SE Florida Coral Reef Fisheries Stakeholder Committee - Meeting 4

Virtual meeting via Zoom

6-8 pm, January 28th, 2020

Summary

Overview

On Thursday, March 4th the fourth Coral Reef Committee meeting was held virtually via Zoom. Project principal investigator Kai Lorenzen, facilitator Joy Hazell, project coordinator and online producer Susana Hervas attended the meeting.

Fourteen stakeholders, three Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission staff, two Florida Department of Environmental Protection employee, one NOAA consultant and two observers attended the meeting.

The meeting objectives were to:

- Build community and trust
- Reflect on the information from the two last webinars
- Formulate questions that need answers moving forward
- Synthesize thoughts and advance thinking

Welcome

The meeting began with activities designed to set a positive, collaborative tone. Activities included introductions, an explanation and clarification of the meeting agenda and objectives, reminder of group norms and sunshine law and disclaimer of video recording (Slides in Appendix 1.)

Introductions

All participants introduced themselves. All participants had been present during previous meetings. Below is a summary of participant introductions by affiliation.

Stakeholder 1: Saltwater sportsmen magazine and TV program. Miami and North Broward

Stakeholder 2: Recreational angler and used to be part of SEFCRI

Stakeholder 3: Captain and Fishing supplies in Miami

Stakeholder 4: Charter from Jupiter

Stakeholder 5: Recreational diver (underwater hunter) in Deerfield Beach

Stakeholder 6: Angler and IGFA from Miami

Stakeholder 7: Industry liaison in Marine Industries Association of South Florida (MIASF)

Stakeholder 8: American Sportfishing Association representative

Stakeholder 9: Recreational angler from West Palm Beach

Stakeholder 10: Executive Director Port Salerno Commercial Fishing Dock Authority and President of Marine Industries Association of the Treasure Coast

Stakeholder 11: President of Marine Industries Association for State of Florida

Stakeholder 12: President of the WPB Fishing Club in Palm Beach County

Stakeholder 13: Retired charter Captain Miami

Stakeholder 14: Coastal Conservation Association Florida chapter

Agency 1: Southeast Regional Administrator for DEP's Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection

Agency 2: Biologist with FWC's Division Marine Fisheries Management

Agency 3: Marine fisheries Research at FWC

Agency 4: Regional Director FWC South Region

Agency 5: Contractor with NOAA Fisheries Service

Agency 6: Assistant manager FDEP Coral Reef Conservation Program

UF Team 1: Project Coordinator

UF Team 2: Program Principal Investigator

Webinar Recap Exercise – Activity Small Groups:

This section of the meeting consisted of addressing the two last webinars (coral and fisheries) to synthesize the most relevant information and understand what other questions exist.

Facilitator: There was not that much time for discussion during the end of the webinars so we will provide that space now.

Facilitator: If anyone wants to leave something for public record, please send to the project coordinator to append on the meeting summary for today (See appendix 2).

<u>Small Group Activity (30 minutes) - Points of discussion:</u>

1. List 3-5 points that you found relevant to the committee moving forward.
2. Identify a question(s) that you still have.
3. Have a note taker for each group and share at the end of the time together

SMALL GROUPS

Group #1 - Stakeholders 4, 6, and 13:

- Discharges and water quality from Lake Okeechobee are damaging reef and ecosystems (Jupiter inlet, and estuaries on both sides of the coast)
- Septic tanks, pesticides, weed killers (roundup), polluted canals, storm drainage and toxic elements.
- Communities are not being tied to sewers. Sewer systems were designed but there are now four times as many homes built. Not designed to hold the volume.
- To solve these problems, we need more money, but no one will say that taxes need to be raised
- Dredging and beach renourishment – fine silt material – buries nearshore reefs.
- We can either drown talking about things or figure out what things we can devise that may help the environment and our fisheries that are doable. Ex. Lake Okeechobee issues and climate change are tough ones to tackle. So, what can we do that has meaningful change in the short period of time that we can actually accomplish?
- Question: Where do we get the money from?

Group #2 - Stakeholders 1, 2, and 10:

- We agree with the last group. We cannot continue to manage resources, fisheries and environment in the same way we have been doing it. Ex. Mutton snapper. Depredation issues. Need a new approach for fisheries management.
- Coral disease, climate change, water acidification… we won't have coral. Benthic material, algae, sponges will grow but there may not be coral in the reef. Also losing grass flats. What can we put on the bottom to help? Ex. Artificial reefs.
- There is a lot of pollution, but coral won't exist in the future. Reef won't rebound in the near future. About coral disease, is it a virus, a bacteria? It is a widely dispersed disease.
- Need of more artificial structures, so lot of things will grow on it. It's not a silver bullet it but can be helpful.
- Inshore water situation doesn't seem to get any better. Biscayne Bay is a mudflat right now.
- Increase habitat in inshore area.
- Shark issue: Management might not realize how bad these sharks are. Big shark conservation makes it taboo to talk about limited commercial re-entry. It could be done for a year with a re-evaluation. Shark situation is worse than ever before.
- Due to sharks, boats now need to re-anchor more than before, which is not good for reefs either. Sharks also follow boats.

Group #3 - Stakeholders 5, 7, 8, and 14:

- Lot of factors affecting ECA. Coral disease, poor water quality and lack of inshore habitat.
- No mangroves or seagrass left. How to improve those nursery areas.

- Water quality, dredging, sewage, septic, ballast, .. significant degradation on reefs.
- The Keys had successful septic to sewer program. Stormwater runoff along the coast is an issue.
- Some are expensive, and some others have ways around them to help improve.
- Get Dr. Frazer to talk about some of the things that are getting done. Dr Frazer and Governor talked about intention to create change, public not well informed about actions.
- Most species were trending up (J. Blonedau (NOAA) presentation on fisheries status)
- FWC do a good job managing the area.
- What can we do more effectively in tackling water quality?
- Dredging – now being held responsible for water quality.
- FWC doing a good job in fisheries issues.
- Fixing outdated pipeline involved.
- We still don't know cause of coral disease. Points at 2014 Miami dredging and grown from there. Corals bleached, but they don't know why.
- More artificial reefs to take pressure off coral reefs.

Group #4 - Stakeholders 3, 9, 11 and 12 (full notes from team in appendix 3):

- Spatial closures – if there are going to be any they need to be in specific conditions which are laid out. Ex. Spawning areas would be a good reason for spatial closures. Happened in the Keys.
- Information and what we don't know yet – what causes the coral disease? What other species are missing and how do we bring them back?
- Not just offshore, also inshore habitat. Grassbeds that we lost. Spawning areas as well. What affects inshore, affects offshore.
- Discharges – frustrated as to what can we accomplish on that? Although we don't give up that water quality is the main issue.
- Grass is sprayed in the canal all the time. They stopped, and grass grew back. Areas outside the canals are killed. Fish have been dying. They keep spraying – they could cut it, trim it. Instead, they spray, which affects the water.

FURTHER GROUP DISCUSSION

- Why the intense spraying?
- Inshore waters feed offshore reefs
- Shark depredation is an issue – maybe invite marine scientists to understand shark behavior better. Invite someone to have that discussion.
- The webinar explained that fishing starts in Florida at unsustainable levels. How is FWC doing a great job if we heard that fishing in South Florida is unsustainable? At the current level, species will only decline.
- Maybe we need a presentation on sharks.
- Maybe have someone address what really is the long-term effect of roundup and other weed killing products.
- There is an inability to fund projects, but we could save by not spraying the canals.

- Graphs from fisheries webinar (pie charts – showed no data) showed that three regions for nine fish discussed were all trending upwards except triggerfish.
- Things are not as good as they used to be but we did not hear FWC say that we have an issue with sustainability levels. Maybe that is a question for FWC.
- FWC might need to take a closer look at it. But we haven't heard that from them.
- We heard that it takes 10-20 years to formulate fisheries management. We need to do it differently. It's difficult to achieve, hard to do, and been the same for 40 years, but it has got to change, otherwise we won't get to preserve it a little bit.
- FWC is open to ideas. Graphs of density went up, but it's only part of the puzzle. There are still questions on that presentation/data.
- In Federal program they have citizen science programs, where people who are on the water regularly have input on historic changes in the fisheries. FWC needs to get on that citizen science program, because those who are regularly on the water have knowledge about what happens in the water.
- Everybody should be allowed 2 mutton snappers (not 5) and then they should go to other areas where there aren't mutton so that you don't catch over your two limit.

Next Steps

Facilitator: We will charge everybody with what two of the stakeholders have talked about: For the next meeting everybody should come with a recommendation that they have based on the conversations we have had. For example, like the last comment on mutton. Or something related to artificial reefs, as it has been brought up. However, bringing up these suggestions does not mean that they will automatically go into play, but it will start moving the discussion forward so we can discuss and look at pros and cons and look at consensus. We have done a lot of background work, discussions and information, so it is time to start with the recommendations.

We will resend you the recommendations that came from OFR. So that you don't need to redo any of those recommendations but perhaps look at what you would reemphasize. Thinking about those that the fishing community would be concerned about.

Stakeholder 2: I was involved with the development of those recommendations. But we can throw them out and start again. Don't go back to where we were, because it is not going to work.

If you had something in mind that already came up, then that work is already done, but this other approach is also valid.

Introducing upcoming public meeting

Next thing to discuss: We are tasked with holding a public meeting every certain amount of meetings, and we have our first one coming up.

Objectives of the public meeting: To inform the wider fishing public about the project and the committee. Also interact and get to know their perception on what is important to the public.

The agenda will involve Introductions of the UF Team and the Committee Members, Presentations of the Project's Purpose, process and timeline, and Q&A with team and committee members.

Upcoming public meeting tentative date is March 4th. Part of this meeting is to introduce the committee members, so we need their participation. To a show of hands, who would be available the evening of Thursday 4th – Committee members showed their hands in agreement.

Time 6:30 – 8pm was suggested as the time to hold the public meeting.

Facilitator: We will set up a web page for this, so when it is ready, we can pass it along so that you can inform your networks.

We will also use the opportunity to gather information from the public. So, is there something that you would like to know from them that you would like to ask?

Stakeholder 2: It's up to us to reach out to the public. If we don't bring in the people, it will not work. We need a new fisheries management plan, and if we don't have public involvement, this will not work. Please friends, make this happen.

Stakeholder 13: When we notify networks, we can ask them to submit questions so that we can have this already set up so that we don't have repetition of questions, etc. This way we can address people's concerns.

Facilitator: In the invitation we will say to please ask questions and what their greatest concern is about the reef or fisheries.

Stakeholder 2: With all of us, we have thousands of contacts, we should use them!

What's next?

Public meeting will be March 4th

Everyone will be contacted with an invitation for the public.

Doodle to arrange when our net meeting will be held.

During our meeting we will discuss fisheries in the ECA and review the public meeting.

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Agency 4: There was a call for getting shark experts together, so let you know that FWC will have a shark panel at the May Commission meeting. So, encourage group to tune into this panel, so that we don't need to duplicate that effort.

Stakeholder 2: We spent 24 minutes this evening introducing ourselves. I think the time is better spent. We know who we are. You can put up a bio, but we need those minutes and use differently. Let's maximize our time.

Facilitator: That's a good point, we are at a point where everyone is comfortable to do that. We just create the structure but you all decide on how to use the time.

Appendix 1 – Presentation

Fisheries and Conservation in the SE Florida Reef Tract: A New Stakeholder Process – Meeting 4

& CONSERVATION

Objectives

Build community and trust

Reflect on the information from two last webinar

Formulate questions that need answers moving forward

Synthesize thoughts and advance thinking

Agenda

6:00	**Welcome and Introductions**
6:30	**Webinar Recap Exercise**
7:00	**Reconvene and Discuss Webinar and Next Steps**
7:40	**Review Upcoming Public Meeting**
8:00 pm	**Adjourn**

Introductions

- Name
- Affiliation
- Favorite scent, sound or sight from the holidays

Group Norms

Customs, habits and expectations for how things will be done

- **Listen carefully**
- **Consider each idea**
- **Everyone participates**
- **No one dominates**
- **Tough on the issues, not on the people**
- **Minimize distractions**

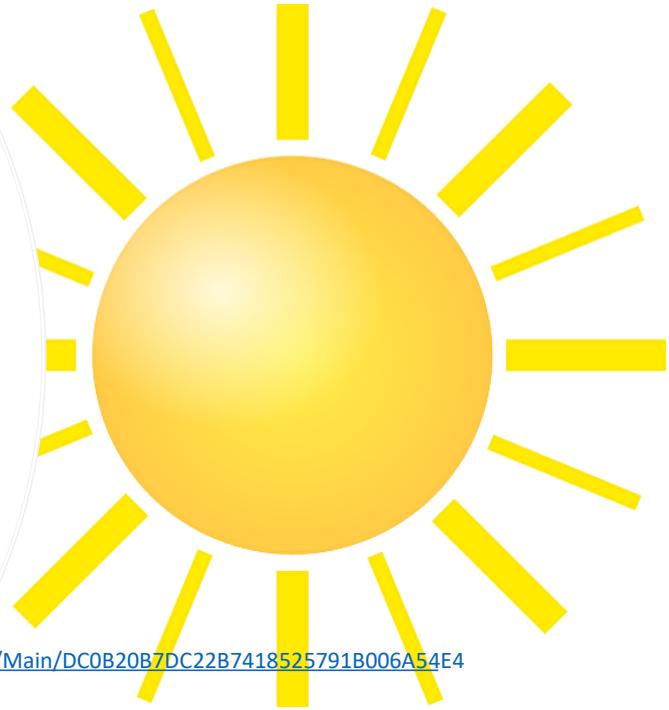
Zoom Related

- **Keep your camera on**
- **Wave your hand to make a comment**
- **Unmute to speak**

Sunshine Laws

- Public can attend the meeting
- Reasonable notice of meetings
- Minutes recorded and open to public

- The law, in essence, is applicable to any gathering, whether formal or casual, of two or more members of the same board or commission to discuss some matter on which foreseeable action will be taken by the public board or commission.



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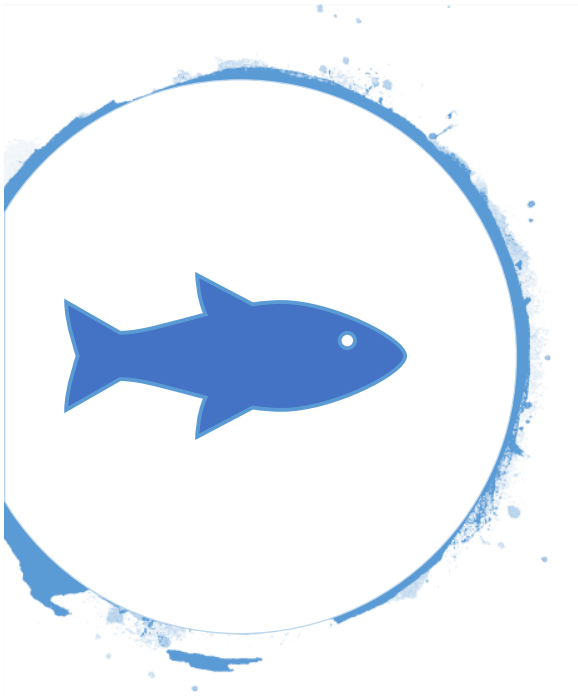
Webinar Reviews

1. List 3-5 points that you found relevant to the committee moving forward.
2. Identify a question(s) that you still have.



Public Meeting

Objectives:

- to inform the fishing public about the project and the committee
- to obtain input on perceptions of reef ecosystem status and management/conservation issues and options

Agenda

Welcome and Introductions

UF Team and Committee

Present on the Project

Purpose, process and timeline

Question and Answer

Gather Input

What do you want to know?

Next Steps

Public Meeting

Committee Meeting

Discuss Fisheries in the SE FL Coral Reef

Review Public Meeting

Date ? on Zoom

Appendix 2 – Comments from stakeholder 2 for public record

Response to Reef & Fisheries Web Seminars

1. Coral Disease started at the Port of Miami dredging in 2014. It appears to be an entirely new type of disease. Appears to be caused by stressed out corals, probably from dredging siltation. It now has spread everywhere along the reef tract except Dry Tortugas. It will get there.

2. Dredging is soon to begin at Port Everglades. Siltation from this multi-year long event will further stress out corals in that area.

3. Cruise ship ballast water has spread the disease all around the Caribbean basin.

4. Is this a virus or bacteria? It is being treated with antibiotics but acts like a virus. Regardless, it is impossible to treat 300 miles of coral with our current ability.

*5. The disease does not go away and sticks around infecting new polyps and colonies as they regrow.

*6. Reef coverage for most of South Florida is 3%.

7. 50% loss of stony corals since 2014.

*8. High # of susceptible species with up to 100 % affected and 100% dying from the infection.

9. These are the framework corals that build high reef relief structures.

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1. Lack of large size fish on the reef tact.

2. Loss of large predators changes the number of foraging fish such as parrots and damsel fish changing the ecology of the reef tract.

3. Fish produce lots of nutrients in their fecal matter that fertilize the zooplankton in corals.

*4. Coral grazing fish help spread coral disease from sick corals that they like to eat to healthy corals.

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*1. There is a 15-20 year time lag to get fisheries results. How is it possible to have relative fisheries data for decision making today when during the 15–20-year data lag the environment has quickly changed in many detrimental and unforeseen ways.

2. Size and species closures actually lead to decreased numbers of fish due to bycatch mortality and shark predation.

3. Inshore nursery habitat loss directly affects the abundance of larger coral reef species, i.e., gag grouper, mangrove snapper, mutton snapper.

4. Current fisheries management does not factor in climate change, reef loss, inshore habitat loss and other NEW stressors to fish abundance. Fisheries regulations that worked 45 years ago do not have the same relevance in protecting and increasing fish stocks today.

5. It is impossible to estimate what our fishery stocks will look like in the future given the rapidly and ever-changing stressors being placed on the reef tract and inshore waters.

January 29th Committee Meeting Comments

We need to develop a "new" approach to the way we manage our fishery stocks. It can't be the same way that we have done it in the past due to the rapid and everchanging effects of climate change, coastal population growth, habitat loss due to that growth and the loss of 97% of south Florida's live reefs.

South Florida reefs are not rebuildable within a reasonable time frame, short or long term, due to 100% mortality from the current coral disease and its reinfection rate on new or transplanted corals. The only alternative is extensive building of artificial reefs, both inshore and offshore, to replicate the relief of natural reefs. Benthic organisms will colonize these structures replicating reefs that had naturally existed. Additionally, ocean acidification would have little effect on these artificial reefs as it currently dissolves natural coral exoskeletons.

Shark predation is a major factor in declines of reef fish. We need to focus more study on this matter.

Water quality is not now the most detrimental reason for reef demise. There are a number of other causes, coral bleaching, ocean acidification, coral disease and various forms of water pollution.

Appendix 3 – Notes from small group #4

Meeting 4 _- January 28, 2021

Breakout Session – Group Notes

Topic: What was your analysis of the recent webinars presented regarding our reefs in the SEFCRI region

Overall, the group found the webinars to be both informative and disheartening. Disheartening in both the scope of the decline and what we still don't know about the disease. Such as:

- What caused the decline?
- Does the cause still exist?
- What species are missing in addition to the corals?
- What role do invasive species play, if any?

The group agrees that water quality is a serious issue and most likely a contributing factor to coral disease. The group also agreed that they had concerns regarding Spatial Management. We all agreed that protecting spawning areas during a particular spawn would be widely supported. But this management tool needed to be detailed in use and have well defined triggers.

We also agreed that we should emphasize the restoration of our in-shore habitats & nurseries in conjunction with this series of reefs.

Although we find the coral nurseries fascinating, we all have concerns that without identify the reason our source of the decline, will these corals survive? Should we be replacing additional species in these nurseries (such as urchins) along with the corals? Maybe we are jumping the gun on an aggressive replanting approach?

Suggestions were also made to consider a program that would restrict taking the larger most mature species in a fishery, however no specific species were discussed