

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners

From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management

Date: October 8, 2020

Subject: Staff Report – Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) and Keys Update

Purpose: Review and update Commission on fisheries issues relevant to the Florida Keys region.

Why: At the request of the Commission, staff is keeping commissioners apprised of FKNMS draft rule development and other marine fisheries management issues relevant to the Florida Keys.

Top Points:

- 1) The upcoming FKNMS draft rule will include several proposals that are of interest to FWC and stakeholders.
- 2) FWC provided detailed comments on the Restoration Blueprint last April.
- 3) FWC has the unique authority to implement marine fisheries regulations for state waters of the FKNMS and the Commission may consider management approaches for several items including, protecting coral nurseries and restoration areas, fish feeding, and Western Dry Rocks.
- 4) FWC staff will also provide updates on marine management issues that are relevant to the Florida Keys, but also affect other parts of the state, including permit, mutton snapper, and casitas.

Affected Parties:

Topics addressed impact a diverse range of stakeholders in the Florida Keys, including fishers, divers, boaters, tourism interests, businesses, and residents.

Summary:

Staff will provide an update on two broad topic areas, those related to the FKNMS Restoration Blueprint and those that are of interest to Florida Keys stakeholders and others beyond the Keys. A topic overview and FWC next steps, where appropriate, will be discussed for the following items:

- Coral restoration and recovery – FWC recommended as top priority in Restoration Blueprint.
- Artificial reefs – Aid restoration efforts by relieving pressure from natural coral reefs.
- Water quality – An update of the Water Quality Protection Program is provided.
- Fish feeding – Regulations that align with those proposed by FKNMS could be considered.
- Western Dry Rocks – Consider if FWC management action is warranted.
- Permit – Consider additional regulations on a parallel timeline as potential WDR regulations.
- Mutton snapper – Consider area-specific regulations at WDR or after next stock assessment.
- Casitas – Staff to evaluate the potential to incorporate commercial casita use in lobster fishery.

Staff Recommendation:

No direction requested, but input on the FKNMS and Florida Keys marine fisheries management items welcome.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management