage to look for trends. Our research staff does do some sampling within aquatic preserves.

Comment from a stakeholder: He asked if there is any talk about VMS or other ways to track recreational anglers and harvest to improve recreational data.

Staff: The Gulf Reef Fish Survey is now required for Gulf reef fish anglers, which should give the FWC a better handle on who is fishing for reef fish such as snapper and grouper in Gulf waters off Florida. Smartphone apps could be used in the future, and the FWC continues to examine ways to improve recreational data collection.

Phyllis Rosetti: She stated that speed zones in this area get very confusing and there is a need to simplify these zones for recreational and visiting boaters. She also asked about the status of oysters in Apalachicola.

Staff: Apalachicola oysters seem to be improving slowly, and a new area opened to harvest earlier this year. There is also a lawsuit in progress between Florida and Georgia which is now at the U.S. Supreme Court.

Panhandle and Big Bend Meeting Notes

Pensacola – July 13, 2015

Location: Sanders Beach-Corinne Jones Community Center

FWC Staff: Martha Bademan, Melissa Recks, Melissa Crouch, Dan Ellinor, Officer Livesay, Major Cooper, Bekah Nelson, Michelle Sempsrott

Members of the Public: (8) Tiffany Bates Representative for Congressman Jeff Miller's office, Robert Turpin, Bryan and Anna Clark, Dennis McKay, Jon Haldrop, Harley Willis, Travis Griggs

Questions:

Officer Livesay – Will the recreational sector have something like the commercial sector with an IFQ-type system in the way of a tag system.

- Martha – It is being kicked around the Council and open to ideas.

Public Comments Period

Dennis McKay (Recreational fisherman): Forage fish – fisheries work from bottom up. Accountability. Red snapper – We all need to sing together, including Texas. Been interviewed once on the dock. Start offering real solution and stop blaming people. MSA works. Recreational guys will continue to lose access. Need to work together as a group. Don't want to see red snapper go the way of the red drum. More outreach. More community spirit. Important to remember red snapper reach sexual maturity at 13 years and live more than 50 years old (Robert Turpin – correction red snapper reach maturity at 2 or 3). There is so much run off and affluent in the bayou which is a concern.

- Dan - How would you go about more outreach?
 - Dennis - Not really sure.
- Dan - Does there need to be more outreach on the federal side or should the state take responsibility to outreach both federal and state?
 - Dennis – Yes, there needs to be more federal outreach however that occurs.

Bryan Clark (Pensacola): Ducks Unlimited is a good model where the sportsman is invested in the future of the sport. Opportunity for recreational fishermen and divers to take more responsibility to hold each other accountable. Public should start investing their resources to set aside time for the fisheries to rest like a farming model. Not sure how to execute but think it would be great for the public to take responsibility in the health of the resource and look for support from state and federal agencies which can lend their resources to help. Instead of finger

pointing. Concern for the lionfish. They are becoming the dominant fish on artificial reefs. Concern about the increase interactions with sharks and dolphins and wonder if we are putting other tourism components at risk by increasing the shark populations in a major way. Species-whack-a-mole – as you shut down fisheries the next one gets hammered and it moves to whatever species is open. Ecosystem measurement. Use emerging technologies. For example, take a picture of a fish on an app that can measure the fish and you can keep the fish as long as you send to FWC. With keep the first fish people will cull, maybe a phone reporting system will help curb this and encourage more citizen science. Have a radar installment and measure trampling effect of the fishing pressure on certain spots. Have a place for people to look online or on a phone to see where the concentration of boats have been so they may be encouraged to go to less visited spots. Allow people more quality fishing opportunities. If we do reserves allow a grid to be fished one year and rest the next. Use technology to come up with new ideas. (Martha – FWRI is coming up with their own app.) Might be more incentive for people to report. Maybe have a drawing for those reporting for a lifetime license. Dive community can help educate what state the reef is in after fishing has taken place. Braided line is accelerating the decline of the reefs with how long it remains in the environment. Braided line is very difficult to cut with a dive knife. Maybe the community can start talking to others about the condition of the reefs.

- Dennis McKay – Agree Ducks Unlimited is a good model.
 - Dan – The issue is all the different sectors, but it is a good idea.

Robert Turpin: We recognize the challenges with the diversity of groups fishing, diversity of habitat, diversity of fisheries, etc. We are trying to provide year round access to the fisheries and we are stressing out the fisheries. Need to look at ecosystem management. By managing reef fish as a complex and limiting harvest there are more mechanisms than just harvest limits. Fish are being impacted by bycatch and it is increasing interactions with sharks and dolphins. You can have the best fish elevator to send fish back to the bottom and the predator is going to learn to wait at the bottom for that fish. Confident FWC can be the leader. Try something new like 4 months inshore open, 4 months reef fish open, and 4 months pelagics open. Or can have open and closed zones. Can maintain access while maintaining SPR. May not be able to fish for reef fish year round, but can help cut down on regulatory discards. Rules must be understandable, be able to be abided by, and also enforced. We aren't being good stewards, but we want to be ethical anglers and good stewards of the resource. I don't fish reef fish outside the red snapper season, because I kill more reef fish outside the red snapper season and it kills me. We are losing in the hearts of the fishermen with the management measures that are set. People have a hard time determining to follow the rule or follow what they feel is right in their hearts. This spirit is encouraging. Water quality is a concern and hope RESTORE dollars is going to help address these needs as well as habitat needs for these animals. Seeing the lost fishing tackle, the trend towards thinner lines these are entangling divers and marine life. In our permitting for artificial reefs, we are coming under more scrutiny with endangering sea life. We are having unintended consequences with improved fishing gear. Educate fishermen about lessening their footprint with losing tackle. Allow reefs to be cleaned and quantify that to report back to the manufacturers. Cognizant of non-consumptive stakeholders as well. Seamanship in boat anchoring and education in the utilization side. Being more cognizant with artificial reefs by removing things that can entangle anchors and fishing lines.

Ana Clark: Agree with Robert. The weekend after the end of red snapper season there are no more big snappers left. Kills me to watch 10-20 red snapper float away from larger boats. Keep the first fish you catch. FWC is doing an amazing job in communicating the value of the resource, but you can be better at communicating the science and the reason for the regulations. Scientific terminology does not translate to joe public. This is a resource we all want to take advantage of but yet still protect it. Public needs to understand the whole data source. There are some wrecks where there are a good 300-400 lbs of lead on wrecks with lost tackle.

Harley Willis: Manage Dick's Sporting Goods. Would love to see a better way of educating visitors. We give them the book before selling them the license, but think there could be a better tool for retailers to help educate the visitors. A lot of our issues locally are not the local fishermen, but it's the visitors not understanding the rules.

Travis Griggs: Release biggest fish back into the environment. Science shows 90% of fish released survived. Release the breeders. Consider slots for reef fish.

- Bryan Clark – Agree to release the larger fish. The hunter/fishermen evolve over time and as you get to later stages you understand the importance of the big breeders. Catch the 12-14 inch fish and release the larger. Such a warfare between public, state, federal, charter, recreational, commercial fighting over the last red snapper. We need to work together.

Travis Griggs (*Comments submitted via comment card*): Want to see slot size limits enacted for reef fish in state waters. Research shows that 91% of snapper survive if released immediately when caught from <100 feet deep. Lets release snapper longer than 25". Follow the success of red drum slot limits.

Destin – July 14, 2015

Location: Destin Community Center

FWC Staff: Martha Bademan, Melissa Recks, Dan Ellinor, Melissa Crouch, Bekah Nelson, Major Bruce Cooper, Officer Andy Maltais, Steve Shea

Members of the Public: (11) George Eller, Pam Dana, Tina Harbuck, Laura Tin, Stan Phillips, David Krebs, Tarra Wixom, Bernard Lefelovre, Chris Schofield, Chris Kirby, Jason Mikel

Questions:

Bernard Lefelovre: What is the state's management goal for red snapper? Why differ with the federal regulations?

- Martha – not particularly a goal on paper but Commissioners want to maintain access to the fishery while maintaining the stock. Commissioners saw an opportunity as the stock is rebuilding to give opportunity in state waters. They weigh and measured their options.

Pam Dana: Have there been a lot of state and guide boats in federal waters?

- Jim Green - yes, but FWC is doing what they can and it is hard to catch them. This is why guide boats need to be identified. Tags would eliminate this.
- Pam - Suggest getting on charter boats.
 - Maj. Cooper – we do, but don't publicize.
 - Pam – Publicize it so we make examples.
 - Maj. Cooper – Feds don't like us publicizing.
 - Jim – Can a picture be taken and that be enough.
 - Maj. Cooper – According to Florida Statute, in a case like this the crime must be seen by law enforcement.

Public Comment Period

George Eller: Federal and state permitted boats. What state does with federally permitted boats, not much the state can do. What the state does for state fishery, they are doing a fine job. Disappointed though in state people that were against Amendment 40 which was the best thing that could happen for the for-hire industry. The best thing about it is data. Real time catch data. Can do it with us since we are a small universe. We want real time data. Can do it with fish tags or electronic reporting. Each have a plan in formulation. State cannot really do anything for us (for-hire), but what they are doing I have no complaints. Getting around conflicting regulations is going 100% compliant with the feds. State is doing the best they can do with enforcement. When boarded, the officers are fast and professional. There needs to be 10 fold more of them. State needs accurate data from recreational fishermen. Until then there is no management plan. Tags do away with derby fishing. No competition between for-hire and private sectors. Open gray triggerfish. Why is the state petitioning congress to get rid of Amendment 40 (regional management) which would do away with federal management? State has to get a handle on real time data for private recreational fishermen and guide boats.

David Krebbs (Ariel Seafoods): We don't want a loss of our heritage. The states that supported Amendment 40 protected our charter fleet. Was disappointed with the state last year when you went non-compliant and squeezed the fleet further. Allocation split with red snapper is fair. I understand you want to still get red snapper in the restaurant. Status quo with allocation is the way to go. Remarkable to see red snapper back on the menu. Would like to see that remain. Taking fish from one side to give to the other is not the way to go. Need to see how this flushes out over the next several years to determine what the dynamic looks like for all the states. They are all a moving target that has been identified over the last 10 years. In the 90s used size and bag limits, but now the fish have grown up and it has become an issue. How are we going to manage a fishery that we are no longer fishing, but finally catching? Which is a wonderful problem to have. Catch first 5 reef fish. Thank you for coming up with a reef fish panel. Maintain something genuine about the south other than being just a great tourist destination. You are in a tough situation and we want to help. Do not want to see this go backwards. More people fishing then enough fish. Need to manage 2005-2006 stock that has recruited into the fishery. Need to educate private anglers and hold for hire and commercial industry to a higher standard. Help the private recreational sector grow and maintain access. With a tag system you are

accounting for the fish and it takes enforcement of state and federal waters off the table. Cobia, what an opportunity for Florida to take the lead on a stressed fishery. The commercial value has gone through the roof.

Bernard Lefelovre: The state having different red snapper seasons than the federal season has instituted confusion. Coincide with federal regulation for lack of confusion. Fish a lot in state waters, but a federal permit holder. Constrained by my boat's speed. My boat caught 183 red snapper during the federal season. If I had 400 tags for the year I would not be overfishing the season. Limit on my boat is hardly ever reached. One red snapper per person is good with me. Similar to headboat cooperative. Plus you get the data. We are catching cobia in June and July off wrecks. See a lot of small come through and may be hurting them by catching the smaller 33" cobia. Consider a closed season during June and July.

Stan Phillips: Concern about enforcement. When non-compliant it is harder to enforce. It is thin in state waters and right now it is a dangerous place to go. Like to see state go with fish tags. Would kill less snappers using fish tags. I don't need that many snapper, can deal with one red snapper per person. That way with tags, when you're out you're out. There is just not enough fish for everybody. No other way to manage the fishery. Hard to cheat the system. This is a fair minded group that isn't out to wipe out all fish, we just want to manage a fishery and the state not get in the way of that, especially with Amendment 40. Not everyone is going to be happy. This fleet is a very un-greedy bunch. We have had to learn to be un-greedy because we have had the short end of the stick for so long.

Scott Robson: Commend you on going compliant with greater amberjack and gray triggerfish. Recognition for state boats so we know who they are like federal boats. Certainly start out with reef fish tags for state boats for sure. Then eventually a tag for primary targeted fish. Help with accountability. Issue tags to start figuring out what's being caught. The guide boats don't have to register for the Gulf Reef Fish Survey and that is a huge portion of fishermen that you are missing information on. It has been a tough season for catching red snapper. Sector separation is the closest tool we have had to fish in a decade. State back off managing federal fish and just manage state fisheries. Stop going to Congress to fight federal issues. People saw the pressure that happened this year. You would be hard pressed to catch a red snapper in state waters this past Sunday. Cobia, there are no more. That fishery needs a lot of attention. Cobia gets worse every year. May be due to more effort. Talked to the Advisory Panel, they all said cobia are getting worse every year and that was from all Gulf state members. Suggest a slot limit to protect breeders and give the gamefish status. We used to catch 10 fish on average 45 days in a row, but there aren't those numbers of fish anymore. The fish grows so fast so the population can rebuild quick with just some attention paid to them. Florida should be the leader to get the other states on board. Other states are considering larger size limits. Maybe 33" is a bit too small. Primarily targeted and caught in state waters. There is more pressure now on cobia than ever before.

Pam Dana: Cobia are robust this year in Mississippi, in other Gulf states, and on the east coast.

Jim Green: First time we have come close to an equal fishery in a long time. Like Commissioners to change stance on Amendment 40. Fair access fishery. It is good for the for-hire industry. Private recreational fishermen have almost 20 more days to catch red snapper this year than the for-hire fishermen.

Capt. Bryan Korley (*Comments submitted via comment card*): Until there is some sort of management plan for the CFH industry, I am in no way interested in a state run system.

Panama City – July 15, 2015

Location: Gulf Coast State College

FWC Staff: Martha Bademan, Dan Ellinor, Melissa Recks, Michelle Sempsrott, Bekah Nelson, Captain Mark Clements, Steve Shea, Officer Travis Basford, Officer Drew Nelson, Major Bruce Cooper, Michelle Smith

Members of the Public: (5) John Pipkin, John Boggs, Dusty May, Mr. and Mrs. Gary Jarvis

Questions:

Would like to know what the issues are for stone crab and spiny lobster?

- Staff – stone crab catch is declining and prices are going up. Long term overfishing in that fishery. Too many traps in the water. Both fisheries have room for improvement i.e. trap design, # of traps in the water, etc. There are trap issues with blue crab as well since fishermen travel around the state to take part in the fishery. There are issues with trap fisheries in general. Industry wants us to look at a few things.

What are issues with goliath grouper?

- Staff – More people are seeing more and bigger goliath groupers. There is a stock assessment happening and the results will be presented to the Commission.

How do you do an assessment on goliath grouper?

- Staff - It is difficult. They are pulling data from anywhere they can get it. When they do the assessments it is reviewed by outside reviewers and with the last stock assessment it was found that there was not enough data for the assessment to be approved by the review panel.

Can you correlate a decline of spiny lobster with an increase in goliath grouper?

- Staff - There have been a lot of studies on what goliath grouper eat.
- Public - You can't find spiny lobster up here anymore. Goliath groupers are aggressively feeding on spiny lobsters. We would have more spiny lobsters up here if you can take a goliath.

When is the last time you have seen anyone catch a warsaw? What's anyone doing with them?

- Staff gave input.

Is there anyone managing goliath or what is being done?

- Staff explained what is happening with goliath grouper.
- Public - Goliaths are getting worse then sharks up here. Sell 1000 tags from the state to take goliath groupers.

Public Comment Period

Dusty May (Port St. Joe): Put a size limit on scallops from the base of the shell to the top (had a tool to show). That would make scallop season discussion mute. FWC works for us the citizen and you need to get back to your core mission of protecting resources. Is Operation Dry Water resource protection? Getting folks for tearing up seagrass is resource protection. We hired you to protect and preserve our resources. People are now sinking beer cans because they don't want to be caught with it. You guys may be doing more damage by concentrating on beer rather than the resource. If you see a guy digging a trench through the seagrass we need to concentrate on them. At some point someone has to start telling the truth about what's going on out there with the dolphins. You guys need to talk to the charter captains to see just how many fish were killed by dolphins. The dolphins know if it is snapper season. Invent a sonic device. Discards started it. Appreciate what the Commission did with the state red snapper season. Get the feds to give private recreational fishermen our 10 days over the weekends. Pursue getting control out to 90 feet. Change SPL regulations to stop cobia commercial/recreational sale. Wish private recreational fishermen were more organized like the charter fleet.

John Boggs (Bay County): Invented and patented the GoFish bag which is an insulated bag for billfish. When tournaments became a big deal and the weight of the fish became important these bags became popular and are still being used. Also invented and trademarked a live well for cobia...the Cobia Tube. If you would declare cobia a gamefish, put a slot limit on them, and tournaments would be catch and release, we could increase that population. He has a reef fish plan that he will leave with us. The plan lists out considerations for implementing an aggregate reef fish plan for the Gulf. It has two categories: the barometric effected fish and those not so vulnerable (list what fish are in those categories along with bag and boat limits). Instead of individual seasons for each fish you would have a 72 day fishing season, May-Oct. Friday-Sunday. Great for law enforcement so there will be no reef fishing four days a week. The other collateral benefit with an aggregate limit you don't throw anything back. The most abundant fish would be caught the most and the least abundant be caught the least. We have taught dolphin a better way to feed themselves. Friends caught 18 pompano and only boated 9. Another dolphin pulled a king off the hook. It is absolutely against the MMPA to feed them. Maybe FWC is turning a blind eye on those feeding them. With freshwater fish we have an aggregate bag limit in Florida. If it works for freshwater, there are way more reasons to implement it in saltwater. Federal needs to adopt the same plan. Form a coalition with other states to make some inroads with NOAA/NMFS. An aggregate would be better than seasons for each species that you catch in the same areas. Saw a lot of gray triggerfish this weekend. Going to meet with a senator about reef fish plan. Another part of the plan requires charter to keep logs and private recreational anglers must report. Keeping the first fish you catch makes more sense to me. What was the foundation for the freshwater aggregate? Martha – hard to tell apart, hybridizations? Get charter boats to agree to participate to get data from them on dolphin depredation. Spread the season out over six months so that the season goes longer and it benefits the hotels, charters, etc. Stop private recreational anglers from selling their catch.

Gary Jarvis (President Destin Charter Boat Association): FWC has done well over the last 6-7 years. The recreational stamp is a step in the right direction to get better data for the private recreational fishery. Gives you a universe who is reef fish fishing. Going to make science and management community more eager for more data. Carcass tag. Science needs to take a better look at what the nine mile population could withstand to determine how many tags the state could give out to private recreational anglers. FWC would know who participated, how many times, etc. Would put Florida at the forefront of recreational data collection and management. Appreciate going compatible on gray triggerfish and greater amberjack. That was huge. Going to go a long way to rebuild those fisheries and keep within the FMP. Go further to get better data from private recreational anglers. FWC needs to write a management plan for state water fish. Focus on developing a system that deals with private recreational access, accountability (actual participation rate, harvest rate, and discard rate). You will have science behind you other than political wants. Increased accountability would help. Federal managers are dragging their feet because there is no science to back up what is being seen on the water. We can more quickly say we have a problem that needs to be addressed. Cobia this year by far (been trending downward for 7 years) the absolute worse year of fishing in the Panhandle ever. It wasn't because of weather or too many people fishing. Banning the sale of recreationally caught fish will reduce effort at some level. Have a slot limit. Tournaments fish for the biggest. When fileted they have billions of eggs. Stopping sale by recreational anglers will solve a large portion of the problem. Keep commercial fishery to keep cobia in the market. Commercial has to have a federal reef fish permit to sell cobia (Martha – we can't require a federal permit for cobia. Cobia isn't a reef fish. We tried doing this down south with yellowtail snapper and we found we can't do it legally). Then go no sale on cobia. Guys who deal in cobia say we have to stop doing this. They recognize we have created a monster by doing this that is wrecking the resource. Asked feds to go to one fish in federal waters. FWC have to stop politically lobbying things that effect economics in state waters. FWC has to do a better job at co-managing the resource (red snapper). Charters can't manage on a three day a week season, but the private recreational anglers may be able to do that with working five days a week. They have unique needs that are different than ours. Commissioners support sectors that have ways of managing that work and stop trying to do away with Amendment 40. Co-managing would allow longer seasons for private recreational anglers. Or go to a tag system that would work for them. FWC expend more energy on private recreational needs and leave charters to federal management. FWC needs to be more science based when making management so Commissioners can make decisions on science rather than politics. Each of the states can be a part of and not stand in the way of federal management. That conversation has to be had with the Commissioners. Would rather work with Martha at the state level rather than be on polar opposites due to political pressure. Recreational lobby groups don't take responsibility to educate their fishermen and come up with workable/accountable ideas, they are just trying to protect their interests.

Steinhatchee – July 16, 2015

Location: Steinhatchee Community Center

FWC Staff: Martha Bademan, Melissa Recks, Dan Ellinor, Matthew Lussier, Michelle Sempsrott, Officer Nick Korade, Officer Leonard Bailey, Sarah Stephenson, Chris Wynn

Members of the Public: (22) Jim Zubrick, Paul Reeves, Geoff Wallet, H. Dale Herring, Robert Benton, Gary Alberts, Ellis H Doshier Jr., Robert A. Fleming, James Martin, Danny Lanier, Patty Zurbrick (?), Capt. Brad Riddle, Steve A. Art (?), Steve Kroll, Scott Childress, Donald Campbell, William ?, Brian Smith, John Messick, Billy Boone, David Capo, Walter Boone

Questions:

Accountability of Florida. 5 redbfish in GA, does that have nothing to do with the 5 states?

- Dan – They are talking more reef fish, the inshore fisheries are handled by Florida. We have the ability to set our own regulations for those since they spawn locally and stay locally. We coordinate with the states, but can work more independently.

Florida received a large amount of money from BP, even Taylor County, did FWC get any of that?

- We got some to restore scallops in the panhandle, but we had to apply for that and I believe other projects did as well. I don't think it can go to law enforcement, it has to go to restoring fishing opportunities. It is very specific. It can't just be applied however we would like to use it. The counties are getting a percentage and they are working on plans for their county.
- UF – we can get together and take it to the Legislature and ask for more law enforcement officers.

Public Comment Period

Dale Herring: Don't go back and not listen to us. Concern is sturgeon killing people. Won't take kids to Suwanee for fear of the sturgeon, does FWC have the will to join us and go to the Feds to say we have an issue?

- Staff – We are on the same page but not sure how that solution looks like. The Endangered Species Act is an upward battle but we will take it back and see what we can do.

Biggest concern! Is there something I can do?

- Melissa – You can contact the FWC Commissioners, the Governor, etc. You can also attend Commission meetings to speak directly to the Commissioners

Please send me an email with information.

- Officer Bailey – We do have officer patrol out there. I agree with you. We have had sturgeon hit us to. We have those concerns. Have the people get on the website if you have public outcry.

Robert Benton (Commercial fisherman): Accountability, the commercial sector is monitored and account for every pound we catch. We now have a charter boat sector who will be accountable for what they catch. It's like the government has a checkbook and they are taking checks but not accounting for the numbers. You have programs to where we can actually find out what's being caught. The whole thing is everyone says flawed data. Now is a chance to take on new programs to get real time data before they get back to the dock. Use tools that are there for all sectors.

Jim Zubrick: How many recreational fishermen are here...? The issue is about the recreational fisherman. The other two sectors, commercial and charter, had to do unbelievable things to get the states in the Gulf and Florida to put electronics on the boat to count the fish. If the problem is with the recreational sector where are they? They are not here. Commercial fishermen want to help. We have swallowed the pill with the tracking systems, etc. I don't want that for the recreational fisherman, not that extreme. But for it to work, the recreational fisherman has got to report every red snapper. This is the real problem, we are trying like heck to get over this hurdle to make accountability happen and no not everyone is going to be able to fish. This isn't the 1960s when we had 2 million people. We need more then seasons and size limits. We need red snapper tags, even if it is only for 2 a year, but at least you can go anytime you want. Enforcement will be easier. Main thing is accountability. Don't have to get exact, but have to get closer. The feds are not doing this, the Council is made up of members from the Gulf States. We can't get the 5 states to come together and that is one of the problems. It is tough love. Kids these day will not be able to fish like I did. I work with Council and I know it's tough but we have to do the right thing. True counting of the fish.

Walter Boone: The commercial fisherman has so many rules and regulations that it makes it so hard to make a living. There are shrimpers out there that have to make a living too. Down south they found out there wasn't enough bird droppings so when they put roosts up and more birds came and therefore they have more seagrass. Net ban, how many would like to see the trout and redfish you saw years ago. Because of the net ban and we have this little hole we catch baby fish. 4 years after the net ban we had the decline. Just before the net ban we had a shorter net and could only catch 500 pounds a night. Bring back the net that will let the babies and young females through.

- Brian Smith - The net is an indiscriminant way of fishing and scrubs the slime off the baby fish.

Before the net ban we had millions of fish and now people can't even cast net off the beach to catch anything. If we keep going like we are going then we can forget about the fish. We are going to lose more trout, redfish, and mullet. 1000 commercial fishermen quit fishing when the net ban happened. 100's of restaurants shut down because they couldn't get the fish. If we don't do something about it this year or soon we are going to have less and less fish altogether. Even for those that fish offshore those little fish feed the bigger fish.

Steve Kroll (Fishing Guide): We have two different issues here with inshore and offshore fisheries. Locally we have lost a tremendous amount of seagrass. We have had dirty water for the last two years that is cutting sunlight off to the seagrass. This has really happened in the last couple years. The crab traps are allowed to keep seabass as a bycatch and allowed to sell them. I am a guide and we used to always be able to count on them, but now they are gone. We did have a red tide or 2 in the fall. Haven't caught the trout we used to. Redfish way off too. The schools of reds we had 3 years ago, they are nothing now like then. The scallop trips is going really well. We have short trout so we feel it will recover. To law enforcement, we need more help in the

winter when the trout especially are the most vulnerable. The loss of seagrass may be a factor for decreasing redfish.

Gary Alberts: Good data is essential. There is a charter log book where they are installing 300 VMS on charter boats. Technology is the very latest. Very easy to use. Information is entered at sea. That way you don't have to do anything when you get in. That is real time data. Excellent data. They are going to tell you how many you caught of all species, not just certain species. If you had this system on some of these boats, you would see the trend coming. You would see the tail off in the catch. This gives managers a much better picture of what is in the Gulf right now. You only see trends now when they are gone. Need forward thinking on data collection. This kind of a program will work. NMFS will use this data to forecast trends in the fishery which is a management tool. You don't have to react you can act before. You can't manage anything without good data. Right now we have 2 sectors that are working together and one that does not want to cooperate. We are ready to begin developing a reporting system for the recreational sector. The longer we wait the harder it will be to get cooperation. These 300 guys are really willing to help, so why won't the recreational sector come up with a plan, why won't you come up with a plan?

- Staff – we are working on it.

Use cell phones. They are using this tool right now for tournaments. Ask the Councils to consider backing this and develop a program for state inshore fishermen to get more accurate data to manage fisheries. Can't manage anything if you don't have accurate data.

Ellis Doshier (Commercial): Snapper accountability. We will never know exactly what is out there, but we can know what we take out. We can get those numbers but we choose not to. I was opposed to VMS when it came out, and I am sure recreational fishermen don't want it either, but fishing is a privilege not a right to cull through fish. Maybe your fear is that you are going to be cut on what you can catch. You aren't overfishing the resource if you are catching the same thing every year. If the catch is higher and the stock isn't collapsing, then you need to raise the total allowable catch. Need a system easy enough for recreational fishermen to count their fish for accurate numbers. Tag system. You can go online and get an alligator tag. Use the technologies we have. Everyone has a SMART phone. We need the information. We are making decisions on he said she said. Whoever is catching the fish needs to prove what they are doing. I was the guy in the room that everyone was shooting daggers in my back, but now we are accountable. We don't ever go over our quota. There is always something left. We have improved the numbers that we take out. Need a system where we have long term viability. Chances are they will get more days when it's all over. Hard to convince me that there isn't the numbers of snapper out there that I am seeing. Charter VMS system, those guy love it. You can plan your economics over the year. Derby fishing will kill you. State representative on the Federal Council, recalibration on red snapper, you cannot take from an accountable sector to an unaccountable sector according to the Magnuson-Stevens Act. If it happens it will go to court and you will lose because the law is the law. If you don't like it fine but the law is the law. Only 3% of the recreational sector go to federal waters and you are taking access from a lot of people.

Scott Childress (Commercial spearfisherman): Thank you for taking the least aggressive stance with the gag staying status quo. I have bigger fish inshore which I haven't seen in a long time, but guys elsewhere are not finding them. They are recovering but are not there yet so would hate to nip it in the bud. Red snapper reallocation, stay status quo. It does nothing for the recreational sector, but hurts commercial fishermen and restaurants. Luiz Barbieri and the Feds do an amazing job getting as close as they do when dealing with the data. Do like a deer management system managing by areas. Hunters can see the finiteness of hunting but fishermen cannot see that. Education is key. Awareness. Get more people to do the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) survey. Was at the MRIP meeting and the recreational folks there were amazed at how much the recreational sector is the problem with lack of data. Law enforcement is severely underpaid and need more of you. Brought up to Roy Crabtree in Hudson, I can't remember the last time I saw law enforcement. If I want to find law enforcement I drive to Clearwater and they are directing traffic which they should not be doing. That's why I told Roy since they provide funding. Poaching is running rampant. Seen hogfish backdoor sales. I cannot get in touch with law enforcement. Manage Atlantic and Gulf differently for reef fish.

Donald Campbell: Seagrass, there is floating green grass and cannot run my jetboat. It still has roots attached. It does not disconnect itself. We are losing miles. There is no grass in areas I fish and I keep moving inshore. We are losing more and more and it's been this way all winter. Big beds of grass floating out there right now. Something is tearing it up from the roots. My jetboat is sitting on the trailer because I can't run it. There is redfish out there, but nothing like they were 3 years ago. If you cut it back to 1 it will tickle everyone here. I don't think we have the redfish population to sustain 2 redfish.

- Gary Alberts - It is all related to bait shrimping.

Brian Smith (Charter fisherman): Solution to the problem, increase the value of fines for violations. That way you can increase income and allow more employment (law enforcement, biologists, supply more presence at the docks to count catch, just more of a presence). If they think they can't get away with it, they can become more accountable. I am accountable for myself. I depend on my charters for my income. When laws impede me, my income goes down to zero. Especially in winter.

- Melissa – our agency doesn't have the authority to set fees, so I encourage you to talk to your legislators about the penalties. We are working on a packet about fines to present to the Legislature, but we do not have the authority to set it.

David Capo (Blue crabber): We have a set of rules that designates the different traps and what I have seen in the last 3 years, each area has different amount of enforcement. I see 2 and 3 people working off one endorsement. They are fishing blue crab traps under softshell buoys. We need to pull more traps to check what's happening. It is clearly obvious to anyone that looks. I have gone to law enforcement but they don't respond. Taylor County is the only place I am checked. I have photos of boats without registration numbers on them in Suwanee River. There are people that are paying nothing, I pay \$2,000 a year for my license. My next stop is the Commission. I have

lobbied the Legislature. The message I am trying to send is the lack of law enforcement. If we have rules they have to be enforced. We are losing our management plan for blue crab.

Geoff Wallet (Marine Extension Agent, Cooperative Extension Program, UF): I work for the government and I am here to help. I am not regulatory, my major role is education. I am offering to help do educational efforts and it is up to you to advise me. I have heard a lot of good stuff tonight. FWC and local officers help me a lot. FWC is not going to cure this problem, I am not going to cure this problem; we have to work together. Law enforcement can't be everywhere. They can't do everything. I can help organize meetings to talk about ideas and share with FWC and legislators. What I can do and want to do is education in recreational fishing. There are people that don't know and don't care. That is just hurting the ecosystem. I can do workshops, education, and offer to you tonight to sign up or call me to set something up to try to make a better effort to educate. I can't educate every fisherman but I can sit at a dock and talk to fishermen. We can work together with FWC, but I need you volunteering.

Ellis H Doshier, Jr. (*Comments submitted via comment cards*): 1. Decisions should be based on the best data. Not having the most comprehensive data is very counterproductive in the long run. We will never know what the actual stocks are. We can know what we take out of the stocks. 2. Taking red snapper quota from the commercial sector and giving to recreational sector will be defeated in court because it violates Magnuson-Steven prohibition on taking from accountable sector and giving to unaccountable sector. Please don't waste anymore taxpayer money on UNWINNABLE positions.

Carrabelle – July 30, 2015

Location: Carrabelle City Hall

FWC Staff present: Michelle Sempsrott, Tony Bresnen, Krista Shipley, Stephanie Walthall, Steve Bauer, Melissa Crouch, Bekah Nelson, Steve Shea

Members of Law Enforcement Present: 2

Number of Public Present: 18

Public Comment Period

Phillip Vinson (Eastpoint Oysterman): He noted that FWC officers are professional. He stated that the 2014 Executive Order concerning oysters had negative impacts on local fishermen, because it cut their work week from 5 days to 4 days, forced oystermen to harvest oysters in a small area, and resulted in several fishermen receiving violations for harvesting undersized oysters. He noted that there are part-time oyster harvesters and full-time oyster harvesters, and many of the actions taken recently have had negative impacts on full-time oyster harvesters. He requested the FWC work more with industry when considering future regulations changes.

Keith Ward: He stated that the Net Limitation Amendment hurt commercial fishermen and has caused bycatch because juvenile fish get trapped in the 2” stretch mesh nets. He also noted the issue of dead discards of male (white roe) mullet in southwest Florida during the roe season.

Ronald Crum: He submitted testimony on the Net Limitation Amendment 2” mesh size issue, including Gil McRae’s 2005 testimony as part of a lawsuit between the Wakulla Commercial Fisherman’s Association and the FWC. He also stated his support for Mr. Moore’s on not requiring turtle exclusion devices in skimmer trawls.

Mark Moore (Commercial Fisherman – Port St. Joe): He stated that turtle exclusion devices are not necessary in skimmer trawls are because these trawls are pulled at a slow rate of speed and the turtles can swim faster than the trawl is pulled. He asked that FWC staff work with NOAA Fisheries on this issue.

Jimmy Lashley Jr. (Oysterman in Franklin County): He asked about the plans for the East Hole oyster area this year, specifically asking about what sections of the area will be opening up. He noted that the FWC closed the resource to keep people from illegally harvesting, but the East Hole area should be open like the rest of the bay. He stated his opposition to the shelling program, and suggested the FWC look into fishermen who are shelling areas that are open to harvest.

Staff: We will continue to monitor the East Hole area and will determine when it will open and what the bag limit will be later this summer. We will have Jim reach out to you to make sure any updates are communicated.

Jimmy Lashley Sr. (Oysterman in Franklin County): He raised concerns over oyster fishermen who are part of the shelling program dumping material into areas that are open to oyster harvest and producing quality oysters. He noted that people are working and catching their limit and dumping shell in good areas isn’t helping and is preventing people from working. He stated that he is trying to get a voice in this process. Finally, he noted that people are shelling to make a living but it won’t last in the long run.

Staff: A shelling project between oystermen, DACS, and FWC, has been underway for some time. A new DACS program that will begin soon will look at what depth of shell will work best for oyster recruitment, and we hope to see positive results on this shelling areas soon.

Jonas Porter (Commercial fisherman): He noted that he is seeing less pinfish in bait schools. He stated that as a commercial mullet fisherman, he used to bring up many more pinfish in his net than he is seeing today.

Richard VanMunster (Commercial fisherman): He stated that there was no biological reasoning behind the Net Limitation Amendment. He noted that there are issues with male (white) roe mullet discarded during the roe season, particularly in southwest Florida, and cited a lack of enforcement as a big issue. He noted that 2” stretch mesh nets create a lot of bycatch and

result in dead juvenile fish, which is not an effective way to manage the resource. He suggested raising the mesh size in the nets, which would allow many of the juvenile fish to swim right through the nets.

Chester Reese (Charter fishermen): He stated that in the past, regulations changes have caused fishermen to adapt, noting that when black sea bass were closed on the Atlantic, there was an influx of black sea bass fishermen that moved their operations over to the Gulf. He suggested the Councils and the FWC consider these possible consequences when considering making rule changes.

(Speaker's name is unknown – was not on list and did not state his name when he spoke): He noted an issue with boaters speeding through an area that is just outside of a local speed zone county ordinance, which is dangerous to boaters and could be causing damage to an important nursery area. He stated the need for an enforceable act for this region that protects the area and boaters.

Dusty May (Recreational angler): He stated his support of the state red snapper season. He noted that goliath groupers in the area are very aggressive, and suggested a tag program to remove some of the larger or more aggressive individuals. He suggested the FWC consider a minimum size limit for bay scallops. He noted that there has been a lack of red grouper in this part of Florida for the last several years. He also noted that management of fish stocks in south Florida should differ from management in north Florida due to environmental and social factors.

Ronald Crum: He noted that the state-issued saltwater regulations book is confusing because it doesn't specify state versus federal waters regulations for species such as red snapper.

East Coast Meeting Notes

Stuart – July 20, 2015

Location: Stuart City Hall

FWC Staff: Jim Estes, Melissa Recks, Krista Shipley, Erika Burgess, Jill Christoferson, Ernie Marks, Captain Camille Soverel

Members of the Public: 13

Public Comment Period

Mike Connor (Stuart fishing guide): We are ground zero for discharges. Bad water quality is the first thing we blame for bad fishing. We are worried about bait fish displacement more than mortality. Lack of seagrass means lack of forage, which means lack of finfish. Forage fish are

often overlooked. The habitat is so important. Statewide, forage fish are healthy, but here water quality is the number one thing to look at. I sit on water coalition. Looking at economic impact of water quality. Snook and tarpon can adapt to poor water, but bait fish cannot. Another issue is of cumulative impacts – beach nourishment affects the fall mullet run. The combination of water discharges and beach nourishment can impact us. We've seen a loss of benthic organisms that pompano and redfish depend on. The numbers of pinfish, pigfish are down. I encourage you to partner with all those you can to address poor water quality.

Dan Eagle: The water quality in the Keys is pristine. This place is a dump when it comes to water quality. You said it yourself, no fish you don't have a job. What is FWC doing?

Ernie Marks: DEP is the lead. Everglades BMAPs – DEP, districts, etc. partner and is where you will get the most impact. Water storage further south (CERP) will help things, and is enforceable, but will not be until several years. Supporting CERP projects will benefit the water quality in the St. Lucie. We do coordinate with DEP on why the water quality is important for wildlife, but DEP and the water management district are the 2 entities.

Dan Eagle: An 8-member board from DEP is in charge. Unicorn filefish – you can't drift fish off Jupiter without filefish eating your baits. We would like to see filefish be taken with dynamite. This has gotten worse in recent years.

- Melissa: 3 or 4 years ago, we pulled them out of marine life

Sharks – are we going to keep protecting sharks, or have bounties to get them out of the water?

- Melissa: Florida is very conservative in shark rules, but we have been hearing more about sharks.

I don't even follow the regulations because they are so hard to follow.

Greg Kyte: Want to thank you for the forage resolution. There hasn't been any bait. They say that our area is the shining star for seagrass, but we don't have any here! The fish are going into the manmade structure instead of the natural seagrass.

Nicole Kirchoff: Two years ago I started a pinfish farm. Last year, the demand exploded. We had to catch wild pinfish from Jan – May, and we couldn't even find any. I think one of the main reasons there are so few, is that back in October there were some big fish kills. About 80% were unknown reasons. About this time, we started seeing mortality in our farms. We called FWC health center, and never received a call back. I would love to send our samples, but there is no one to send our samples to! There is something seriously wrong with the water. Your website is unbelievably bad to navigate.

Mike Pressure: I had the privilege to review a recent copy showing that less than 20% of the pollutants in the lower IRL is coming from Lake O – a lot of golf courses. Average runoff is 3,000 pounds of runoff a day? Martin County is taking steps to stop people from fertilizing in the rainy season. A grass from Australia requires no watering, herbicide, etc. I'm seeing a major improvement of my canal after replacing my lawn. There's no way that Lake O can go upstream.

People need to be more educated on this. I met the enemy, and them is us. We are polluting our own canals and our own fish. I would love to see more education on the proper flow, instead of just blaming Lake O. This new report came out and is very impressive.

Ernie: To add to that, if you are looking for something that reviews flow – the districts have broken down the flow. 60-80% of the flow come from the basins. Septic systems, HOAs, etc. are captured in those functions.

Jim: Only 60% of the survey said we are doing a good job. Any comments on how to improve?

- Where is the manpower? There are too few LE officers.
- Where is the habitat restoration?
- The stuff you have been doing is excellent. Even though you are thin, you are getting a lot of stuff done. Got the first time pulled over in 65 years the other day.
- I concur with the difficult website to navigate. It takes me forever to find anything on that website.

Mike Conner (*Comments submitted via comment card*): I applaud the FWC's resolution to address forage fish problems/fishery health. I would ask that the FWC take water quality into account and perhaps partner with NGOs that directly deal with Lake O discharges and related problems with baitfish health and displacement and the loss of baitfish habitat due to damaging discharges.

Ruth Neese (*Comments submitted via comment card*): Prefer that forage fishing not be expanded until better data exist on fish populations. Support any efforts to limit discharges from Lake Okeechobee into the St. Lucie River. Also support efforts to keep effluent out of the Indian River Lagoon. Would like to see more efforts focused on returning seagrass beds in the lagoon to viability and creation of oyster reefs.

Fort Pierce – July 21, 2015

Location: Garden Club of Fort Pierce

Staff: Melissa Recks, Jim Estes, Mason Smith, Krista Shipley, Jill Christoferson, Erika Burgess, Captain Camille Soverel

Attendees: 13

Public Comment

Steve Ribdroft (local fisherman): A local fishermen, diver, etc. for 50 years. My concern is we are addressing the lionfish as an invasive species, but we've had regulations on the goliath grouper, which has been a very detrimental fish to the reef. I can't find any information on populations, but from my own experience they are overpopulated. The local population of the seabass, grunts, and lobster being eaten by goliaths. There may be a necessity for an open season

– perhaps a two day season. I can't go to a reef now without a few goliaths there. You need better PR – this place should be packed. I found this workshop in some obscure publication. Melissa: the last stock assessment for goliath grouper was rejected because of lack of information. We are just finishing up a new stock assessment. We will be providing an update on the goliath grouper status at the September Commission meeting. Our Commissioners are eager to learn whether the science supports a harvest of goliath grouper.

Zak Judd: Do we have baseline data?

Pete McLeod (Recreational fisherman): Water quality, habitat, are big issues. I like to catch more fish. I think that recreational fishing should be the priority – things like jacks and ladyfish, and the bait – you can't have good sport fishing if you don't have the bait around.

Brian Combs (Fort Pierce Sport Fishing Club): You want to see 60% satisfaction, but diversity even within the recreational anglers are going to differ. A couple issues – goliath grouper have gotten so bad in some places you can't get a fish in – Sebastian inlet, Boyles, etc. they are getting pretty smart at how to get a good meal. As a diver, we see more underwater than anyone sees above the water. When we dive on the reefs we see resident goliaths 300 pounds. Something is wrong with your advertising if you could only get this many people in a community like this where fishing is a huge part of this community. I see this stuff in my email, I think that is the best way. One of my questions was: does the state get pressure from the federal government to follow their regulations?

Melissa: sometimes, the federal government feels that state regulations are undermining their regulations.

Jim: our Commissioners are pretty independent-minded, so the pressure from the federal government doesn't do much on what we do.

My biggest issue is that we weren't really happy with the snook regulations that went into effect – 98% of the fish are released, that is a pretty low keep rate in the current slot. The only place that you can successfully release a fish is from a boat – docks, piers, etc., the fish are usually going belly up. If you allow people to catch your one snook and go home, how many are you saving rather than killing snook by releasing? The number of snook they throw back at Sebastian Inlet or the bridges here in Fort Pierce is huge. We would like to go back to the old 26-34 inch slot. We catch them and go home. I know a lot of people that have just plain quit fishing because they are tired of throwing back snook. Personally, I would like to see a maximum limit on trout, too. There is no reason to keep that one over the slot – they don't taste good. We get really big trout here.

Melissa: How is seatrout looking to you right now?

Brian: This year, we haven't caught as many as the 18-20 inches, but there is a lot of big trout in this area. My concern is allowing that upper limit to be kept. Overall though, I think the trout population is pretty good here. We didn't have as much of the seagrass degradation as north and south of us. Very good, 20 feet water clarity in the inlet here recently.

Melissa: We will have a big meeting on snook in December. We have an opportunity to look at some changes based on the stock assessment.

Grant Gilmore: I agree that I didn't hear about this except from PEW. I've been conducting research in Florida for about 45 years now. Over the last 30 years have landed in court against the state of Florida against permitting/habitat issues. The goliath and other issues stem from ecosystem. I've been disappointed that FWC doesn't have a permitting role – we've been losing this habitat to agencies that don't know fisheries; I know that you comment on permits, but you should have some more. We know about key locations of the life history of all these fish – where do they spawn, and are we truly protecting those sacred locations? Including forage fish. We're talking about ecosystems. I'd like to see FWC involved in any permitting that is going to sacrifice fisheries.

I had a manuscript rejected that showed that pinfish and gobies in 1968 were not in plight back then. It is published in Fish Bulletin.

Zack Jud (Gamefish biologist): 150-day recreational angler. Conservation of gamefish is critical, but if we don't do enough for ecosystem conservation it won't matter. Spawning, recruitments, - protect the nursery habitats, and protect the forage fish, and other data-limited species. Protect other species that all fit into this puzzle. I applaud the recent forage resolution and barracuda changes. However, all the while the ecosystem here is being damaged. I'm afraid that our IRL is at an ecological tipping point – we're turning a blind eye while dumping water and fertilizer. The seagrass recover can't give us false hope... remember the 47,000 acres of seagrass loss from 2011.. that can happen again in a blink of an eye. These ecosystem issues have a huge influence on all these fish that we value. There's certainly a point of no return, so please don't let our IRL slip to that point.

Tim Simos: I live locally, and do fishing charters. There were a lot of important points touched upon. I would like to reemphasize the importance of water quality. Also, goliath grouper are long overdue for changes. I catch them, my clients catch them, but they are also eating the smaller fish we're catching. Gamefish are important, and there should be bag limits on every fish out there that swims. If there is a reason for someone to make money on it, they are going to abuse it. Every fish should have limits. Spearfishing: the success of a spearfisherman is higher per hour, so I don't think they should have the same bag limits as your rod and reel fishermen. As far as the bag and size limits go, they need to be simplified. If there is a one inch difference, just use common sense and simplify it – use the higher number. I agree with Grant Gilmore about the permitting. Keep equality between recreational and commercial interests – commercial interests are obviously favored.

Bill Gibson: Native Floridian, and run a motorized kayak business and we're on the water all the time. I'm here for forage fish – thank you for passing the forage fish resolution. They're not glamorous fish, but we need to somehow convince the public of their importance. We have the water quality this time of year. The snook come in by the hundreds to some mangrove forests.

Malvin Savage: Water quality is important. One idea to getting the word out – a message board, live feed, etc. would be beneficial. I'm not sure about what illegal fishing is implying.

Melissa: illegal sales without a commercial fishing license.

How do you go about obtaining a commercial fishing license?

Melissa: some state, some federal depending on what you want to do.

What are the data collection methods?

Melissa: one of the things we're trying on the Gulf coast is a new survey program to get more details so that we get better recreational data for reef fish that we need more data on. We're also working on the folks that do self-reporting, such as the Angler Action program, and how we can incorporate that information into stock assessments. We're always looking for new ways to get useful data.

_____ - On goliath grouper, we go to holes in the Keys that used to be very productive for spiny lobster, but now only have goliath grouper.

_____ - I noticed when you had the issues up there, you put the IRL on there yourself which is great. Think very strongly about having permitting responsibilities; it's crazy not doing it. We should have scientists and fishermen on the Commission. I'd like to see us do more on educating kids. I'm with Audobon, and we're taking kids out on the lagoon. We're going to put kids with a cane pole and to go find bait – they're catching fish and going crazy. We're aiming for the 5th graders and giving scholarships to the poorest schools. We're going to have an after school program. We think you need indicators of the quality of the lagoon into the papers – economic, social, how fishing helps us survive, and the environmental. I'd like to find some funding for that. You need to give money to the scientists to support the citizen research out there. Lastly, there are some really nice spoil islands out there that need to be protected. They are some really beautiful areas that people don't take care of – people are pooping on these islands and attributing to the nitrogen... we need to get porta pots like the Everglades, or a composting toilet, and pay with by a pay box or donation box.

Jim: We have developed our “Youth Conservation Network,” and I can help you get involved with these centers.

What is the mortality rate of the snook that are released?

Melissa: I can get that information to you. A lot of things go into the survival, and there are a lot of reasons to conserve the largest fish.

Jim: the big issue is that we have different people that have different desires. What we want to hear from you all is what are your goals, not the methods. Our discussion really ought to be about what our management goals should be about.

Jud: I'm still confused about snook, as a snook biologist. Harvesting smaller fish like redfish, you wouldn't have to worry about.

Jim: It depends on the management goals.

There has been mention of funds – what about a permit for keeping larger snook to generate funding. If a snook is a male at 18 and a female at 32, you are always removing a potential female out. I think there would be many people out there that would purchase it, in those cases for people that won't be able to revive that fish.

Jud: If you make it expensive enough it could work.

Jim: One thing we've learned is that we haven't done a good job outreaching this. How would you guys like us to do it?

I got the email 3 or 4 weeks ago, but would be great to get a reminder, or on your Facebook page.

I like the idea of the bait shops. I work with 3 non-profit groups and we have a huge network. Find these conservation groups to get with hundreds of members.

Brian Combs: You did not make it easy to find it on your own website.

Need to get in touch with the local newspaper guy. Need to get in the paper more than one time. Is there an ability to have regularly scheduled meetings like this? Instead of having all of you here, you could have one person man it and it would be covered.

Jim: It would be very difficult.

I dive, but I don't where I can get with volunteering.

REEF.

Erika: also, FWRI is looking into camera surveys for cost efficiency.

Jim: In freshwater fisheries, we had regional staff, but now regional staff.

With coldwater upwelling, groupers are getting slaughtered by spearfishers.

Fresh fish for even 7 days is still better than what you get in the fish market.

Gregory L. Simmons (*Comments submitted via comment card*): Please consider going back to an 8" slot limit for snook, either 26"-34" or 28"-36", one fish is fine. Our numbers have improved since the 1994 net ban. We are catching and handling a lot of fish to keep one in the current slot. There is cryptic mortality involved in handling fish, per paper from Ron Taylor 10+ years ago. Thank you for hearing and considering my request.

Cocoa Beach – July 22, 2015

Location: Central Brevard Library

FWC Staff: Melissa Recks, Jim Estes, Mason Smith, Krista Shipley, Jill Christoferson, Erika Burgess, Officer Jordan Humphrey (LE), Officer Dusty Humphrey (LE)

Members of the Public: 7

Public Comment

Mitchell Roffer: I think overall you are doing a good job; the status of the stocks are doing pretty good. I would like more fisheries independent catch and recreational catch. We need to do more research on these, because biases in catches from technology. I would also like to see local fisheries studied – snook, tarpon, redfish, etc. What are these fish doing year round? This feeds back to management because different areas want different things, so if the stocks are different than they can be managed that way. I think that more effort should be taken on getting catch and effort data from fishermen out there every day on the water. Perhaps a way to do it on the web?

The NMFS phone calls are terrible. Commercially, concerned about people not reporting where they caught the fish, only where they land it.

Water quality is an issue degrading over time in the past 10 years. Florida is the biggest fishing state – the economic benefit from fishing is bigger than citrus and cattle, but citrus and cattle are damaging our fisheries. Dollars have to come first, so FWC should take bigger stance.

I prefer bigger fish, trophy fish. I like the slot sizes and seasons you have right now.

Forage fish are important to me – we still need to protect them.

Oil, gas and wind development in the past – I would hate to have it developed in our state. We were lucky from Deep Horizon, but I worry about future impacts. Wind farms could shut off access to fishing areas.

Port Canaveral wants to be a Newark Port and is going to damage the ecosystem.

NOAA is going to remove the Canaveral Buoys – the public uses these for health and safety issues (wave height, offshore conditions, etc.)

Charles Levi Jr.: My main concern is how sensitive our area is compared to other areas in the state. The north end of the lagoon lacks tide influences, so our water quality is garbage sometimes. Used to be able to dig clams in good water, now you cannot find them. We know that every year we are going to get that sewage smell from dead grass – red rolling grass is choking out large parts of the Mosquito Lagoon. Areas where this red grass is not there, there is beautiful grass. Anywhere north of the barge canal on the west side of the lagoon still has hope that it could bounce back.

Stock assessments need to be a little more on the water, hands on. With our area not being tidal-driven, all of our fish are land locked. We have redfish that spawn inside the river. There could be things placed, I'm not saying a spawning season closure, but a lot of people beat up the bull reds. You can go out any weekend and find large dead redfish on the bottom that were worn out on light tackle. Our catch limits, seasons, are perfect for around here for redfish. I don't support taking one seatrout over the slot limit; they are more valuable to us as a gamefish than to someone's dinner plate.

We have a significant possibility to have a tarpon gamefish spot right here – we have 80 pound tarpon in small enclosed marsh pond. Something needs to be done to look at as far as that is concerned. Dr. Aaron Adams did not have a definitive answer why we are seeing the small fry in the areas we are.

The number of snapper species and small grouper species are down that used to infiltrate the river have diminished. We used to catch 2-5 pound mangroves on the bridges, but now we don't. An artificial reef inside the river might be a good thing.

The habitat loss is concerning because this is the fishes nursery – it's hard for the fry fish to get away from the bigger fish and birds.

The red rolling grass is one of the main concerns as far as our water quality is concerned.

The no motor Banana River is a window to what the entire ecosystem should look like 365 days a year. There are people that want to build an earthen causeway here... the fish stock in the Banana River used to be what we saw in the entire ecosystem.

Turn the Mosquito Lagoon into a poll/troll zone – the new small fast flats boats are zipping through and ripping up all the seagrass. These boats go 30 mph on plane. We’ve seen a bunch of dead manatees, sea turtles, and others.

Alex Gorichky III: Born and raised in the space coast. There are some great regulations out there. Our catch amounts, slot limits, are good, but I do want to remove the allowance of one trout over the slot limit.

More manpower for law enforcement. A few more boats/time on the water could evade some of these boats running shallow water and things that could be stopped. These guys and gals need a raise. The minute I have an issue, they are the first people I want to see.

Maintaining solid stocks of fish.

We need to get behind the legislative teeth of fisheries importance. There shouldn’t have to be things to worry about such as fishing access lost from new development. We’re already feeling pressure as guides from LA, TX, who are dropping lots of artificial reefs. I’d like to see a little more of a push to come up with “hot zones” for inshore or out to 3 miles for artificial reefs. It would be neat to see something along those lines. It might help spur some of those snappers and groupers getting closer to us.

One of the main issues in this area is the water quality. There are great programs that are trying to help – the EELS program is one.

I’d like to see ways the FWC could maybe foster our future fisheries – look at the 15 year outlook – with potential fish stocking. This area was the redfish capital, and the seatrout capital, but now we are losing ground to TX and LA.

I’d love to see something online to get people to report their catches. I feel that because of the red snapper closure this year, no one is going to report their red snapper anymore. We got some areas that are 40 miles from the beach that could get some red snapper in there if we could get artificial reefs in there.

This industry is so huge in our state, and a travesty would be to let a railroad on earthen causeway run across the Banana River. As fisheries managers, the Banana River is holding this lagoon together right now.

I’d like to see the FWC spearhead more of the environmental side of habitat. It doesn’t matter if its bonefish in the Keys or redfish here, it’s all connected.

A better push in PR to get in front of utilizing data and solving issues. Maybe if we get a little more positive light on what you guys are doing, we can get better data. Incorrect data is where these issues are coming about, and where distrust comes from.

Please get knowledgeable about the causeway.

Charles Levi: We should have a citation program. It would give you more data on trophy fish.

Jim: we have a brand new one

Alex: giving the rewards is a great way to get the data

Charles: The average weekend warrior loves to put fishing pictures online – a reward program would be a great way to get more photos

Charles Levi – Goliath grouper are really annoying. We’re catching very large grouper out of the Haulover Canal. I want to know how many redfish are going through the canal and getting

eaten by goliaths. We have a decent stock of legal gag grouper in the northern IRL in the channels.

I found out about this meeting at 4:45pm. When I look at the FWC website, it's kind of lacking. The website itself looks like it was great 10 years ago. Most of what I do is on social media. I also see on social media a lot of people bringing large tarpon on board. Look up "FWC's most wanted." The public that follow these sites don't ever see the outcome.

Jim: Should we have staff on public fishing forums? Some nodding heads
Once you're known, people can send things to you.

Attending fishing tournaments to say something about what FWC events.

Charles – most kayak tournaments are catch/photo/release, so having an FWC that is online would be good for data.

Also, being ex-law enforcement, I know that the under-manned LE is what causes the distrust. The hotline is ok – we've run into people pulling gill nets. I called about a dead manatee the other day and a biologist called back in 30 seconds and it was great.

Back in the day, everyone used to know that undercover officers were on the inlets.

Melissa: we do have a section of LE that looks into online violations, but we could find better opportunities to get that back to you. You're right about not enough officers on the water, but keep reporting, because when we get those habitual offenders they can know when and where they need to be to catch them.

Jim: Also, peer pressure is good to get people to do the right thing.

Joshua McCoy: 5th generation here. The water quality is the biggest issue. We could beat this drum, but it goes by the wayside. I grew up fishing in the river, and 20 years ago fish were everywhere. The net ban wasn't the problem, the water quality was the problem all the while. I used to swim all the time, but I won't let my daughter swim there. We're now more focused offshore, we have a fish house. It's big money when you are dealing with big corporations being polluting. The dredging is not helping the forage fish around Cape Canaveral – also whiting and flounder. There are hardly any shrimp boats out there, so it's definitely not them.

Right now, we are shark fishing longlines but we'd rather not be. We're seeing a lot of bigger sharks, including sand bars coming closer to shore than they used to. There are hardly any commercial shark boats out there anymore. We caught 140 sand bars on 300 sharks, blacktips one every other hook. If we could go up to the mile line with long lines to catch blacktips it could clean up the beaches from sharks.

Also, those weather buoys need to stay out there.

Jim: they recently advertised some recent changes in shark fishing, did that negatively affect you?

Joshua: Our season used to open Jan, but North Carolina wanted to get away and get away from us.

Charles – all the dredging, beach restorations, etc. has covered all that hard bottom south of Port Canaveral that used to have lobsters and hold fish.

_____ - I spearfish offshore, but I usually go all the way up to Jacksonville or go south, because there is nothing out there.

Charles – Dump some rubble out there to get habitat back. Any way that the public can get involved, I know people that would be willing to help fund these programs.

Also, safety is getting bad – we’ve lost more kayakers and paddle boarders this year than ever. We always preach about PFDs, but we’re going to see more tragedies if new laws don’t address those guys going out past the breakers offshore – they need a VHF radio, a tall flag, much stricter regulations. A whistle is not going to do anything offshore. If you get knocked out of your kayak offshore, you cannot swim fast enough to catch it.

Ormond Beach – July 23, 2015

Location: Ormond Beach City Hall

Staff: Melissa Recks, Jim Estes, Erika Burgess, Krista Shipley, Mason Smith, Jill Christoferson, Shannon Wright, Major Craig Duval (LE Major), Clay McDunna (LE), Seth Winger (LE), Greg Workman

Members of the Public: 8

Public Comment

Chris Davy (Flagler Fishing Club): We keep a big database on the fish that get caught. One of our biggest concerns is that we have a 2 fish bag limit for redfish above Volusia County, but a 1 bag limit south... if we have a tournament, a higher bag limit draws more participants. Most of our members our pier, surf, etc.

60% satisfaction is probably a pretty good number.

The regulations between NOAA are ridiculous. There are a lot of apps in there. I tell members to not trust the apps... is there any way to have an official FWC app we could trust? That would simplify things.

Jim: We do have an app, but it is very new and needs to be worked on. The councils also have apps. We’ve also heard that our website is atrocious.

David Garret

For the Gulf, there is a new survey?

Jim: Gulf Reef Fish Survey is required to get our data more precise, because we will now know who to contact.

Craig: we’re asking most of our officers to educate people to get it. Anytime we do new requirements, we are in an education time period.

Spearfishing around an inlet or jetty – spearfishing can only be flounder or sheepshead?

Melissa: That is a special act of local application – we are currently looking through all special acts to review if they are still needed.

So do we go to the county to get it repealed?

Melissa: Yes, the quickest way is for the county to pass a resolution for FWC to repeal.

Lionfish – you have some studies in 2013, can I get a copy of that?

Jim: Yes, we can give you that.

I created a company here last year and have been to two Commission meetings, and got a letter from Jim Estes about our bounty not being a good idea. Lionfish are a problem – gag grouper reducing, it could be from lionfish. I've applied for MARFIN grant but was rejected because I'm not a scientist.

Jim: Yes, we are weary of bounties. We've had bounties since the 1800s, and are generally unsuccessful. What we think we should do is target some key areas. Local removals do work.

David: From 2013 lionfish summit, 13 stakeholders believe bounties are the best. 80% of our native population is being annihilated. Our company has killed 643 this year so far.

Your website talks about funding for lionfish derbies – how much is available?

Jim: \$1,500 – but it's not about numbers of fish, it's about making a splash and getting people involved.

Take it back and think about on the bounties. I'm the only one looking into a bounty. I also sell to a few restaurants.

Jimmy Hull: Lionfish are one of the biggest problems right now.

The Gulf Reef Fish Survey is very good, because the lack of the known number of fisheries is the reason the red snapper fishery is closed – they just guess.

Thank you for being here.

It's vital to keep access to fisheries.

I believe the fisheries should be kept at maximum sustainable yield for the better of all users of the resource.

Every fisherman that I know will tell you that the shark populations are fully rebuilt and out of control. We don't have a commercial shark fishery in state waters. Hopefully the state can bring this issue up – these sharks are starting to interact with people. Hopefully people don't start getting hurt more by sharks.

Of all the FWC, the FWRI, and the agencies of the state, you still have credibility – no one trusts the federal system. I think you're better than 60%, and you being here is proof of that.

At the Canaveral National Seashore we are facing all the commercial fishermen getting pushed out. The state did not deed over the authority to the feds when they gave over that land. Making that area a sanctuary is really not necessary.

Jim: Yes, we have those documents.

The taxes that go back into the state from restaurants, boating, etc. is so important. We need to continue to ensure access.

We see lots of information from the state for being good stewards of the environment; I think the state is doing a good job.

Is the day going to come when we are going to have to limit the number of anglers? At some point, there are an awful lot of people on the water.

The state is doing a really good job with seafood marketing.

Wasting the resource is bothersome to me – dead discards are frustrating. When you have these mixed species, especially with some species with higher quotas than others, you end of with dead discards. The state just pushed through a triggerfish size increase – that is going to cause dead

discards. A lot of the triggerfish I bring up in 120 feet of water have intestines hanging out. We should have total retention limits – it doesn't matter what size they are.

The red snapper fishery was shut down this year because they estimated how many fish they caught. The majority of the quota was recreational. They said they caught the same number of fish in a mini season as they did when the year was wide open. What I think they did is adapt the high effort for red snapper during the 7 day season to the rest of the year, which is incorrect. They shut down our fishery for no reason.

Chris Davy: The comment about the days open was so true – we only got so many days, so we went out with as many people we could!

_____ – Please support commercial fishing. I have a Master's degree in history and I couldn't get a job and now work with Jimmy Hull. Most people here want local seafood but the fishermen cannot go catch it.

Dave Rodgers: Overall you are doing a good job. You have better LE now than you used to have.

Our water quality is a lot worse than it used to be.

Access is the other biggest problem – not many people are going to kayak 3 days to get to accessible areas.

Overall, you are heading in the right direction. Also, please make the slot limit for snook just a little bit wider. They are plentiful and of all sizes, but they always crash in the freezes.

Melissa: The first Saturday and Sunday of December we will have a meeting in St. Pete to go back to the drawing board for snook. We will see what folks want.

Jim: How did you all find out about this meeting?

It was in a local news journal.

It's a government meeting, so people feel they don't won't be listened to. You're getting lumped into "government."

Separate yourself from the feds. The sanctuaries proposed to NOAA are no good.

The perception is that the government wants to shut down the fisheries, so if you give out information they will just shut it down.

This meeting is the first I've been to, and I think it's great.

I think that good science would set everyone free – people would believe it, and trust it. Red snapper has been our offshore bread and butter between Jacksonville and Ormond Beach. I think that the federal government is not doing good science. It's been such a confusing mess to get involved in a SEDAR stock assessment, spending tons of limited dollars to make this confusing beurocracy that no one can participate in unless they have a PhD. The state assessments, yellowtail snapper for example, are great and not as complicated.

Jimmy Hull: I'm working with some charter fishermen in West Palm. They took away their daily recreational bag limit for dolphinfish and mackerel. We're trying to get some relief for

those guys at the Council, and it would be great for them to sell that small bag limit to help supplement their income and we could use the state's support.

Dave Rodgers: Used to be 50-60 charter boats at our place, and now there are 6. The charter industry is a huge part of Florida's culture.

Greg Workman: what would be another way to get more of you out?

Radio shows – hardcore local fishermen listen to it.

Facebook is the way to get the younger people.

Jacksonville – July 30, 2015

Location: Jacksonville Public Library Southeast

FWC Staff present: Jim Estes, Kellie Ralston, Erika Burgess, and Jill Christoferson

Members of Law Enforcement Present: Lt. Corey Brigwell and Officer Traci Ivey

Number of Public Present: 9

Questions

Mark Williams: Expressed opinion that the Magnuson-Stevens act rewrite was illegal

Staff: Show of hands as to who thinks saltwater regulations are simple.

1/9 hands raised. Comment that our waters and habitat is very diverse.

Staff: How did you hear about this meeting?

Public:

2 received an e-mail from our e-mail list

1 read about it in our fishing regulations magazine

1 said it was mentioned in the Times-Union

1 read about it on a Fishing Forum Post

Suggestions for the future included posting on fishing forums, ads in fishing magazines, billboards, radio ads and TV ads.

Public Comment Period

Scott Hawkins: Expressed his appreciation for having the meeting. Stated that he found out about the meeting on a fishing forum. Expressed concerns with releasing fish that will die, problems with dolphins consuming dead or dying discards and teaching this behavior to their young. Would like to see FWC address this issue

David Cherrill (Commercial Crabber): Florida sportsman forum has a NOAA rep that trolls the posts and chimes in on occasion, why don't we have an FWC rep to address these issues?

Scott Hawkins: It would be nice to have a place on the Florida Sportsman Forum where the public could ask FWC questions

David Cherrill: The FWC website is not easy to navigate

Feels FWC presence is lacking. Local officers that he has had contact with have been good people representing the agency well, however he feels the law enforcement section is underpaid and understaffed and as a result they may not be able to be as effective as desired. Commented on problems with other commercial fisherman where it is common knowledge that certain individuals are problems but have not been adequately punished/penalized.

Crabbing not as good last couple years, he has had his traps robbed regularly and nothing has been done. Trap robbers are difficult to catch and suggested putting more enforcement bodies on the water would provide more opportunities for their apprehension as well as act as an incentive for compliance. He also suggested making an example out of those that are caught, giving them more severe punishments/penalties rather than a slap on the wrist.

Staff (LE): Majority of penalties are imposed by the county or the federal government not the law enforcement officers. In many cases the offender will go into the magistrate and receive reduced penalties based on perceived economic or other hardship

Staff (MFM): For instance in the Apalachicola Bay area where they have problems with people stealing oysters. The Judge tends to be more lenient on offenders as they are perceived to be in desperate situations trying to feed their families. In these cases fisherman are encouraged to go and meet with the judges to explain and emphasize the importance of enforcing the resource laws and holding offenders accountable. Judges are often more sympathetic when they hear from their stakeholders.

David Cherrill: Suggested more frequent use of license restrictions or license revoking on resource offenders. Also suggested signs displayed at boat ramps to discourage molesting crab traps.

Staff (LE): Reiterated that taking time to talk with local judges and explaining fisheries issues as well as encouraging other members of the public to speak with judges may have an effect on the severity of punishments to resource offenders and that in lieu of a personal visit email was also an effective way to contact these officials.

Mark Williams (commercial fisherman): The red snapper issue destroyed rod and reel and charter fishing businesses. Felt FWC was doing a good job managing their fisheries but was not pleased with federal fishery management. Felt FWC did a good job with redfish, and was pleased with the work that was done on the crayfish dive endorsement. Commented that getting state waters extended to 9 miles on the Atlantic like it is on the Gulf it would be very beneficial. Also commented that fisherman needed to diversify their catches to remain in business.

Jepp Walter (recreational offshore fisherman): Supportive of size limit on snapper, however was very unhappy with lack of federal red snapper season on the Atlantic and the short seasons last year. Claimed there were more red snapper now with more size variation than when he was

younger. Believes that the quota is not working and is not accurate. Believes an effort to use better, more accurate data should be made. Felt it was suspicious that North Carolina was initially included in the quota and then later excluded. Expressed no problems complying with size and bag limits, or getting checked by law enforcement. Expressed dissatisfaction with the fishery being limited by a quota that he felt was essentially “guess work”.
Comments from stakeholder: Claimed that red snapper are worse than lionfish at competing with and consuming juvenile groupers on reefs.

Charles Holt (CCA): Expressed opposition to catch shares and IFQs that facilitate large companies ending up with majority of quota. Stated closures should be used as a last resort to reduce catch and that other methods of limiting catch should be explored thoroughly before resorting to a resource closure.

Expressed strong support for Alternative 9 in gulf.

Suggested utilizing a network of seasoned and credible fisherman to fact check scientific findings and gain input on resource trends. Also suggested this might be a more reliable source of resource information that might also be more current than the scientific data.

Addressed the net ban provision, while shrimpers in St. Johns River were grandfathered in, river shrimpers have become a major problem. There are issues with bycatch as well as what was referred to as “cheating” with regards to some illegal crossover between live bait shrimpers vs food shrimpers. In general he felt that the river shrimpers were not supposed to be there.

Michael Murphy: Appreciative of FWC providing this opportunity for public input. Addressed the lack of public attendance at meeting, cited a potential cause is public discontentment with the South Atlantic Council over the Red Snapper closure. Claimed that many people provided comment against the closure and the Council did not respond to their satisfaction. As such they may have felt this meeting would follow a similar course. Would like to see the money that the City of Jacksonville received for to build artificial reefs to be continued. Stated that with regards to federal red snapper regulations he believed that there were provisions where a state could pull out of the South Atlantic Council to manage their own fisheries in house and receive the state’s portion of the federal budget to facilitate this management.

Staff (DMFM): Respectfully expressed doubt in the validity of the last statement, stating that if it were the case it would have likely been explored already.

Public Stakeholder (did not identify himself):

Why is the FWC not more open to public volunteers to police areas?

Staff (MFM): We do have a reserve officer program

Staff (LE): In the reserve program you go through the same law enforcement training as our officers and while you are working with an officer you have officer status. There is a minimum hour requirement to maintain reserve officer status and reserve positions are strictly volunteer.

In this area they are frequently used as there are only 25 sworn officers for the Nassau/Duval area.

Staff (DMFM): We are also looking into increasing opportunities for citizen science.

Staff (LE): We also have the Wildlife Alert program which is similar to the crime stoppers program. It is entirely funded by assets from arrests and there can be rewards available to informants, however informants can also choose to remain anonymous. Illegal activities can also be reported online.

Jepp Walter: Acknowledged there could be issues with extending state waters.

Staff (MFM): There are some bills in right now concerning the state taking over management of red snapper from the federal government. Provided a brief history of how these bills were introduced.

Public stakeholder: Marine Fisheries rules used to be more complicated than they are now which they felt was pretty standard when regulations changed. Pleased that FWC was able to increase redfish bag limit on the Atlantic.

Charles Holt: Felt gag grouper in Gulf has been overregulated similar to the way he feels snapper has been on the Atlantic. He feels there has been less pressure on gags due to economy and would like to request an increase bag limit to 2 gags per person and an increased season length to be open year around.

Scott and Jaqui Hawkins: Both agreed that Florida's marine fisheries management was much better than California's were overall pleased with the job that FWC was doing with their marine fisheries.

David Cherrill: Wanted to emphasize that 25 officers for 2 counties seems very low. Taking into account that 3 officers are typically offshore which leaves 22 officers available to cover one of the largest counties in the state, this seems way too low and more law enforcement is definitely needed!

Jepp Walter: It seems like a lot of the grouper have disappeared from the Jacksonville area, does FWC have any idea what some of the causes might be? Could it possibly be related to lionfish and/or snapper competition?

Mark Williams: I suspect it has a lot to do with changes in reef dynamics due to overabundance of snapper, out competing grouper and consuming juvenile grouper and triggerfish and other reef fishes.

Scott Hawkins: In the future these workshops should be better advertised, billboards, radio, TV, etc. It would also be better to have more of these more often, maybe, twice a year.

Jim wraps up with closing comments and where we go from here.

Statewide Webinar Meeting Notes

Statewide Webinar – July 27, 2015

Location: Statewide; staff in Tallahassee

FWC Staff present: Melissa Recks, Tony Bresnen, Stephanie Walthall, Krista Shipley (remotely), Nancy Sheridan (remotely)

Members of Law Enforcement Present: 0

Number of Public Present: 6

Questions from the Public

Mike Colby (Clearwater): Where is the Commission right now on the Gulf State Red Snapper Management Authority (GSR SMA) plan? Was there any discussions at the June Commission meeting about this plan?

Staff: There was no discussion on this at the June Commission meeting, and the last discussion on the GSR SMA plan was at the April meeting in Tallahassee, where the Commissioners expressed their support for the concept of the GSR SMA moving forward. Staff will continue to closely monitor any new Congressional bill concerning red snapper management and the Magnuson Act reauthorization and will keep Commissioners aware of any developments in Congress.

Comments from the Public

Dennis _____ (Miami, FL – primarily fishes in the Gulf of Mexico): He stated that fishing in the Gulf of Mexico is different depending on where you fish, and fisheries located in the Keys are different from fisheries in Texas. He also commented that areas closed to fishing in the Florida Keys do not prevent overfishing and limit fishing access. He stated that dolphins are becoming a problem in southwest Florida because tourist “cruise” boats feed dolphins which causes dolphins to associate boats with food. He stated that there are issues with dead discards of recreationally caught red grouper in southwest Florida, and he suggested that regional management for species like red grouper and red snapper could help manage the resources better. He noted the need to get more scientists out on the water to see how people actually use the resource.

Staff: We appreciate the comments on the issues with regulatory discards of red grouper, and this is a topic that continues to be mentioned by stakeholders. In regards to dolphin feeding, there are laws in place to prevent this, but FWC law enforcement can only enforce these laws if they are

present. In regards to the area closures in the Keys, some of the Dry Tortugas areas are closed because of fish spawning aggregations and nursery habitat, and not necessarily to prevent overfishing.

Mike Colby (Clearwater): He suggested that everyone generally agrees that enforcement is very important throughout the state. He stated that he would like to see more data collection in recreational fisheries, and would like to engage stakeholders who are on the water to collect recreational data. He suggested that the FWC engage the charter industry to provide another source of labor for fisheries independent data. He stated that he would like staff to encourage the Commission to support data collection efforts from the charter industry. He also stated the state waters red snapper fishery may not be sustainable in the long term, and there is a need to look at ways to manage the state waters fishery.

Stefan Blache (Email Comment – Listed Below) “I’m surprised to see Barracuda not listed as a regional concern/interest fish. We need harvest restrictions for Barracuda in Monroe County, and ideally Barracuda classified as a game fish. Barracuda are extremely valuable as a catch and release fish in the Keys. The number and size of Barracuda that I’ve encountered over the past few years has greatly declined. I understand no stock assessment is planned due to the complexity of counting this fish. That said, at a minimum a harvest limit should be put in place until the actual stock is better understood.”

Staff: Staff has heard these concerns before, and a draft rule on barracuda was presented at the June Commission meeting in Sarasota. Staff are recommending recreational and commercial bag limits for the south Florida region only (Collier through Martin Counties). The Commission will make a final decision on any new barracuda regulations at the September 2-3 Commission meeting in Fort Lauderdale.