

# SE Florida Coral Reef Fisheries Stakeholder

# Committee - Meeting 5

### Virtual meeting via Zoom

### 6-8 pm, April 1st, 2021

**Summary**

Overview

On Thursday, April 1st the fifth Coral Reef Committee meeting was held virtually via Zoom. Project principal investigator Kai Lorenzen, facilitator Susana Hervas, and co-facilitator Joy Hazell attended the meeting.

Twelve committee members, two members of the public, two Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission staff, two Florida Department of Environmental Protection employees, and two observers attended the meeting.

The meeting objectives were to:

* Review March 11th public meeting
* Identify potential recommended management actions

Welcome

Given the familiarity of the committee members with each other in this fifth meeting together, the start of the meeting was a quick presentation with 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.)

Public Meeting Review

This section of the meeting consisted of reviewing the public meeting held prior to this committee meeting to recap the public comment and receive feedback. Most of the committee members present had attended the public meeting. Those who could not attend had been sent the recording of the meeting and transcript report.

In a show of hands to understand the level of satisfaction with how the meeting went, there were a variety of responses. A majority had a sense that the meeting went so-so, a couple showed good level of satisfaction and a few felt somewhere in between so-so and bad. When asking for an explanation to their impressions of the meeting, these were the comments shared:

* I had one major issue with the meeting, it was emphasized repeatedly that our group would not take up time in the meeting and people in our group dominated and repeated the same thing.
* I second what was said but there were also some visitors who were dominating the conversation also, people repeated themselves and seem to have a specific agenda they were trying to push.
* One of the most outspoken people in the meeting has the ear of the general public to the max – spearheaded quite a few visible projects – although he did reiterate the same thing. He does have a very loud voice to the public and we have to pay attention to what he said. (member Bruce Marx)
* It is up to us to progress, come up with something that would work and if people join us, that’s great. But I love how many people were present. We need Bruce here because of his wide-ranging audience.
* A lot of the same agenda push but I think it was great having that many participants.
* Folks in the shop were concerned that they didn’t have enough time to talk because of all the other people talking.

Notes from members:

* Just found out – I live on Key Biscayne and they are refurbishing beaches with new sand from salt mines in central Florida - Jamie updated folks on why – not enough sand off Miami-Dade County and the mined sand can custom the size which may mitigate some concerns with sand settling on reefs.
* Jupiter island sand – when it gets hit with a wave it goes onto the reef.

Infographic

The committee members were shown an infographic with a summary of the topics and questions that came up during the public meeting, as well as through public comment (Slide 7 in Appendix 1). This infographic was a qualitative representation for their reflection on the next small group activity. However, there were some comments about it:

* Specify to stop the spray of round up in the canals.
* Let’s look at the bigger picture – water quality.

Small Group Activity

This section was created to provide space for initial brainstorming to narrow down the conversations from the previous four committee meetings, reflect on content from the webinars and input from the public meeting. The twelve members were divided into four groups of three and given 30 minutes in breakout rooms to create a list of i) 2 draft recommended management actions for water quality, ii) 2 draft recommended management actions for fisheries, and iii) 1 draft recommended management action of your choice. They were provided with the public input through the infographic, and the list of Our Florida Reefs (OFR) Final Recommendations for reference. After 30 minutes the group reconvened. Each group had time to explain their list, and there was time at the end to discuss the topics and commonalities between the proposed recommendations.

Small Group Report Out

**Group 1**

1. OFR N70 – protect and restore estuarine habitats (mangroves, seagrasses etc. )
2. OFR N68 – reduce and regulate all the cides because if we cannot get that out of our water column then we cannot do N70.
3. N146 – (the MPAs) has to go away and never come back because if that is in the mix you are never going to get the broad support to do N70 and N68
4. N104 – (two new dredging projects) – set new and appropriate turbidity standards and monitoring, associated habitats.
5. We need spawning closures when all fish spawn. Closed for their spawning, not spatial.
6. Artificial reefs are extremely important now that our regular reef is dying because with climate change and ocean acidification the coral will turn into sands so relief will go away. If we put out stuff that can grow algae, put soft corals on it, sponges on it that have relief – to replace the reefs that will disappear (nearshore, midshore, offshore)

Comments

Before they did the Government Cut dredging in Miami, it was the most productive grass flats and now there are no fish on the grass flats. And there is a fraction of the grass, it’s still pretty healthy, but no fish.

MPAs in the Dry Tortugas reef system are good but not on a piece of dead reef off of Miami – want to keep people involved.

**Group 2**

1. Lake Okeechobee – been hearing that for 15 – 20 years and it needs to stop being dumped into the ocean.
2. Removal of all septic tanks – such as in the Keys.
3. Stormwater runoff – particularly eastern communities where sewage water went into the canal and then the ocean, so there needs to be a funding mechanism like utility taxes to redo their stormwater runoff so it doesn’t run into the ocean.
4. More artificial reefs to take pressure off natural reefs – if we put more, that will help the whole environment – will significantly help.
5. We couldn’t agree on the MPAs as a group – one feels the science is there, others need to know more. I haven’t seen how MPAs are going to help the reefs. Only if there is a good scientific reason.
6. Need to find out more about sharks. We are seeing more under the water and being more aggressive than they used to be.

Comments

Mistakes made by FWC are generally on the conservative side – i.e. hogfish 12 inch to 16 inch

**Group 3**

1. Septic tanks – remove and get on sewer systems.
2. Spraying
3. Agreed to disagree in terms of MPAs – we agree with spawning season closures but closing down areas without science there might not prove the best – other has been to scientific meetings where he has seen the science.
4. Sharks – feeding, sharks chasing the boats, eating the fish – One lost 38 fish to sharks between two trips – encourage the state to resume some controlled harvest of sharks especially bull shark and the sandbar sharks with a small commercial fishery FWC is holding their shark meeting in Miami (Susana will send reminders)
5. Discussed that Lake Okeechobee is a problem for the East and West Coast and if they could flow it back in Florida Bay it would be a win/win all around
6. Enforcement from FWC and mostly for the fact of anchoring on the coral reefs, that when they pull their anchor, they are destroying the reef.

**Group 4**

1. Reductions in fertilizer and herbicide spraying would make a big difference - look at the Tampa Bay model, TAC on aquatic plant management and they are putting GPS on spray boats
2. Continue infrastructure improvements as modeled in the Clean Waterways Act – get rid of septic tanks, outfalls, improving municipal sewage and run-off. Have been working on that and there are pretty big fines now.
3. Come up with a list of 5 fish they feel are in peril and have FWC do a stock assessment on them – have some really good fishermen in this group.
4. Implement a more robust artificial reef – get a more robust program for artificial reefs to take pressure off natural reefs – would continue to help with economic standpoint with diving and fishing community.
5. Depredation by sharks or goliath groupers – not saying go out and get rid of the big goliath groupers – they start chasing sailfish down that are hooked up and not close to the boat, it’s a big problem.

Comments

This week they started removing 5.5 miles of the Tamiami trail so good stuff is happening. Can we have a speaker go over the info on group 4 #2.

Points of Commonalities/Places where there is still disagreement:

* Water quality – agreement
* I didn’t hear anyone mention climate change, ocean acidification, bleaching etc. we cannot do what we are trying to do for our resource without seriously incorporating what we know now and what we believe to be coming.
* Artificial structures – low relief, concrete – commonly discussed.
* MPAs – a few members are proponents, and the rest of the group are opposed.
* Shark depredation was another common topic.
* Some agree that MPAs work fabulously in many different places all over the world and were established many years ago but what we have going on now is a whole different scenario and if you have no reef it doesn’t make sense to do an MPA to protect it – one in Tortugas is amazing but we will see if it works if/when the coral disease makes it to that MPA (MPAs work, maybe not in these circumstances)
* The other day we had a scientists come to the public meeting and express what all of other scientists have told me and that is that MPAs in this reef system would be very valuable and maybe this group could benefit of understanding how MPAs work and now we are putting a full court press on the fish in SE FL by not allowing the fish to get big enough to spawn to their full potential and MPAs would allow the fish to get big enough – report by FWC on RNA of mutton snapper.
* I respect science and MPAs around the world but right here in SE Florida. The disease problem can’t be solved by MPAs – it won’t bring back our fish. Scientists have not worked in these circumstances with the disease and climate change that MPAs will work here – need other options to bring relief and soft corals and sponges back.
* Who is to say that a spawning aggregation spawn will not succeed on other than hard corals, such as mutton snapper, gag, grunts can their spawn only survive on hard corals – we don’t have the science to verify that.
* Fish spawn in specific places and should be protected – all I am saying about the reef line is that if climate change leads the coral down to sand the fish have no place to go offshore.
* I’m not 100% on either way re: MPAs, but if our reefs are dead then it is because of water quality/pollution, not the fishermen who don’t catch the little fish – you can close fish zones all day long but we have to fix the water quality
* I don’t agree that FWC isn’t managing fisheries so the fish can spawn. MPAs do work well, but in areas where fisheries management is strong they are less successful. Tortugas is a special place but randomly selected areas aren’t going to be very effective – won’t protect corals against water quality.
* Would love to have a list of what fisheries are in trouble and let’s do a consensus and let’s have FWC look into it.
* Let’s work on something we can all agree with – acknowledge some are very pro MPAs and some have watched fisheries decline over time
* We want a healthy fishery – would love for people to give a list of what fish aren’t allowed to reach spawning potential.
* Should look at Dr. James Bohnsack where he studied all of the MPAs in the FKNMS and proved that they are working.

Next Steps

Members were reminded that before the next committee meeting #6 there will be potential webinars coming up to clarify some of the criteria used in previous fisheries webinars and to inform them of what possible management recommendations exist that can be utilized in the creation of the management recommendations that are to be made later one.

Appendix A

















