

**Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary  
Marine Zoning and Regulatory Review  
Ecosystem Protection Working Group Regional Meeting  
Key West – Lower Keys  
September 25, 2013**

**Comments Compiled in Round-Table Discussion**

Working Group Representation

- Want to see transparency in SAC and working groups. Conflict of interest on SAC with researcher that holds a live bottom lease. Should be shown to the public. Where does the money come for sanctuary studies?

Communication/Public Information

- What assurances do participants expect to be heard and get feedback?
- Community input must be heard. Not only board members but an input of fishermen
- On line footage (i.e. You-Tube has a tremendous amount of documentation to use as support of information
- When all recommendations for new areas/zones are drawn on a map, the public will have more meetings to view and comment before final vote.
- Mis-information has been circulated about new areas/zones.
- There is a lack of information dissemination
- Website is extremely confusing –It needs to be more user-friendly
- Misinformation: don't know proposals from working group; don't know how citizens can impact that process
- Make website more user friendly – more navigable

Impacts to User Group

- Reduce user conflict
- No place that fishing is allowed but not diving; no place to study fishing alone, without diving pressure
- If an area is closed, close it to everyone.
- The more areas taken, it displaces the pressure. Areas outside no lobster zones are getting hammered.
- Consider artificial reefs to focus tourist dive pressure
- If they close it to fishers, they should close it to all. Be fair. When will tourism give something up?
- Divers/ large snorkel boats do more habitat damage than fishermen. Divers use areas where fishing is and is not allowed.
- Misconception that dive/snorkel activity is less consumptive or less impactful to resource than fishing
- Limit access of divers and snorkelers for habitat protection
- Are commercial/charter fishermen causing more damage to the reef then the tourist snorkel/scuba boats?

- Additional closures cause conflicts.
- How do you get the flat-fishermen group to become more involved in this process?
- Jet skis should not be allowed in the back country
- If you are going to exclude a user group, exclude all other user groups – for any and all areas
- Want to see impact of each user group (commercial and recreational fishermen; divers) in SPAs – and for proposed/future SPAs
- Not true what was said earlier- closure areas were going to be voted on that day of the meeting and implemented. If closing, close to everyone. Need an EIS as the closure applies to each specific user group.
- Fishermen are treated different from divers. The perception is fishing is consumptive and diving isn't. Damaged caused from excessive diving/snorkeling at E. Dry Rocks. Large commercial snorkel/dive boats damaging corals.
- Has a problem with snorkeling not being considered a consumptive use. Snorkeling/Diving are consumptive uses. Large user groups in a small area do not work. There is currently not a fish only SPA with no snorkeling/diving.

#### Environmental/Scientific

- Why have all corals died? How are the recommendations going to help/affect this issue?
- Where has scientific study been done? Who is doing it?
- Research is not adequate to justify more area closures
- Concerns that ecological reserves are not fulfilling original stated functions; resources are still in decline and more areas “set aside” for no consumption will not restore the resource
- Sanctuary should put more emphasis on restoration, not just coral, but sea grass should be a focus of management
- Condition report documents management failed
- Need to see the science that is used to make new recommendation.
- Science does not access all fish species.
- Re-access Lemon Shack population
- As a diver, I'm very concerned about the condition of coral
- When designating boundaries – line drawing, base it all on vetted science, which is vetted by other agencies
- Publish results and effectiveness of SPAs and research areas
- Want published where sanctuary got funds for mutton spawning studies
- No need to increase/change marine protected areas. Nothing seen at federal level to justify current zones so no need to increase. No science to support the marine zones. No need to make it larger.
- Against any more lines drawn, especially to any groups. Any closures should be in response to a serious environmental affect. No users should be allowed in an area. Don't know if there is science that proves that the existing zones work. If all closures happen, there will be increased pressure in other areas. Very much against closures that go from the beach to 100ft water. Need a lot of science to support that.

- Want to hear from the Sanctuary about the state of resources before providing input. Came to today's meeting to get information
- Science that is available does not match what we experience. No scientists come to the dock and talk to us. Very frustrating. Dramatic increase in flats guides and reef experiences. Dive industry got a golden ticket and fisherman got the shaft. Reef fishing was taken away from us. We would like to see communications with scientist. We can tell you what's happening, we are the experts and should be consulted. Kingfish population in lower keys is bad.
- No public release of data on SPAs. Larger fish, not necessarily spawning fish. No science for reducing bag limits. Change in bag limits could work. Let's see what happens when you remove all the large fish and let the small fish spawn.
- No reason for additional closures. Full data release of all information on SPAs.
- Need real scientific data, not based on 1 or 2 days. Bonefish count example, very far off due to weather. Should have cancelled the count.

#### Economic Impacts

- Marine businesses should not be negatively impacted by any changes to zoning
- Florida economic impact study should be completed to support zoning regulations
- Closure affects fisheries with in turn affects all other businesses (Key West Marine Hardware)
- Bigger closed areas can lead to higher fuel costs and unnecessary boat engine emissions for commercial/charter fishermen.
- Give concerted thought to socio-economic consequences
- Need strong emphasis on economic consequences of closures

#### Site Specific Input

- Reduce size of the Western Sambo ecological reserve by protecting reef area only; remove from Hawk Channel to shore
- Coral nurseries should be protected.
- Upper keys protection not showing results – concentrates pressure
- Extend Western Sambo ecological reserve south to deeper reef for lobster to move freely through more habitat types
- Join together sand/rock/ER SPAs
- Expansion of the Western Sambos boundaries will be detrimental to the charter/Ballahoo fishermen.
- Need to see a solid reason to close (or not close) regions west of the Marquesas
- I lobster and crab trap from Johnson Key to Smith Shoal. I would not want trapping closures in that area.
- Smith shoal north to Marquesas and west to the Marquesas stay open to fishing.
- Are islands not allowed to go on being preserved? Keep Marvin, Snipes, Contents- every sand bar in the back country open. Keep available for kids/generations.

## Water Quality

- Water quality: What are other elements besides commercial fishing or residential fishing effecting water quality?
- How is water quality tested/measured/investigated?
- Who creates/monitors regulations of live-aboards and who monitors enforcement of pump outs that affect water quality issues?
- Water quality seems to be dictating fishing areas and regulations. Fix this before changing zones.
- Water quality is critical
- Concern about water quality influences coming from outside Keys (i.e. Biscayne/sewage)
- Sanctuary should focus on water quality protection; improvement money was promised by Feds/ State and has not been properly distributed ; needs to be more of a regional effort
- Mandate better water quality throughout sanctuary and expand protection into source areas of pollution
- Sewer and H2O quality on mainland should be addressed
- Sugar subsidy should be removed. This is a large pollution source
- Water quality is the issue – the cruise ship business is causing a lot of damage to lower keys than a lot of other activities

## Education / Enforcement

- Enforce current regulations before enacting new closures
- Simplified fishery/resource regulations would make education easier
- Create way for approved fish feeding like a Blue-Star recognition
- How will law enforcement be effective in controlled zoning? LE as exists can't control current laws/rules
- Enforcement in Tortugas is more effective
- Enforcement has declined in last 10 years and is no longer effective
- More enforcement and education
- More awareness of FKNMS; Need a sign at top of US1
- Enforcement is not effective, not catching poachers
- Not enough enforcement; community does self-police
- Need more law enforcement on the water
- In the winter, non-locals come to the Keys and rape the area – need law enforcement
- Whenever signage, buoys, or other informational/regulatory marks are missing, they should be replaced promptly. It should be reported to USCG, state/DEP, county, sanctuary
- Law enforcement: don't add more regulations on top of those that are not already enforced
- Lack of capacity to enforce existing managed areas – Why add more areas to manage when current areas cannot be managed?
- Cannot easily identify designation
- Lack of enforcement

- Protection versus uses. Concerned about abuses and enforcement. Sanctuary not adequately protecting areas now.
- Hasn't done a good job with wildlife protection. Note enough protection. I have bird data available.
- Who actually does the enforcement for the sanctuary? Can't do much about it.
- Enforcement and lack of is a common thread. Not the same place it was in the 60s. Would like to see something left. There is a lack of funding for enforcement. Produce a plan that's workable and follow up with enforcement.
- Sees tourists not respecting resources. Focus education and enforcement on tourism. Concerned about how much is already closed. A lot needs to be taken into consideration when closing an area.
- Sanctuary staff needs to go out and replace and put out all of the backcountry zone signs.

#### Other Issues to Consider

- Consider consequence of concentrating traps fishing by changing sizes of zones
- State boater fee could generate money for water quality
- No dredging.
- Zones not effective strategy for preventing groundings
- Adaptive management is an anti-politics machine.
- Changes by FKNMS effect other agencies plans already in place.
- Closures combined with certain weather conditions could cause safety issues with charter boats.
- Monster cruise ships are the ones destroying the ecosystem
- Adaptive management idea scares me. We see 2 or 3 heavily used islands start getting taken away because of adaptive management.
- Adaptive management that is small in scale and able to make changes. Be able to react faster on a small scale.
- Need Lionfish training for captains to train and allow customers to catch lionfish.
- Dive and snorkel operators should have user fees to go back to the sanctuary- or a study on it. Night time lighting at the reef to help navigation. User fee that comes back to the resource.
- Toll booth option. A sign that says "you're entering a marine sanctuary". Jewfish Creek area. Toll booth funds directed here to enforcement and education- not general treasury fund.
- Put a cap on how many occupational licenses that are issued for all user groups. Enforce occupational licenses.
- I'm here to see what the sanctuary is doing about the dredging.
- Have the cruise ships towed in and out. Less prop wash would help dramatically and create jobs.
- Cruise ship patrons are not our clients.
- Cruise ship passengers return.
- Cruise ships offer exposure to Key West.

## Temporal Zoning

- April, May, June spawning closure at Western Dry Rocks
- No sale of mutton snapper in April, May, and June
- No temporary closure; manage the fish, not the spot
- Open Western Sambo ecological reserve if habitat improved; let public use/benefit from opening it.
- Keys wide don't create more area of no take zone if they aren't working. If they are, move them around to let people enjoy "formerly" no take areas
- What are new zones? Will any area already closed reopen?
- Specific area closures are ok for times such as spawning
- If you close an area – why not reopen an area that was closed for a decade already?
- Good things occur when close/regulate the grouper spawning when the tourists are here. But opened up when the left and there were more groupers for the locals. I know for a fact the group spawning aggregation closure worked.
- Wilma Key example. Tom Wilmers explains why Wilma Key was closed. FWS Refuges were created before any of us were born. Cottrell only place where pelicans nest. Birds deserve a break. New uses in backcountry: Paddle boarding, Kite boarding etc. What doesn't change is certain places are for birds. Backcountry plan went through because it was small enough. Give pelicans protection where they need it. Can't have people go wherever they want to go. There is commercial use on every island. Some of these places deserve protection.
- Understand about birds and how they move and concerned about Snapper. Move the protection along with where the fish are. In favor of idea of temporal closure.

## Fishery Management and Zoning

- Create new fish grounds (artificial reefs)
- Year round closure for FSA (spawning aggs)
- Consider adding more zones for "generational" effect they will have on members of ecosystem
- Balanced approach to fisheries management; FKNMS should work with NMSF to manage stocks
- Bag limits should be for boats, not individuals
- Manage fisheries, not the land (benthic component)
- How are fish regulations renewed and how/when should they change
- Can we regulate fishing better? Can tags or permits be allowed to catch the regular fish?
- Marine sanctuary is not a fishing manager. Leave protection of spawning aggregations to fisheries managers (councils, FWC, NOAA Fisheries).
- You're not going to save anything by stopping fishing.
- No more "no fishing" zones are needed
- Many fish are over fished
- Sanctuary and zones should not be managed for fisheries
- Zones should not be closed to fishing. How is that helping the ecosystem/habitat?
- Don't like the idea of lumping catch n release fishing with any other fishing in certain areas

- We have a lateral fishery that changes w/ water temperature, currents and time of the year which reflects ability to change fishing areas. Closed areas prove this.
- Mutton snapper should be limited to 2 per boat rather than closures.
- FKNMS should stay out of fisheries management.
- Support closures of spawning locations (and/or reduce fishing pressure on spawning areas)
- The proposed maps from the ecosystem protection working group were proposed as fishing closures. They were not just ideas. (Rebuttal: they are just ideas).
- I recommend all zones be opened up for bait-fishing: hair-hook and cast-net. Specifically at the northern part of Western Sambo – the shoreline of Boca Chica
- I'm a recreational fisherman that loves fishing and it's hard when grouper is closed and we can't go for grouper but love it when it opens up. Have to make concessions so you can bring the fish back.
- Spawning aggregations- if NOAA is not charged with fisheries then leave it to those with the science. Close fish from being fished.
- Keep open near shore areas of lower keys to have access for fishing: bait, flats, shark, etc.
- Why not more effort to change size/bag limits on Snapper/Grouper complex- because that's what the closures are all about. Need changes to help. 2 per person over 10 lbs. 10 per person is absurd when targeting muttons on a spawn. Temporal closures around spawn and general bag limit reduction. Yellowtail could also be reduced. Bracket May-June full moons for spawn. The low hanging fruit that needs to be addressed.
- Sanctuary should be able to set bag limits.
- Failure in structure of sanctuary when we can't set size and bag limits. Limited entry concept. That could solve the problem.
- Reducing bag limits a little at a time. Grouper example- too drastic. Went from wide open to nothing. Do not want to see areas closed.

#### General input regarding zoning

- Manage MPA's consistently (i.e., combine fish management with resource management regulations so they are simplified)
- People won't come here if we can't fish
- If areas are closed when does the zoning stop?
- Recommend no more closures
- No changes should be made at this time
- Sanctuary wants the bottom; instead, take the high reefs because the trappers and fishers don't use them. Above 5' mean low tide, then you won't have tourists standing on reefs
- No one is in favor of any more ecological reserves. Not opposed to potential for slightly expanding some of the existing SPAs). If there's something there to protect it, then protect it. But, if there's not, don't.
- We don't need any more zones
- Should transplant corals in areas already closed before taking away new areas
- Case has not been made for zone expansion; status quo should be maintained until we do a better job
- How can you do more with less money?

- Lines on a map are not going to do anything to help resources
- No more new closures.
- Don't want to see more area/zone closures.
- Need rationale for any attempt at closures
- Once they close it, they will never open it again
- Lack of funding to manage zones
- They closed enough – don't close anymore
- If it's not working, why consider further expansion?
- Once an area is closed, it will stay closed forever.
- The fear of many sport fishermen is that closures will be extended forever
- I don't want to give up anything because we won't get it back
- Coordinate boundary modifications with/through other regulatory agencies
- People are scared of mentioning there is a species or something in need of protection because it will be closed and never opened up again; even after the protection is no longer needed
- Do not need to increase the size or numbers of closed areas on top of what already exists
- Protect smaller islands. Don't think large areas can be pulled off. I wrote the FWS Backcountry plan. Write plans and then forgot about it. Frigates are disturbed. People moor for the night near roosts and the birds can't go home. Need to get zones now, don't want to wait for the Sanctuary. Adaptive management for small island wildlife management. Be able to move around to get with the real issue. Resources important that need to be protected.
- Thought Sanctuaries main purpose was water quality and now fisheries management.
- Fishing is a benefit to people in Key West. Offers a healthy alternative. Sanctions seem pretty harsh. Understand benefit of ecosystem protection.
- Biggest concern is closures. Closing areas causes fishing to move to other areas. Understand bag limits. People being spread out makes conflict less. Less impact on channels and flats with more areas available/open.
- Closures are a symptom- a last resort but not against closures. Closures for all groups. Why still allow unlimited snapper/grouper commercial license. Against unlimited snapper/grouper license.