

FLORIDA KEYS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY ADVISORY COUNCIL  
**Hyatt Place**  
**Marathon, FL 33050**  
**December 8, 2015**

**FINAL MINUTES**

The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council met on Tuesday, December 8, 2015 in Marathon, Florida. Public Categories and government agencies were present as indicated:

**Council Members**

Conservation and Environment: Ken Nedimyer (Chair)  
Conservation and Environment: Chris Bergh (Vice Chair)  
Boating Industry: Bruce Popham (absent)  
Citizen at Large – Lower Keys: Mimi Stafford  
Citizen at Large – Middle Keys: David Vanden Bosch  
Citizen at Large – Upper Keys: David Makepeace  
Diving – Lower Keys: Don Kincaid  
Diving – Upper Keys: Rob Mitchell  
Education and Outreach: Martin Moe  
Elected County Official: George R. Neugent  
Fishing – Charter Fishing Flats Guide: Tad Burke (absent)  
Fishing – Charter Sports Fishing: Steven Leopold  
Fishing – Commercial – Marine/Tropical: Ben Daughtry  
Fishing – Commercial – Shell/Scale: Justin Bruland  
Fishing – Recreational: Jack Curlett  
Research and Monitoring: David Vaughan  
South Florida Ecosystem Restoration: Pete Frezza  
Submerged Cultural Resources: Corey Malcom  
Tourism – Lower Keys: Clinton Barras  
Tourism – Upper Keys: Andy Newman

**Council alternates** (present)

Boating Industry: Kenneth Reda  
Citizen at Large – Middle Keys: George Garrett  
Citizen at Large – Upper Keys: Suzy Roebing  
Conservation and Environment: Caroline McLaughlin  
Diving – Lower Keys: Bob Smith  
Fishing – Charter Fishing Flats Guide: Will Benson  
Fishing – Recreational: Bruce Frerer  
Research and Monitoring: Shelly Krueger  
South Florida Ecosystem Restoration: Jerry Lorenz  
Submerged Cultural Resources: Diane Silvia  
Tourism – Upper Keys: Lisa Mongelia

**Local Elected Officials**

City of Key Colony Beach – Mayor Jerry Ellis  
City of Key West – Mayor Craig Cates  
City of Layton – Mayor Norman Anderson (absent)

City of Marathon – Mayor Chris Bull (absent)  
Village of Islamorada – Vice Mayor Deb Gillis

**Agency Representatives**

Florida Department of Environmental Protection: Joanna Walczak  
FWC Division of Law Enforcement: Captain Dave Dipre  
FWC Fish and Wildlife Research Institute: John Hunt  
NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service: Heather Blough  
NOAA Office of General Counsel: Karen Raine (absent)  
NOAA Office of Law Enforcement: Kenneth Blackburn (absent)  
Dry Tortugas and Everglades National Park: Christopher Kavanagh  
U.S. Coast Guard: Phil Goodman (Auxiliary)  
U.S. EPA: (absent)  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Wildlife Refuges Florida Keys: (absent)  
U.S. Navy: Ed Barham

**I. CALL TO ORDER, ROLL CALL, AND MEETING MINUTES  
APPROVAL OF 10/20/15 DRAFT MEETING NOTES**

**MOTIONS (Passed)**

Chairperson Nedimyer welcomed everyone. A motion was made by Mimi Stafford to approve the minutes from the October 20 meeting. Minutes were approved unanimously. Ben Daughtry made a motion to accept the meeting agenda. Justin Bruland seconded the motion. The agenda was accepted without any objections.

Chairperson Nedimyer thanked Clinton Barras and *FloridaKeys.com* for making it possible to live stream the meeting.

Chairperson Nedimyer made the following announcements:

- The advisory council recently finished a period of recruitment. The following members will be serving additional terms: Martin Moe for Education and Outreach, Chris Bergh for Conservation and Environment, Corey Malcom for Submerged Cultural Resources and Andy Newman for Tourism – Upper Keys. Justin Brulund is now the council member and Jeff Kramer is now the alternate member for Fishing—Commercial Shell/Scale. Diane Silvia is continuing to serve as the alternate for Submerged Cultural Resources. New alternate members include Kasey Fey for Education and Outreach and Lisa Mongelia for Tourism – Upper Keys. Chairperson Nedimyer thanked Eric Handte and Alex Brylske for their years of service on the council.

**II. NOAA RECREATIONAL FISHING STRATEGIC PLAN**

NOAA’s Recreational Fishing Coordinator Russ Dunn gave a presentation about NOAA’s recreational strategic plan for recreational fishing. To view this presentation, visit <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov/sac/othermaterials/20150812recfish.pdf>.

Mr. Dunn’s presentation described the National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Initiative implemented by NOAA Fisheries to establish and maintain a strong partnership with the recreational fishing community. The National Policy and Implementation Plan developed for this initiative calls for collaboration with the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) to identify and highlight

recreational fishing opportunities and the ways that sanctuaries and recreational fisheries can work together in the areas of science, public education and improving participation in the sanctuary management process. As part of the plan's implementation, regional coordinator positions were established, an angler attitude survey was conducted, national saltwater recreational fisheries summits and workshops were held. A meeting of all SAC fishing representatives is planned for 2016 to address collective issues.

**Note:** ONMS Regional Director Billy Causey explained that there is a great deal of overlap in the ways that NOAA Fisheries and sanctuaries operate under the laws that guide each agency. Both entities strive for sustainability of natural resources and have been working closely to collaborate when possible.

### **Discussion (council members)**

During the discussion, the following points were made:

- The suggestion was made to invite state fishing clubs and state fishing agencies to participate in the SAC recreational fishing representative meeting/workshop. This might help develop a common understanding of the laws and regulations and where they overlap.
- The idea of using artificial reefs similar to the way that Alabama uses them was suggested. In Alabama artificial reefs can be purchased and then placed for fishing purposes.
- It was noted that the sanctuary advisory council provides an easier forum for the public to make comment and be heard. It is a greater challenge for a recreational angler or commercial fisher to be heard by the fishery councils (both state and federal) because the councils move their meetings around over a large area.
- The idea of forming a subgroup of SAC fishing representatives to gather input on how to manage local fisheries and solve the fisheries challenge was suggested. Some interesting input could be forthcoming from such a group.
- In response to a comment that the estimate of anglers in Florida (1.8 million) seems low, Mr. Dunn explained that this number is based on the state license records and is a known underrepresentation because it doesn't include age and active duty military exemptions.

### **Comments**

Chairperson Nedimyer recognized former SAC member Bill Wickers, representative of the Key West Charter Boat Association. Captain Wickers stated that he was pleased to see that NOAA Fisheries was reaching out to the recreational fishing community. The Key West Charter Boat Association holds the viewpoint that the Sanctuary mandate does not allow the sanctuary to make fisheries rules and/or engage in fisheries management, which is accomplished through fisheries management councils. Fisheries councils have the staff to determine whether stocks are healthy and what measures are needed to keep stocks healthy while not allowing the fishing communities to wither and die from too much regulation. Hopefully, through this process, a point will be reached that the tensions can be worked out; he is really glad to hear that this issue is being worked on and hopes that no more lawyers are needed.

In response to Captain Wickers, Regional Director Billy Causey explained that marine sanctuaries do not manage fisheries, but sanctuary regulations fully allow sanctuaries, including FKNMS, to implement regulations that affect fishing. In fact, years ago, the Key Largo NMS and Looe Key NMS both implemented regulations that affected fishing, including no spearfishing. If a regulation that affects fisheries is planned, that sanctuary will work closely with the fishery councils to give them first opportunity to create a regulation. If that regulation

does not go far enough to protect the habitat, for example, then it can be appealed and reevaluated. Mr. Casey acknowledged and thanked Captain Wickers for his contribution to the sanctuary advisory council.

Superintendent Morton explained that if any proposed changes would affect fishing, NOAA Fisheries would be informed and become involved at the regional and national levels through communication and coordination with FKNMS.

### **III. FLORIDA BAY SEAGRASS DIE-OFF**

Dr. Jim Fourqurean, Florida International University, gave a presentation entitled *Florida Bay Update: The return of seagrass die-off*. This presentation can be viewed by visiting <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov/sac/othermaterials/20150812Floridabaysg.pdf>.

Dr. Fourqurean described the large scale seagrass (*Thalassia testudinum*) die-off observed in the late 1980s in Florida Bay and gave an overview of the most recent die-off, which began in the summer of 2015. In the late 1980s, extremely high salinity levels and high seawater temperatures in the shallow clear waters of Florida Bay resulted in very low dissolved oxygen (DO) or hypoxic conditions, especially near the seafloor. At night when DO was low and the plants weren't producing their own oxygen through photosynthesis, sulfides intruded into and poisoned the meristems (or growing tips) in the plant shoots, causing them to die. Large areas in the central bay died in this way and floating seagrass was observed at the water's surface in these basins. Similar masses of floating grass have been observed in recent months. Only a few years after the late 1980s die-off, cyanobacterial blooms became prevalent in bay waters. These blooms, which were fueled by decaying grass, drastically impacted the bay's ecosystem by causing widespread mortality in sponges. The loss of sponges meant that bay waters weren't being filtered as frequently and this reduction in filtration contributed to further declines in water quality.

Conditions in the summer of 2015 were similar to those in the late 1980s and as in the past led to the seagrass shoot mortality in the same dense grassbeds in the western/central bay. In response to the first die-off, routine monitoring of seagrasses and water quality began. Monitoring of seagrasses over the years showed that seagrasses had been gradually recovering until the summer of 2015. Today's die-off covers thousands of acres, with the percentage of losses varying between the different basins. In the degraded grassbeds, scientists have been observing the presence of elemental sulfur being emitted from the sediments as a "yellow fog". Video footage of the fog and degraded grassbeds was presented.

In today's altered system, Florida Bay receives most freshwater as direct rainfall. Under drought conditions, high evaporation in bay basins drives salinity levels up, especially in the central basins. This makes every freshwater source, including inputs from the mainland, important in moderating salinity. Getting the right amount of fresh water into Florida Bay at the right time is critical to preventing similar hypersaline conditions in the future.

#### **Discussion:**

During the discussion, Dr. Fourqurean made the following points in response to council member questions:

- The recent rain has helped to alleviate salinity conditions, but it is difficult to say whether conditions will continue to deteriorate due to positive feedback loops that exist (decaying seagrass could lead to widespread algal blooms in the water column).

- Even a small amount of freshwater in the bay can ameliorate conditions—by preventing waters from becoming too hypersaline. Water management plays an important role in getting freshwater into the bay in the system that exists today, which is very much altered from the natural one that existed in the past.
- Seagrass plants hold the sediments in place on the seafloor. The loss of the armoring of the bottom by the seagrass helps promote algae blooms in the water column. When plant rhizomes die and lift away from the seafloor, there is nothing to hold the fine muddy sediments of the bay bottom in place and deterioration of the water column follows.

Other points made include:

- The sponge die-off seen in association with early seagrass die-off resulted in loss of juvenile habitat for spiny lobsters, which had a local effect on the fishery. Cyanobacterial blooms have continued through the years, although they may be less extensive than in the past.
- The stage was set in the 1980s when waters were extremely high in the Everglades. At that time, canals on the mainland were drained 2.5 feet and have never been allowed to return to previously high levels. This change in water management led to reduced freshwater inputs into Florida Bay.
- At the same time as bay grasses were dying in the late 1980s, corals were bleaching on the entire Florida reef tract and throughout the Caribbean. Environmental conditions at the reef and the bay then were similar to what they were this past year—slick calm conditions, hot water with a low saturation of dissolved oxygen.
- The heavy rains in December 2003 eventually led to the “black water” water mass event. This water mass originated off Florida’s west coast in the Gulf of Mexico in January 2004 and then flowed across the Florida Keys reef. The black water was thought to have formed when a disintegrating red tide mixed with a bloom of diatoms. Diatom growth had been fueled by silica carried to the coast by heavy rains.

## Break

### IV. WATER QUALITY MONITORING in SOUTH FLORIDA

(Presentation and Potential Action)

Dr. Chris Kelble, NOAA Atlantic Oceanographic & Meteorological Laboratory, gave a presentation entitled *Long-Term Trends in South Florida Coastal Water Quality: With Potential Consequences*.

To view this presentation, visit

<http://floridakeys.noaa.gov/sac/othermaterials/20150812floridabaywq.pdf>.

Dr. Kelble described the trends in water quality in South Florida and the Florida Keys based on the results from three long-term water quality monitoring programs and from fisheries data on spotted sea trout. Overall, fisheries data show that juvenile sea trout populations have been declining for many years and that salinity plays a role in this species that spends its entire life cycle within the bay. Years of good recruitment (2005, 2006) had the most “normal” or lower salinity regimes (not hypersaline). In contrast, when salinities were high, recruitment was low. Models showing bay water conditions when more surface water is directed into the bay show a huge increase in suitable habitat for sea trout.

Eutrophication or nutrient pollution is a concern in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. The sanctuary is broken down into several water quality regions based on water quality characteristics. Increasing trends in inorganic phosphorus (Soluble Reactive Phosphorus SRP) are observed in all

regions since the baseline was established in 1995. Phosphorus is the primary limiting nutrient throughout most of the sanctuary. This trend is consistent across monitoring programs, across regions and in Biscayne and Florida Bays. The increase is 2 to 3 times greater in the backcountry and western areas, indicating that one source of phosphorus may be upstream in the Gulf. Increasing trends in chlorophyll were observed in some regions. Dr. Kelble described the feedback loop from increased nutrients, which eventually results in the loss of benthic community and benthic grazers and increased algal growth. Scientists are examining two different hypotheses as possible causes for increased chlorophyll a levels. The Bottom-up hypothesis asserts that nutrients in the system are increasing and resulting in increased chlorophyll-a levels. The Top-down hypothesis states that decreases in grazing activity have allowed phytoplankton and macroalgae to increase. The loss of sponges from the bay represents the loss of grazers on phytoplankton. Ongoing monitoring of conditions and taking proactive and innovative actions to prevent further increases in inorganic nutrient loading are essential to maintain health of coastal waters.

### **Discussion**

Dr. Kelble made the following points in response to questions from council members:

- If the freshwater that is sent to Florida Bay as part of restoration meets the accepted high nutrient standards, then adding more freshwater should not create more nutrient pollution. Discussions have taken place as to how much degraded water is acceptable, if any, to get the quantity of water needed to mitigate for the severe impacts of extremely high salinities.
- Data on adult spotted sea trout are somewhat limited, which means it is difficult to say whether overfishing plays a role in the declining populations. To maintain a healthy sea trout population, high recruitment should take place about every three years and it has been about eight years since sea trout recruitment has been good.
- Pink shrimp, which are also a good indicator species, have also shown population declines.

### **Comments**

Dr. Fourqurean pointed out that nutrients affect Florida Bay waters differently than waters of the reef tract. Increasing water flows into the bay from the north (mainland), which has less phosphorus than Gulf of Mexico waters, does not increase phosphorus loading in the bay. It actually decreases loading by displacing phosphorus rich water that would have come in from the Gulf with the tides. This nearshore phosphorus-limited system will not respond to excess nitrogen. The reef tract is nitrogen-limited and nitrogen inputs could affect the reef even without affecting nearshore communities.

Dr. Fourqurean noted that seagrass monitoring has been ongoing since 1995 with 40 sentinel sites spread throughout the Keys. At these sites, signs of nutrient increases are not being observed. An additional 1,000 seagrass sampling sites exist and when resampled will show decadal changes, if present.

Regional Director Billy Causey pointed out that restoration on the mainland is all inclusive and that means getting the timing, quantity and quality of water flows right.

John Hunt added that in addition to Everglades restoration and water management options, local opportunities for restoration should be considered. A sponge restoration program focused on shallow water sponges in Florida Bay is underway and provides an opportunity to jump-start recovery following these kinds of perturbations. He called attention to an older Sea Grant publication he authored with the late Dr. Brian Keller, called *Rust and Rotten Eggs*, which was about the iron-sulfur

interaction. Dr. Fourqurean and other scientists are proposing exploring some of those concepts with respect to seagrass recovery. The council should consider where and how local actions might be applied and encourage organizations such as the National Park Service to consider such options.

## **V. WATER QUALITY PROTECTION PROGRAM– CANAL DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS**

Monroe County Sustainability Program Manager Rhonda Haag gave a presentation about the canal demonstration projects that are part of the Water Quality Protection Program (WQPP). To view this presentation, visit <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov/sac/othermaterials/20150812canaldemo.pdf>

Ms. Haag described early land development in the Florida Keys and the building of the canal systems. Many canals exhibit very poor water quality due to poor circulation and anoxic (no oxygen) conditions and do not meet state water quality standards for dissolved oxygen (DO). The canals discharge directly to nearshore Outstanding Florida Waters in the FKNMS. To guide restoration, the FKNMS Water Quality Protection Program (WQPP) formed a canal restoration subcommittee that oversaw the development of a Monroe County Canal Management Master Plan (CMMP). As part of CMMP, all canals were assessed and rated on the water quality characteristics. Of the 502 canals, three hundred and eleven canals were identified as needing some form of water quality improvement. A Canal Restoration Demonstration Program was implemented using 7 million dollars of funding from Monroe County. The purpose of the program was to test the effectiveness of the five different restoration technologies. Two projects have been completed and were considered successful: backfilling a deep canal in Key Largo (Sexton Cove) and organic removal in Doctor's Arm on Big Pine Key. The backfilling project, which cost 1.36 million dollars, corrected the DO conditions almost immediately. Since then, fish and other marine life have returned and seagrass has begun to reestablish itself. In the organic removal demonstration, the canal, which is 13 feet deep, was not backfilled. The organic muck was removed, dewatered at a station set up on site. A second muck removal project was also completed in Big Pine Key. As part of the outreach component of the CMMP, interested members of the community participated in a site tour at Doctor's Arm organic removal project.

Scientists from FIU tested and characterized water quality in demonstration canals one year in advance of restoration and will be monitoring these canals for a full two years after restoration. Benthic (seagrass) monitoring is also being conducted by FIU. The canal grant in 2016 from EPA will look at less expensive technologies and develop a business plan to identify reliable and equitable funding. The Monroe County's Board of County Commissioners requested a workshop to discuss programmatic plans for future restorations if they occur, identify funding mechanisms and clarify the regulatory requirements, including whether restoration is mandated by EPA/FDEP. The workshop is tentatively planned for March 2016. Ms. Haag recognized the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Environmental Protection Agency for their funding contributions.

### **Discussion**

The following comments/points were made:

- Support for canal restoration was expressed whether or not it is mandated by FDEP. EPA has provided funding for water quality projects because it is obligated to oversee water quality in the FKNMS in accordance with sanctuary legislation. This is an example of how EPA brings something significant to this community.
- Asking the community for input on canal restoration ideas might be helpful to explore the development of less expensive restoration methods.

- Property values of restored canals are expected to increase. A socioeconomic analysis to evaluate how property values change with restoration is being planned by the county.
- Even though some funds were made available by FDEP, EPA and Governor Scott to help with wastewater restoration, most of the costs were born by the residents of the Keys community. Local governments would like to see more funding to aid with costs. Appreciation was expressed for the wastewater funding provided by Governor Scott.
- Monroe County is seeking Restore Act money for canal restoration.
- Monroe County generates more sales tax per capita than any other county in the state. The county generates 200 million in sales tax and gets back 20 million.
- The FKNMS and Areas of Critical State Concern Program help make the case as to why federal and state dollars are needed for these projects.

## **Lunch**

### **VI. FLORIDA KEYS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY 25<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY UPDATE and 2016 BUOY CAMPAIGN**

Superintendent Morton recognized Tourist Representative Andy Newman, who has been guiding efforts for the Tourist Development Council (TDC) related to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Mr. Newman stated that the TDC values the sanctuary both in its advertising and public relations programming and has contributed economic resources to the community by supporting the Florida Keys Eco-Discovery Center, the Vandenberg wreck and other capital infrastructure projects in the Keys. One goal of the TDC public relations plan this year was to bolster awareness about the FKNMS sanctuary and its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Mr. Newman shared a 6 minute video with the council produced for the anniversary. The TDC is continuing to work with media related to the anniversary and to the centennial celebration of the national park service. Other anniversary related efforts include producing a one minute video, publishing feature articles Keys Traveler Magazine, publicity on Visit Florida and other websites, broadcast news pieces and postings on social media. More than 400,000 people were reached on social media. To watch the video visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pugOu8mvF8>

To read the article in Keys Traveler Magazine visit:

<http://www.fla-keys.com/pdf/KeysTraveler2016.pdf>

Superintendent Morton thanked the TDC for their efforts and announced that the sanctuary's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration will be continuing into the next year with a mooring buoy campaign. In recognition of the anniversary Blue Star operator Fury Water Adventures approached the sanctuary and offered to reach out to both commercial and personal users of the mooring buoys to support buoy maintenance. Providing mooring buoys is a big part of what the sanctuary does for the community. Buoys need to be properly installed and maintained and this is sometimes a challenge with available resources. Superintendent Morton thanked Fury for kick-starting this program with the sanctuary and added that he would like to involve the advisory council members in this campaign, which will be featured during 2016. The campaign will be housed with the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation; more information can be found by visiting <http://nmsfocean.org/mooring-buoys> and <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov/mbuoy/welcome.html>.

### **MOTION (passed)**

Vice Chair Bergh explained that Conservation and Environment Alternate Caroline McLaughlin provided wording for a motion about Florida Bay to the council in advance of the meeting. A few minor tweaks were suggested by members regarding the language of the motion, which was

projected on the screen to show its content and suggested changes. The council held a brief discussion about the suggested changes and listened to public comment (see below) before calling the vote. To view this resolution, on the *Ecological Conditions and Restoration Needs of Everglades National Park and Florida Bay*, visit <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov/sac/othermaterials/20150812floridabaymotion.pdf>.

Vice Chair Bergh made the motion, which was seconded by David Makepeace. A role call vote was taken; the motion passed unanimously.

**Notes:** Superintendent Morton pointed out that people who are interested in this topic might also like to attend meetings of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force, its Working Group and Science Group. For more information, visit <http://www.evergladesrestoration.gov/>. Dr. Kelble serves on the Science Group.

South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Representative Dr. Jerry Lorenz suggested that the ecosystem restoration working group of the advisory council be reconvened to keep sanctuary staff and the council apprised of Everglades/Florida Bay issues. Dr. Lorenz chaired this working group, which was operational as a working group of the council, until about four years ago. With current issues in the bay, re-establishing this working group might be appropriate. This suggestion was not part of the proposed motion.

## **VII. PUBLIC COMMENT FOR ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA**

Captain Bill Wickers, Key West Charter Boat Association

- Captain Wickers stated that the Key West Charter Boat Association strongly endorses the FKNMS resolution on Everglades National Park and Florida Bay. This is an extremely positive action. His association has always supported any action that could have a positive impact on cleaning up waters. He and members of the association believe that water quality is the key to saving the unique marine waters of the Florida Keys that are so important to our livelihoods and to our quality of life. Getting the water quality back to historic levels will solve most of the problems in the nearshore waters and offshore reefs. It is difficult to understand why the same issues are still being dealt with that occurred back in the 1990s. Hopefully, one day this will be resolved from both the state and federal governments. The charter boat association would like to feel like partners with the sanctuary advisory council in protecting this beautiful place we call home. He and the other members make their livelihoods in this beautiful place. The last thing that they would ever want to do to see it destroyed. Thank you for listening.

Ron Cole, private citizen

- Mr. Cole has been following the politically incorrect topic of climate engineering for quite some time. He has a little bit of concern about the geo-bio engineering in Florida Bay. People know that climate engineering is taking place. Russ Dunn said earlier that we need scientifically sound and trusted information. The elephant in the room is climate engineering. Everyone is dancing around it and not talking about it. People know that they have been putting aerosols in our environment—aluminum, magnesium, barium—all kinds of aerosols that ultimately end up in our water. This information was presented at a Monroe County commission meeting about 3 or 4 years ago and nobody's talking about this. This is having some kind of effect on our environment. The rainfall is being manipulated. This is a whole

huge issue and we are not being honest about this issue. He understands that a lot of people are under restrictions and can't talk about it. Hopefully, people are talking about it behind the scenes. People need to find a way to address it and end it because ultimately it is damaging us. He reads the Key West Citizen everyday where he read the following in the citizen's comments: So, which story is true—the seagrass die-off was grossly overestimated or that the eco-nuts think the sky is falling? That must be him they are talking about.

**VIII. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT, REGIONAL DIRECTOR'S REPORT AND AGENCY REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:** DEP, FWC, NOAA NMFS Southeast Region, NOAA OGCES, NOAA OLE, NPS, USCG, USEPA, USFWS, and U.S. Navy

**NOAA Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Report, Sean Morton**

- Sanctuary staff continues to work on the draft Environmental Impact Statement for the management plan review. The goal to release the draft is late spring/early summer.
- Director Dan Basta retired on December 1<sup>st</sup>. John Armor will continue as the acting director until the recruitment goes forward. Matt Brookhart is now acting deputy director.

**NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries Southeast Region, Billy Causey**

- A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been signed between Cuba and the U.S. to facilitate joint efforts concerning the science, stewardship and management of MPAs. The MOU establishes a sister sanctuary network that involves Guanahacabibes National Park and Banco de San Antonio in Cuba and Flower Garden Banks NMS, the Florida Keys NMS and the Everglades and Dry Tortugas National Parks in the U.S. The agreement was signed in Cuba by Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and NOAA Administrator Dr. Kathryn Sullivan and first Director of Cuba's Ministry of Science, Technology, and Environment Dr. Fernando Bermúdez. Other NOAA administrators and representatives from the National Park service were present for the signing. This MOU, which was the first agreement between Cuba and the US since diplomatic relations were restored, received international press. The US and Cuba have shared resource concerns and under this agreement expect to work closely on resource issues without the contribution of monetary support from the US.

**Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) Report, Joanna Walczak**

- FDEP is still tracking the unprecedented outbreak of coral disease in Miami-Dade and Broward Counties. Since the last council meeting, disease reports have fallen off, but disease is still present at higher than normal concentrations. Everyone is encouraged to report disease/bleaching through MEERA in the Keys and SEAFAN on the mainland.
- Our Florida Reefs community planning process for the northern part of the Florida reef tract has a stakeholder working group that has made some management recommendations (not formal). To seek public input on these draft recommendations, community meetings will be held in January and February on the mainland.
- The legislative session will be beginning early in January. People are encouraged to participate in events held at the Capitol in Tallahassee and help inform the legislature about the importance of natural resources to the local community. Some of the Capitol events include: Oceans Day (February 11), Dive Day (February 4) and Florida Keys Day (February 17).

### **FWC Law Enforcement, Captain Dave Dipre**

- FWC is busy responding to violations throughout the Keys. Unlicensed fishing is taking place on the bridges; many violators are visitors from Miami. Captain Dipre suggested offering more fishing courses in Miami to better educate people on the regulations.

### **FWC Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI)**

- FWC commission has initiated the early stages of multiple management directions that relate to the Florida Keys:
  - FWC is hosting a snook symposium, which is a statewide symposium held in Orlando on January 13 ([MyFWC.com/Snook2016](http://MyFWC.com/Snook2016)).
  - Workshops on mutton snapper rules and different actions will be held on February 2 at Hawks Cay on Duck Key; February 3 at the Marriot Beachside in Key West and February 4 at the Murray Nelson Government Center in Key Largo. Changes to bag and trip limits are being addressed at these workshops.
  - Barracuda workshops will be held on February 23 at Harvey Government Center in Key West; on February 24 at Key Colony Beach City Hall and on February 26 at Murray Nelson Center in Key Largo.
  - A workshop will be held on anemones on February 23 in Key Colony Beach. Three years have passed since the marine life rule stopped the harvest of the pink tipped anemone.

### **NOAA Fisheries Service Report, Heather Blough**

- The South Atlantic Council is meeting this week in Atlantic Beach and is scheduled to approve for implementation:
  - New action to establish trip limits in commercial dolphin fishery
  - New action to change start dates of commercial and recreational fishing seasons for yellowtail snapper to minimize likelihood of future winter closures
- The South Atlantic Council is expected to approve for public hearing:
  - Draft rebuilding measures for Florida Keys hogfish stock, including very substantial commercial and recreational catch limit reductions, size limits, bag limits, commercial trip limits, and fixed recreational fishing season
  - Proposed changes to mackerel boundaries, catch limits
  - New electronic reporting requirements for the for-hire sector
  - The South Atlantic Council is expected to approve for scoping new catch limits and management measures for mutton snapper. They will be coordinating with FWC on that.
- The South Atlantic Council will discuss the spiny lobster overage and Gulf Council recommendation to reconvene the two Council advisory panels to consider providing guidance/recommendations.
- The Nassau grouper listing determination is still pending; expect to publish it early next year.
- Through December 18, requesting comments on a draft Action Plan for Fish Discard and Release Mortality Science.

### **Everglades and Dry Tortugas National Park Service, Chris Kavanagh**

- With regards to the status Florida Bay, Everglades National Park briefed the regional level office for their awareness of the situation. The park has requested assistance and asked

that the situation be considered as a crisis incident. Additional park service staff may be brought in short term and monetary assistance has been requested.

**Note:** In response to a question about possible fisheries regulations for spotted sea trout, the suggestion was made to consider restrictions and to involve FWC as a partner.

#### **US Coast Guard, Phil Goodman**

- Since the last advisory council meeting, the U.S. Coast Guard and Coast Guard Auxiliary have investigated 27 calls in the sanctuary from the National Response Center for Pollution. All of these calls were fuel based, except one for nitric acid. Florida DEP assisted in monitoring the nitric acid incident. One case involved fuel and drums and other cases involved derelict vessels, which have had the fuel removed from them. Five cases were federalized.

**Note:** Captain Dipre responded to a question about derelict chubs in the Marquesas. FWC, Border Patrol, U.S. Coast Guard met to discuss this issue. The number one issue is how to finance the removal. FWC has secured some funding from Border Patrol to have these removed. FWC and the Coast Guard are cooperating to assist with removal since Border Patrol has no vessels in the vicinity. Funds from the state's Boater Improvement Fund have been used in the past, but these funds are limited and can only fund the removal of 100 vessels a year and there are far more vessels than that.

#### **U.S. Navy, Ed Barnham**

- The Navy recently privatized wastewater system on the base. The Florida Keys Aqueduct Authority is now handling their wastewater treatment and the original small plant will be taken out of service.

### **IX. UPCOMING MEETING AND CLOSING REMARKS**

The next council meeting is in February. Chairperson Nedimyer adjourned the meeting.

#### **Adjourn**