

# SE Florida Coral Reef Fisheries Stakeholder

# Committee - Meeting 6

### Virtual meeting via Zoom

### 6-8 pm, May 27th, 2021

**Summary**

Overview

On Thursday, May 27th the sixth 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.

Ten committee members, two members of the public, two Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission staff, three Florida Department of Environmental Protection employees, and one NOAA contractor.

The meeting objectives were to:

* Introduce concept of criteria
* Identify potential criterial for fisheries management
* Plan Committee Meeting 7

Welcome

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 (Slides in Appendix 1.)

Recap of latest webinar on information gaps and Committee Meeting 5

The committee members were asked to share their take home messages from the latest webinar before sharing a summary slide on the main points that were mentioned by the two webinar presenters and a visual summary of the activity outcomes from last session. These were the take home messages shared during the discussion:

* Thought it was good, no surprises. Answered most questions I had.
* I didn’t see where it showed a well-defined fisheries management problem.
* I thought that Dr. Lorenzen showed that this reef tract area that we are discussing, the fisheries are not in good shape, actually they are in very bad shape.
* I understand why you would say that but when you are comparing an area that has been under protection for decades it will not look the same. It will be different to the Tortugas since it is far from developed areas and does not have the same amount of pressure.
* Every scientist actively involved in this process that I have talked to have described the reef tract as having fisheries at unsustainable levels. Talking also with the scientists that came at the public meeting. This is not an issue of comparing this area to the Tortugas, but what can we do to this area which appears to be drastically in bad shape.
* If you move up the road and look at the IRL, we are having the same thing there and it isn’t because of overfishing, it’s because of water quality.
* It is far more than just one issue, there are many different issues and yes, water quality is very important but is not the only one
* Nursery grounds is something that can be improved upon. I haven’t heard FWC or SA say they are drastically concerned with any particular fishery in the area. There were some issues with red grouper that were addressed by the SA Council. Also recently protected large mutton snapper spawning areas.
* People have different experiences in fishing – different people bring up different issues and this process is to help us bring those conversations into a common together (facilitator).
* I’m not saying there is not problems with fisheries, there is always fisheries coming up and that is why we have agencies who come up with new rules.
* What I’m struggling with all the time, we talk so much about fisheries but I don’t know how that impacts the reef, the fish need the reef but I’m not sure the fish impact the reef. If the reef succeeds the fish will thrive. Fish need reefs for nursery.
* Our biggest problem up north of the reef is when they started introducing water from lake Okeechobee. Florida should put effort into sewage infrastructure.
* We all understand that the issues of water quality are huge and complex but today’s meeting is about fisheries management
* There are issues with habitat loss, water quality, coral reef and what we try to do, MPAs, fisheries management, artificial reefs – those are the symptoms that we are trying to treat. Can sense everybody’s frustration. We all agree on what are the most important points, but right now we are going to focus on treating the symptoms, which is a frustrating thing, but that is what we are focusing on.
* We are proposing a new way of thinking about things about every recommendation today and we think that because these are smaller chunks to bite off than water quality. It is an easier way to get you used to this new way of thinking (facilitator)
* The first presenter in the webinar mentioned we needed more MPAs. The second presenter reported there was an increase in maintenance removal of grass as opposed to spraying.
* DEP- Acknowledges that the coral reef is facing death from a thousand cuts and we need to address all of them.
* Need to have someone from DEP talk about the clean waterways act and there is lots of money for septic/sewer conversions. Have someone from DEP talk about some of the great things that are happening.
* What I understood from the scientists is that we have multiple fish species that are at unsustainable levels. One of the things we can do is to develop a network of marine reserves. I realize how unpopular this is, but since this is a FM meeting I want to make some comments about that: When I was 17 y/o there were tons of fish but now we have millions of boats and fish are not allowed to go to full size and spawn. Sooner or later we are going to have to develop a network of marine reserves from the Dry Tortugas to Martin County.
* Webinar presenter - Clarify what I talked about and emphasize the issue of scale. The way we manage most of this stock is on a relatively large spatial scale so the stocks I discussed in the webinar are managed as a combined SA and GoM unit. So for the whole stock there is one assessment. So they are managed together. Those assessments and plans are made for large regions. In that view of the four species red grouper is potentially in trouble. And measures have been taken that should improve the situation for it, and the other three – yellow tail snapper, mutton snapper and gray triggerfish are in a good state on the level of the whole stock as we assess it. The other information we looked at a smaller scale was from the National Coral Reef Monitoring Program through the reef tract. And from the Dry Tortugas to the Southeast reef tract, and it creates three indicators for each of the three regions – the Dry Tortugas, Florida Keys and SE Florida Reef Tract. One of those is the level of fishing pressure and that is calculated as the ration between the fishing mortality rate and the natural mortality rate, and as long as the fishing mortality does not exceed the natural mortality then it is in a good shape. This is an indicator specific to fishing pressure, not necessarily water quality – just how fish are fished. So fishing pressure is lowest in Dry Tortugas, is intermediate in the Keys and highest in the reef tract. Wiithin the stocks mentioned, throughout the region they are ok, but in the subregions the pressure varies and is extremely high in the reef tract area. The reef tract has the highest pressure of this area, and also the fewest and smallest fish. So in a sense everyone is partially correct here. At a big management level the stock is not in trouble, but when we lok at the region specifically, then that pressure is really high. The other indicators that are abundance space indicators consider water quality and availability of habitat. A lot of this comes down to spatial scale and is partially why we are having this circular discussion. The FM by enlarge is done on a larger spatial scale than those assessments but also the pressure on the SE reef tract is not only from water quality, but the fishing pressure is also extremely high.

Recommendations and Criteria

The committee members introduced the concept of using criteria. Looking at the broader recommendations that were being discussed from the latest webinars, what specific criteria could better describe the members’ preferences? In other words, Under what conditions would they want their recommendations to be considered? (Please refer to slide 11 in Appendix A).

Small Group Activity

Based on the concept of criteria, the objective of this activity was to create a set of criteria for fisheries management. The committee members were divided into three groups of 3. Each group had 30 minutes to discuss criteria for a specific fisheries topic that had come up repeatedly during previous meetings. The topics were: i) Spawning closures, ii) Gather more information on species, and iii) Anchoring.

This section was created to provide space for discussing fisheries management criteria as well as becoming familiar with using the concept of criteria to be used in upcoming meetings. Although none of these criteria were finalized during this meeting.

Small Group Report Out

**Group 1 – More Information on Species**

* Goal – be able to make more informed decisions on fisheries management.
* Review of current info and SA for those key species for FWC/NOAA/DEP
* Good idea to enlist information from citizens to address trends in their observations – used to make changes in hogfish, barracuda, mutton snapper, brought issues to attention of the appropriate agency, being used for sharks and depredation and it is in process
* Develop a network of key groups, CCA, ASA, fishing clubs, tropical fish collectors and have them report what they are seeing through FB for instance – Bruce Marx has an example in marine theft.
* Info could be compiled and given to FWC marine fisheries then to commission
* Already being done piecemeal but this would make it more standard and official
* Why – FWC does work plans and they schedule their stock assessment years down the line and it is difficult when these things parachute in and so if you have a formal process that this info is being brought to the commission, there will be something in the budgeting that is there to handle things like that, important to be standard rather than piecemeal
* Reach out to rank and file to report info and trends and to keep the info as accurate as possible, using photos and human testimonials in a database type fashion
* Bruce has been successful in organizing things such as this on social media – setting up FB pages on particular tasks such as artificial reef and when people see things in real time and have a place to go to see it, lends credibility and leads to results (Marine Force Task Force) – people tend to get involved when they can see trends and results.

**Group 2 – Anchoring**

* Anchoring evolved into mooring buoys to solve damage to reef.
* Id where buoys need to go, 75 feet or less inside, may have conflict in deeper areas, divers or non-stationary boats.
* ID high value sites where we can do the most good, dive or fishing sites, probably a shared buoy system, i.e. fishers at night and divers during the day.
* Not to just daisy chain upper reef but for fishers it is ideal to have in upstream end so should cluster at end of reef and still have spots along the reef but have clusters upstream.
* Education – signage at boat ramps and marinas identifying why you needed to use a mooring buoy and not to anchor adjacent to the mooring buoy, looking for PSAs in fishing radio shows.
* How to support the mooring buoy – adopt a reef or adopt a buoy and sponsoring companies could have their name on the buoy to show their support for the reef.

**Group 3 – Spawning Closures**

* Discussed concept of closures of known spawning aggregation sites in order to protect spawning activities and in general we all agreed that is a very viable concept, closing known spawning sites at the time of spawning.
* We do not know where or if there are spawning aggregation sites b/w BBNP and Martin County so we need to find out if and where and what species are aggregating in that part of the reef tract so they can be protected – like how it is applied to Western Dry Rocks.
* We know mutton snapper spawn in May and June during full moon, mangrove snapper spawn at similar times in shallow areas and if significant spawning areas were identified by scientific community I think the fishing and diving community would all agree to protecting those spots.
* We also talked about places where we knew that gag grouper once spawned off PBC and they no longer come there, so there may be opportunities to create new spawning aggregations through AR or something like that.
* Looking for direction from FWC, that would be helpful but I think we are all in agreement that if we can identify species and location of a spawning aggregation then we need to close it down for a time.
* In many cases it can be spawning seasons. If there isn’t a spot identified still protect spawning seasons that can be identified as well as location. Mangrove snapper, mutton snapper as examples.

Planning next meeting

Next meeting, we want to get together in a bigger block of time to bring the conversations forward. Several formats were proposed (please see slide 13 in Appendix A) and during the discussions on people’s availability and preference, the following was proposed as the best alternative:

Proposed to have a split meeting on Tuesday and Thursday of the same week for two evenings (2-2.5 hrs each day). The meeting is preferred in person, but the possibility of this is still in questions given agency policies.

Next Steps

Members were reminded that before the next committee meeting there will be additional webinars throughout the summer.

**Adjourn**

Appendix A

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