

**Resolution of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council Advancing the Shallow Water Wildlife and Habitat Protection Working Group Recommendations to NOAA for Analysis through a Draft Environmental Impact Statement**

**Adopted: June 17, 2014**

1. Whereas, The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary harbors a tropical marine ecosystem unique in the continental United States, including the world's third largest barrier coral reef, and
2. Whereas, this State and National environmental treasure experiences intensive usage by local residents and an estimated three million annual visitors to the region including recreational divers, recreational fishers, commercial fishers and boaters and it is subject to water pollution, and climate change impacts originating within and beyond the Sanctuary, and
3. Whereas, visitation and environmental usage are increasing with each passing year, and
4. Whereas, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Condition Report (2011) noted stable or declining trends in the abundance and distribution of habitat types, fair to poor status of the condition of habitats, and fair to poor status of human influence on habitat quality in the Florida Keys, and
5. Whereas, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Condition Report (2011) noted declining trends in the condition of living marine resources in the Sanctuary including fair to poor status of biodiversity, fair status of non-indigenous species, poor status of key species, and fair to poor status of the levels of human activities that might impact the quality of such resources, and
6. Whereas, the boundaries, zoning, and regulations of the FKNMS are currently under review and it is expected that this review will result in changes that will guide the future of the FKNMS to adapt to and to withstand the environmental impacts associated with increased usage that are inevitable and currently underway, and
7. Whereas, as part of this review, the Sanctuary Advisory Council created a Shallow Water Wildlife and Habitat Protection Working Group charged with the following objectives:
  - Evaluate existing Wildlife Management Areas for effectiveness in protecting wildlife and their habitats under current as well as emerging public uses and environmental conditions; recommend status quo, modification, and/or new areas.
  - Develop recommendations considering existing regulations and zoning - mainly use of vessel restrictions on anchoring, speed, access, and channel marking - to further protect seagrass and critical shallow water habitats in FKNMS.
  - Address concentrated uses that diminish and destroy seagrass and shallow water habitats.
  - Identify where high impact activities known to occur should be allowed and encouraged for public and private uses.
  - Identify seagrass and shallow water habitat areas for exclusion to allow for research control areas.
  - Evaluate mangrove habitat protection for bird nesting.
  - Reduce damage to natural resources from improper vessel salvage methods.

Therefore, the Sanctuary Advisory Council of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary resolves as follows:

1. We acknowledge the commitment and contribution of Advisory Council and community members who served on the Shallow Water Wildlife and Habitat Protection Working Group.
2. We request that the Shallow Water Wildlife and Habitat Protection Working Group Recommendations are forwarded to the Sanctuary Superintendent for consideration and analysis as part of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.
3. We request the following also be considered as part of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement:
  - Ensure channels remain open for navigation, noted in particular Vaca Cut.
  - Consider mechanisms, including working with appropriate other management entities, to address emerging areas of concentrated use that could damage shallow water habitat.
  - Ensure clear rationale including the problem, goal, solution for any zone modification (noted in particular Tarpon Wildlife Migration Zone, East and West Baracutta Key Flats, and Marquesas Keys Zone).
  - For areas identified to protect turtle resources, consider other ways to meet this resource protection goal.
  - Consider proper marking of zones.
  - Consider the area of Pelican Key on the bayside (MM98) for a potential new zone. Resource protection needs include wading and frigate birds. In addition, this is a high use area.

*The council is an advisory body to the sanctuary superintendent. The opinions and finding of this publication do not necessarily reflect the position of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, or the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.*