

FLORIDA KEYS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY ADVISORY COUNCIL

**Hyatt Place
1996 Overseas Highway
Marathon, FL 33050
Tuesday, April 18, 2017**

FINAL MINUTES

SANCTUARY ADVISORY COUNCIL MISSION STATEMENT
(adopted unanimously, December 6, 2005)

Council Members

Conservation and Environment: Ken Nedimyer (Chair)
Conservation and Environment: Chris Bergh (Vice Chair)
Boating Industry: Bruce Popham
Citizen at Large – Lower Keys: Mimi Stafford
Citizen at Large – Middle Keys: George Garrett (absent)
Citizen at Large – Upper Keys: David Makepeace
Diving – Lower Keys: Don Kincaid
Diving – Upper Keys: Elena Rodriguez (absent)
Education and Outreach: Martin Moe
Elected County Official: George R. Neugent (absent)
Fishing – Charter Fishing Flats Guide: Tad Burke
Fishing – Charter Sports Fishing: Steven Leopold (absent)
Fishing – Commercial – Marine/Tropical: Ben Daughtry
Fishing – Commercial – Shell/Scale: Justin Bruland (absent)
Fishing – Recreational: Ken Reda
Research and Monitoring: David Vaughan (absent)
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: Karen Thurman
Citizen at Large – Upper Keys: Suzy Roebling
Conservation and Environment: Caroline McLaughlin
Conservation and Environment: Jessica Dockery
Diving – Lower Keys: Bob Smith
Diving – Upper Keys: Michael Yasky
Fishing – Charter Fishing Flats Guide: Will Benson
Submerged Cultural Resources: Diane Silvia
Tourism – Lower Keys: Joe Weatherby
Tourism – Upper Keys: Lisa Mongelia

Local Elected Officials (present)

Village of Islamorada –Mayor Deb Gillis

Agency Representatives (present)

Florida Department of Environmental Protection: Joanna Walczak

FWC Division of Law Enforcement: Capt. Dave Dipre

FWC Fish and Wildlife Research Institute: John Hunt

NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service: Heather Blough

NOAA Office of Law Enforcement: Kenneth Blackburn

U.S. Coast Guard (USCG): LT. Quentin Long

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), National Wildlife Refuges Florida Keys: Daniel Clark

U.S. Navy: Ed Barham

**I. CALL TO ORDER, ROLL CALL, AND MEETING MINUTES APPROVAL OF 02/21/17
DRAFT MEETING NOTES**

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call

MOTION (passed)

A motion to accept the minutes was made by David Makepeace and seconded by Bruce Popham. The minutes were accepted as is. A motion to accept the agenda was made by David Makepeace and seconded by Bruce Popham. The agenda was adopted with the following change: John Armor will give his remarks later in the afternoon.

Opening Remarks

Chairperson Nedimyer welcomed the council. Over the five years he has served as chair, he had hoped the regulatory review would be complete. Even though that is not the case, he feels as though they have made many accomplishments. He is excited to nominate the new chair and vice chair at today's meeting. Mr. Nedimyer also welcomed the new upper keys diving alternate Michael Yasky.

Mr. Nedimyer asked Pete Frezza for an update on the Everglades restoration. Mr. Frezza noted recent legislation passed through the Florida Senate for construction of a reservoir on state owned land to create water storage south of Lake Okeechobee. This storage will be central to reduce the delivery of contaminated water to the St Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries and deliver fresh water to the Everglades and Florida Bay. This bill is now scheduled to be seen by the Florida House of Representatives. After potential amendments, the final bill will be voted on by the Florida Senate and House, and approved by the governor. The best available science indicates that storage south of the lake is the best option for water quality.

Discussion:

- A council member clarified that the governor has come out in support of the southern reservoir as well as restoration of the Herbert Hoover dike.
- One member asked for clarification on the quality of the water released to the east and west compared to that same water released south. Pete Frezza clarified that the reservoir will be naturally filtering the water through vegetation in the reservoir.
- A question was raised about locations for testing of water quality and how to determine the purity of the water as it travels south. Everglades National Park has specific water quality guidelines for water coming into the park, and the water released through the reservoir will

meet those standards. The water is currently tested throughout the system to ensure its quality. Once the reservoir is full however, there is the option for spill-over.

- One council member took a site visit, and they determined the process for filtration was simple and effective. The quality of water will be ensured through the filtration process as well as through the natural filtration of the Everglades before it gets to Florida Bay. A member raised concerns about small concentrations of chemicals and debris that can harm development of invertebrates and fish, and noted that more research should be concentrated in this area.

ADVISORY COUNCIL BUSINESS

II. FLORIDA KEYS SHALLOW WATER BOATING IMPACT ANALYSIS AND TRENDS ASSESSMENT (potential action)

Pete Frezza, Audubon Florida and South Florida Ecosystem Restoration FKNMS Member, introduced a resolution that was sent to all council members in advance of the meeting.

Resolution

After three presentations over the last year, Mr. Frezza would like the council to consider the resolution to update the regulatory review process to consider the Florida Keys Shallow Water Boating Impact Analysis and Trends Assessment data (Kruer 2017) in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. To view the final resolution, visit

<http://floridakeys.noaa.gov/sac/othermaterials/20170418swimpactsres.pdf>.

Motion (passed)

Pete Frezza made a motion to accept the resolution. This motion was seconded by David Makepeace. The vote was called and the resolution passed unanimously.

Discussion on Resolution

- A question was raised about the current progress of the review and how this would impact that process. FKNMS Policy Analyst Beth Dieveney clarified that this information can still be useful for further review. USFWS National Wildlife Refuges Manager Dan Clark supported this position.
- Vice Chairperson Bergh extended a thank you to the author of the study as well as those responsible for supporting this study.
- One member also commented that this study showed that seagrass has been recovering with these closures and the importance of that finding.

Public Comment on Resolution - none

III. ADVISORY COUNCIL CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR SELECTION

Ken Nedimyer and Chris Bergh, current chair and vice chair, asked for nominations for their successors. They encouraged anyone who is willing to participate as a leader of the council to volunteer.

Vice Chairperson Bergh clarified the role of the chair and vice-chair as follows: the chair is responsible for running the meetings and the vice chair provides that leadership if the chair is unable. They are also involved in the agenda setting and approving the meeting minutes. When vacant seats arise, staff and council leadership work together to fill those vacancies. In addition, there are various

conference meetings for the chair throughout the year. The regulatory review will also be released soon, and that will present a time commitment for both positions.

Andy Newman nominated Bruce Popham for chair. Bruce clarified that with personal issues he will not be able to serve longer than a year. He suggested having two vice-chairs who are prepared to take the leadership role that he can mentor. He commended the knowledge of other members at the table, and stressed the importance of nominating someone who wants the position. He will take over in the interim, but with the caveat that one of the vice chairs be prepared to take over.

Vice Chairperson Bergh nominated David Makepeace for vice chair. David indicated willingness to accept the position in a year, but not at this time. He was willing to take over as second vice chair. Mimi Stafford and Ben Daughtry also considered serving as co-chair if needed.

Clinton Barras volunteered to serve as a vice chair under Bruce's tutelage, and will be prepared to take over as chair.

MOTION/ELECTION (passed)

Bruce Popham was elected chair of the council and Clinton Barras was elected vice chair.

IV. OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ADVISORY COUNCIL RECREATIONAL FISHING WORKING GROUP

Captain Will Benson, Advisory Council Fishing – Charter Flats Guide alternative and working group chair, and Nicole Uibel, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, provided a presentation to the council. To view this presentation, visit <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov/sac/othermaterials/20170418blueafishingguide.pdf>.

A working group of the advisory council was convened and chaired by Captain Will Benson, Advisory Council Fishing – Charter Fishing Flats Guide alternate, and professional fishing guide, to advise on program development. Nicole Uibel is the sanctuary's representative on the Blue Star fishing guides program under development. She explained that the working group was comprised of members of the advisory council and community experts and held two all day workshops during the 6-week development period. Public meetings were also held to seek public input. The working group was established based on a resolution passed at the August 16 advisory council meeting (for the final motion see: <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov/sac/othermaterials/20160816recfishwgmotion.pdf>).

Captain Benson explained that one objective was to recognize charter operators who meet set criteria regarding conservation of the ecosystem and education of their customers. Other objectives include increasing awareness of stewardship among residents and visitors, increasing communication and partnerships between the sanctuary and recreational/charter community, and promoting the sanctuary as a multiple use recreational area. The primary goal of the program is to develop a voluntary education, recognition, and endorsement program for charter fishing operators to expand on their awareness and knowledge and promote responsible angling practices in the sanctuary.

At the workshops, the working group discussed a range of topics that included best practices, process for participation and incentives for participation. Training is required to participate and remain eligible. Best practices will comply with legal standards and exceed ethical standards. Program participants will also report illegal actions, limit and dispose of waste, and perform other best practices identified as the program. Certified guides will be evaluated on a regular basis, receive annual refresher training (online), engage in a conservation activity of their choice and participate in

continuing education programs. They are working with the local guides associations to accomplish program objectives. Certified program guides will receive promotion by NOAA, educational materials for clients, networking opportunities and marketing opportunities through articles, radio, sanctuary website, etc.

Captain Benson acknowledged the commitment of the advisory council and community members who served on the working group and requested that the working group recommendations be forwarded to the sanctuary superintendent for development of a Blue Star Fishing Guide program.

Note: A resolution to this effect was sent in advance to council members for their consideration.

Discussion

- In response to a question about the Blue Star logo, Captain Benson indicated that he expects that the logo will change, but the Blue Star concept will be incorporated into the new logo.
- In response to program evaluation, Nicole explained that with Blue Star dive operators they conduct a ride-along as part of the certification evaluation. A ride-along may not be feasible with limited boat capacities. Another form of evaluation will be developed and may include something like a dockside orientation. Captain Benson added that clients may be asked to provide evaluation input.
- Support was given for the idea of not always taking the full bag limit while on a charter. Captain Benson commented that the practice of taking fewer than the limit won't be a requirement of the program, but some guides will take this approach with their clients. Fishing handling will also be done in the most ethical way.
- Andy Newman recommended that they give a presentation about the program to the Tourist Development Council at the time of program roll-out.
- Charter Fishing Flats Guide council member Tad Burke stated that one criteria could be holding a Monroe County occupational license as a commercial fishing guide. Some kind of criteria along these lines is needed. Additionally, if a client locates a guide using the NOAA website, maybe they could send this person a flyer or some information so that the client could help raise awareness and speak on different issues of interest to the fishing guide community. People across the country could help influence decision-makers at the national level.
- Captain Benson clarified that the program is open to all kinds of charter fishing, not just flats guides. In response to a question about spearfishing operations being included, this hasn't been considered so far, but could be. Spearfishing may more closely belong to Blue Star Dive program.
- Nicole explained in more detail about the code of conduct that will be implemented in the program.
- Captain Dipre expressed support for the program and asked about compliance of participants with legal fishing standards. FWC can help with this aspect if the program contacts the agency.
- LT Quentin Long stated that the Coast Guard has a vested interest in who is participating in this program. If program organizers haven't already been in touch with the Coast Guard commercial safety and enforcement division, he suggests they do so.
- Nicole explained that the goal is to have the program launch in 2018. This will involve creating a logo, marketing scheme, and finalizing the framework. This program will be adaptive and will be evaluated and updated as needed. Funding is coming through the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation and possibly other grants.

- It was noted that many of the issues on the water involve new recreational anglers and boaters and are not necessarily due to the locals who work on the water. There is a huge learning curve with boating and so many people are new to the area/Florida. Captain Benson explained that this program is not geared toward individual recreational anglers. Nicole added that 93% of the charters in the Keys are taken by visitors and that is the demographic they are trying to reach. This program may be used as a model for every day anglers in the future.
- Recreational anglers tend to look up to professional anglers. It is likely that this program will also reach the individual through media programs and other ways.
- A suggestion was made to create a logo that represents all Blue Star programs to have more numbers and support behind the logo. The graphics could be developed using an umbrella approach for all programs.

Resolution

To view the resolution adopted by the council visit

<http://floridakeys.noaa.gov/sac/othermaterials/20170418recfishwgres.pdf>.

Andy Newman made a motion to accept the resolution. The motion was seconded by Mimi Stafford. The vote was taken with a show of hands. No one was opposed.

Public Comment

Paul Horan stated that he thinks the people coming down from elsewhere learn from the charters that they take when they are here. Those are the people who usually move to the Keys because they enjoy it so much. They were learning from the beginning what is going on and how things should be done.

Break

MARINE ZONING AND REGULATORY REVIEW STATUS AND ISSUE UPDATE

V. REVIEW OF ADVISORY COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION: DERELICT AND ABANDONED VESSELS

Beth Dieveney, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary gave a presentation on the advisory council's recommendation for derelict and abandoned vessels. To view this presentation, visit <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov/sac/othermaterials/20170418dvregreview.pdf>.

A quick review of the nine priority items identified by the advisory council for the regulatory review was provided. . The specific advisory council recommendations related to abandoned and derelict vessels and towing and salvage operations were highlighted including the advisory council resolutions:

- In October 2014, the advisory council recommended that the issue of derelict and abandoned vessels be considered in the marine zoning and regulatory review process.
- In June 2014, the advisory council accepted the Shallow Water Wildlife and Habitat Protection working group recommendations to consider a towing and salvage permit program. The advisory council recommended that a towing and salvage permit program be considered in the marine zoning and regulatory review process.

Ms. Dieveney reminded the council that the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) is still in development.

VI. DERELICT AND ABANDONED VESSELS AND FISHING GEAR – ISSUE OVERVIEW

Steve Werndli, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, gave an issues overview on derelict and abandoned vessels and fishing gear. To view this presentation, visit <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov/sac/othermaterials/20170418dvoverview.pdf>.

Derelict and abandoned vessels may be decreasing overall, but the vessels still an issue. Impacts of these vessels include debris, such as plastic and Styrofoam, pollution threats, impacts to habitats, and public safety, and there is a clear need to address this threat.

A number of regulations apply to derelict vessels, including those from NOAA, US Army Corps of Engineers, US Coast Guard, and others, which each have different authorities and jurisdictions. Other limitations of removing these vessels include identifying responsible parties, accessing the vessels, funding, and reducing damage to sensitive habitats.

Salvage for these vessels remain a high priority item, and creating a best practices guide for salvage or recovery activity may serve to address this issue.

The Shallow Water Wildlife and Habitat Protection working group recommended that the sanctuary implement a towing and salvage permit program. This included formalizing best practices through partnerships with the advisory council and the local towing community.

Future actions on this issue include maintaining and improving the partnerships made during this effort, identifying funding sources, enforcing existing regulations, and strengthen legal authorities to prevent derelict vessels.

Discussion:

The following points/comments were offered in the discussion.

- A question was raised related to identifying funding sources for projects like these. FKNMS Acting Deputy Superintendent Lisa Symons clarified that the majority of these cases utilize the Damage Assessment fund, which comes from penalties of past cases. These penalties are only come from cases where the responsible party carries insurance; if they do not, funds can run dry. This will continue to be the case until insurance companies require liability insurance on vessels.
- A question was raised about the time for response – can we respond more quickly to the groundings (i.e. immediately after the Coast Guard extracts the pollution)? Mr. Werndli answered that the first step is a notification system. There is currently no requirement for reporting a derelict vessel. Through partnerships, the sanctuary and other agencies are attempting to streamline the time frame for vessel salvage.

Lunch

VII. DERELICT AND ABANDONED VESSELS: MONROE COUNTY USE OF BOATING IMPROVEMENT FUNDS

Rich Jones, Monroe County Marine Resources Office, gave a presentation on the use of boating improvement funds by Monroe County for derelict and abandoned vessel removal. To view this presentation, visit <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov/sac/othermaterials/20170418countydv.pdf>.

Mr. Jones gave a presentation detailing the process for preventing derelict vessels. The process for removal through the county is well defined, and the county is now focusing on prevention. These vessels include derelict vessels, floating structures, and other marine debris, which cause physical impacts to the sensitive habitats, impact water quality, and hazards to navigation.

The Florida Keys are particularly sensitive due to the large geography, the demographics of the vessels, and the socioeconomics of the area. On average, the county removes approximately 60 vessels per year. However, the number of removals is expected to increase because of an increase in funding stream and increased partner effort for removal. Cost for removal of these vessels ranges per year between \$100,000 and \$250,000. These funds come from the recreational vessel registration to the county, grants through FWC, and restitution payments from derelict vessel owners. The process for removing these vessels is through contractors, which are pre-qualified through the county. There are currently seven standing contractors in Monroe County, and they undergo a competitive bidding process whenever a vessel is slated to be removed (average cost for a vessel \$3500). After the bid is accepted, the removal must be documented, including the disposal of the vessel.

While most derelict vessels are processed through these contractors, some are too large or too complicated to handle through these funds (i.e. sunken, impoundment, etc.). However, the county is working with its partners to handle those larger cases.

As of 2016, 'at risk vessels' went from an educational program to a regulatory measure. There is an anchoring bill currently proposed which will prevent vessels from tying off on unauthorized moorings. A new 'vessel turn in program' is in development to provide an avenue for vessels owners to voluntarily dispose of their vessels. There are a number of other legislative bills and ordinances that county staff are working on, including preventing re-licensing of a derelict vessel.

VIII. MULTI-PARTNER DERELICT VESSEL REMOVAL EFFORT IN THE MARQUESAS KEYS

Celia Hitchins, Monroe County Marine Resources Office, gave a presentation on removal of vessel in the Marquesas by multiple partners. To view this presentation, visit <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov/sac/othermaterials/20170418marquesas.pdf>.

Ms. Hitchins explained that the Marquesas Keys have seen a huge increase in derelict vessels over the years. Between the scale of a removal project, the sensitivity of the resource, the funding, and the authority of the removal, the county reached out to partnering stakeholders in order to remove 32 derelict vessels in that area. Through a preliminary salvage assessment and vessel tagging, the scale of the project was revealed, and permits through NOAA and USFWS were obtained, which included an environmental impact statement.

Coffin Marine won the bidding process to remove and salvage the derelict vessels, funded through Monroe County and FKNMS. The removal was required to be complete by April 2017, and over a 23 day period Coffin Marine was able to successfully remove 31 derelict vessels by the March 31st deadline. Over 25 tons of debris was removed from the Marquesas, just in time for bird and turtle nesting seasons. The project was covered by local and state media and received very positive feedback.

John Coffin was honored with a certificate from the county for his effort to remove these vessels.

IX. DISCUSSION, Q & A WITH PANEL

The following points/comments were offered in the panel discussion.

- A question was raised about attaching a nominal fee to the purchase of new vessels to assist with funds for removal of derelict vessels. Bruce Popham clarified that the industry currently does not have a recycling process for vessels, and that the funds used for these removal processes come from boater registration. Rich Jones mentioned that Monroe County has made the recommendation to the state; however, it has not made it past conception.
- A council member asked about the process for removal of vessels before they become truly derelict. Rich Jones clarified that labelling a vessel as derelict is under the jurisdiction of FWC. Captain Dipre clarified that private property cannot be labelled derelict until the vessel no longer has intrinsic value, and FWC cannot assume property of the vessels until they become dismantled. The responsibility of these vessels lay with the individual boat owners until they become derelict. Prevention of the vessels becoming derelict is the key to reducing this problem.
- The Coast Guard clarified there is a difference between ‘unmanned and adrift vessels’ and ‘derelict vessels’. They need to be handled differently.

Break

X. PUBLIC COMMENT FOR ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA

No public comment was offered at this time.

Discussion on Florida Power & Light (FPL) position paper

Chairperson Nedmyer gave the floor to Kenneth Reda who brought this position paper to the attention of the council. The document, *The Federal Lawsuit Against Florida Power and Light for Violations of the Clean Water Act at the Turkey Point Nuclear Facility: A Position Paper and Summary of the History, the Legal Issues, Evidence of Violations and Proposed Solutions*, written by attorney Bonnie Rippingille, was distributed to the council in advance of the meeting.

Ken Reda explained that a cooling canal system (CCS) is used to cool two nuclear reactors (units 3 & 4) at Florida Power & Light’s Turkey Point facility. There is great concern regarding a hypersaline plume that has developed underneath the unlined canal system and is moving through the limestone into the Biscayne Aquifer, which is the source of drinking water for the Keys (and Miami-Dade). This plume of hypersaline waters may be reaching the northern part of the sanctuary. He wanted to bring this up with the council in case they would like to address it at a future date.

Vice Chair Chris Bergh added that Ms. Rippingille is advocate for replacing the cooling canal system with cooling towers, which are used by other nuclear facilities. He read the paper. The basic issue is that hypersaline waters (and other substances) originating in the canals are mixing with surface waters of Biscayne Bay via the aquifer and moving west toward drinking wells. There seems to be agreement that this is not a good thing for the estuarine Bay. He considers this issue to be an important one affecting the northern sanctuary. This paper questions the effectiveness of the plan to mitigate for the impacts of this plume and calls for cooling towers to be built to replace the canals.

Caroline McLaughlin explained that FPL has a proposal to expand the Turkey Point nuclear facility by adding two new units (6 and 7) that will use cooling towers. This expansion will make Turkey Point one of the largest nuclear reactors in the country. The plan to cool the new reactors involves

using wastewater that will be injected into the boulder zone. Concerns have been expressed about this radioactive water potentially migrating to mix with the Upper Floridian aquifer, which is also a source of drinking water. Some organizations have litigation against the Nuclear Regulatory Commission regarding this proposed practice.

XI. AGENCY REPORTS: SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT, REGIONAL DIRECTOR'S REPORT AND AGENCY REPORT HIGHLIGHTS: DEP, FWC-FWRI, FWC-LE, NOAA NMFS Southeast Region, NOAA OGCES, NOAA OLE, EPA, NPS, USCG, USEPA, USFWS, and U.S. Navy

NOAA CORAL REEF CONSERVATION PROGRAM (CRCP) UPDATE WITH SPECIAL GUEST

Jennifer Koss, NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program, gave an update on the Coral Reef Conservation Program. To view this presentation, visit <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov/sac/othermaterials/20170418crp.pdf>.

Ms. Koss explained that in 2000, the Coral Reef Conservation Act established the CRCP. She has been the director of the program for about one year. CRCP is housed in the National Ocean Service and is matrixed across four major line offices, which allows them to draw on the expertise across NOAA. The program's mission is to "support effective management and sound science to preserve, sustain, and restore valuable coral reef ecosystems for future generations." The program has taken a threat-based conservation strategy captured in their threat reduction implementation plans. Strong relationships at the federal, state and local levels have been developed. Annual funding has been about \$26 million dollars, which supports a national program to fund NOAA scientists addressing program goals, a competitive grants program, a conservation fund to build public-private partnerships and a USAID Asia-Pacific partnership. Threats to corals range from impacts of fishing to land-based sources of pollution to climate change impacts, including ocean acidification. In 2016, they conducted a full assessment of the program, which included an internal assessment, manager's surveys and science evaluation. Since FY 2010, CRCP has funded 51 projects in support of FKNMS. Total funding amount contributed by CRCP to support these projects was \$16, 257,134. Ms. Koss looks forward to future collaborations with FKNMS.

Ms. Justine Kimball is the coordinator of the National Coral Reef Monitoring program, which is supported by CRCP and includes Florida Keys NMS, Flower Garden Banks NMS, and other US coral reefs around the world. In 2013, all coral reef monitoring in the system was consolidated into the national program with four monitoring themes: climate impacts, socioeconomics, coral and benthos and reef fish. The main goal of the program is to provide a robust picture of the status of coral reefs. A high-level report card with status and trends for each US coral reef area is being developed and will serve to inform the public and managers involved in decision-making. The report will take a national level approach as compared with the FKNMS Condition Report 2012, which is more detailed and geared toward the local management level.

NOAA OFFICE OF NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARIES (ONMS), John Armor

ONMS Director John Armor stated that he always enjoys attending the advisory council meetings. He reiterated his sincere appreciation to Ken and Chris for their service as Chair and Vice Chair respectively and thanked Bruce Popham and Clinton Barras for stepping up to take leadership roles. Director Armor introduced Nicole LeBoef, who joined the sanctuary program recently as the second in charge at National Ocean Service. Nicole has extensive experience with endangered species issues

with NOAA Fisheries.

NOAA NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE, Nicole LeBoeuf

NOS Deputy Assistant Administrator LeBoeuf greeted the council. She explained how she developed her conservation ethic while growing up on the Texas Gulf coast. During her 20 years at NOAA, mostly in fisheries, she completed three tours of duty at NOAA budget, has worked in the field a few times and served as acting deputy director at NOAA's National Center for Coastal Ocean Science. She has specialties in protected species, specifically marine mammals and by-catch, and international treaty work. In time, she would like to be able to say that sanctuaries are also an area of specialty.

Since she began with NOS in December 2016, Deputy Asst. Administrator LeBoeuf has had the opportunity to visit Hawaii's Humpback Whale NMS and Papahānaumokuākea visitor center. She was struck by the difference that the sanctuary and monument are making in the communities, not just in terms of resource protection. She looking forward to getting to know FKNMS and finding out the full range of the ways the sanctuary affects/interacts with the local community. During this transition period in Washington with the new administration, a transition team is in place. NOAA staff are getting to know the new Congress members. She thanked everyone.

Deputy Asst. Administrator LeBoeuf addressed a question that was posed earlier in reference to sanctuary management. She explained that the process is ongoing and the management leadership matter is a top priority of John's and of hers. They would like to bring the process to a close as soon as possible. She expressed her appreciation for everyone's interest and patience regarding the matter. Director Armor added that it is understandable that people here today want closure. He asks that people trust both of them to move this matter to a conclusion.

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, Beth Dieveney (for Ed Lindelof)

- A new mooring buoy staff has been hired and is based in the Key West office. Mooring buoys are a service that the sanctuary provides free of charge. Marker buoys are used to mark the zones and mooring buoys protect the reef from anchor damage and allow recreational uses.
- The process to hire a new communications and outreach specialist through the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation is underway.
- Volunteers assist the sanctuary in management and are an important aspect of the sanctuary program. Two events were held to honor volunteers--one in the Upper Keys and one in the Lower Keys.
- Two classes are being held to train new Team OCEAN volunteers. Team OCEAN volunteers work on the water to reach out to boaters and others with information about the sanctuary, etc. Trainings will be held on April 22 in Key Largo and April 29 in Key West at the Eco-Discovery Center. Contact Eric Raslich, Team OCEAN lead, for more information.
- FKNMS has just received funding through a NOAA Preserve America grant to conduct photogrammetry on ships on the shipwreck trail. This will enable people who are not diving to see the cultural resources in three dimensions and will provide opportunities for Florida Keys Community College students.

Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Joanna Walczak

- Florida Coastal Office (FCO) is kicking-off two 5-year projects. Both are funded by NOAA through the Florida Coastal Management Program.
 - 1) Statewide Assessment of Coastal and Aquatic Resources (SEACAR)

- This is a statewide effort to look at ecosystem indicators for all FCO-managed areas, including 41 Aquatic Preserves, 3 National Estuarine Research Reserves (NERRs), the Coral Reef Conservation Program (CRCP) and FKNMS.
 - The goal of this project is to establish ecological indicators to allow better analysis of the status and trends within various habitats around the state (coral reef, oyster, seagrass, hardbottom, coastal wetland, etc.) to improve management decision making and communication.
 - No new data will be collected as part of this project. Existing data from inventory and monitoring programs will be used.
 - This process is not intended to duplicate the FKNMS 2011 Conditions Report.
 - Last week, FCO hosted an in-person meeting of the SEACAR Partner Team to identify data and recommend indicators.
 - 2) Visitor Use Tracking:
 - In these big managed areas that do not have defined points of entry (such as many state parks have), it is challenging to know how many visitors are using the resources.
 - This project will work to develop a statewide consistent protocol to track visitation across the FCO-managed areas in a cost-effective way. This information will help justify the need for continued funding to improve management.
- Florida is still in the middle of the 2017 legislative session. There are currently some budget discrepancies between the House and the Senate, which will need to be addressed before the budget goes to the Governor for final approval. There are some coral-related bills being considered:
 - One is to develop a legal designation (a ‘box’) for the northern portion of the Florida Reef Tract, so that it can be recognized as a special place in need of additional management.
 - There is also a proposal for funding to assist with coral disease response, which would apply across the entire Florida Reef Tract. Such funding could be used for a dedicated coral disease coordinator, additional sampling and research, etc.
- Ms. Walczak participated in Ocean’s Day in Tallahassee in March. It is clear that there is still a lot of education that needs to happen about coral reefs. A 3D TV and videos were useful for showing the resources to many different people who may not be able to see them in person. This easy technology can be produced in-house using a simple set up with GoPro camera.
- Regarding the United States Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF):
 - Ms. Walczak reported that she participated in a USCRTF Meeting in Washington D.C. in February. A large focus of this meeting was to introduce new federal members to coral reefs and the Task Force.
 - The Task Force is co-chaired by NOAA and the Department of Interior (DOI); The new DOI Chair has no background in coral, but instead comes from human-resources. He was impressed at how the complex information about coral reefs was presented in a way that made him care and want to take to action. His advice is that in challenging situations it is necessary to look towards innovation, which cannot happen without significant risk. In the future, we might need to take bigger risks to move forward with effective coral reef management.
 - The State of Florida is hosting the USCRTF meeting this fall.
 - The meeting will be held August 7th – 11 at the Harbor Beach Marriot in Ft.

- Lauderdale.
- This week-long meeting includes workshops and fieldtrips, and culminates in the high-level Business Meeting in which federal members and governor-level jurisdiction members work on national coral policy issues. All are invited to attend.

Note: Andy Newman made a comment regarding research. He noted that the Tourist Development Council has funded two research studies to link the economy of Monroe County with the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and Florida Bay. He suggested looking for partners for the visitor survey.

NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service, Heather Blough

- Last week, NOAA Fisheries published a new rule that will create a year-round boundary for the Gulf and Atlantic migratory groups of king mackerel at the Miami-Dade/Monroe County line. When the rule takes effect in mid-May, Monroe County will become part of the Gulf Southern Zone year-round, the recreational bag limit will increase to 3 fish per person per day, and the commercial fishery is expected to re-open with increased catch quotas.
- Both the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils' electronic reporting and hogfish amendments are still with NOAA Fisheries for implementation. The hogfish amendments were approved, but implementing regulations have not yet been published. The 2017 catch limits specified in the South Atlantic Council's rebuilding plan for the South Florida hogfish stock are very low. Fishermen can check NOAA Fisheries' website for catch data as they become available so they can see where they are relative to those catch limits. 2017 recreational data are not available yet, but Wave 1 (Jan-Feb) data are expected to be posted soon.
- At its April meeting, the Gulf Council approved several regulatory changes for Secretarial review, including:
 - Mutton snapper and gag size limit changes and mutton snapper bag limit changes that would make regulations for those species more consistent throughout South Florida; and
 - New biological and effort reference points for the penaeid shrimp fishery.
 Note: The National Marine Fisheries Service will be requesting public input on those proposals in the coming months
- Both Councils are still planning to approve spiny lobster catch increases at their June meetings. The South Atlantic Council is holding a public hearing webinar on that amendment on May 9.
- At its March meeting, the South Atlantic Council tabled discussion of new allocation options to avoid in-season closures of the yellowtail snapper and dolphin fisheries until recreational harvest estimates are recalibrated in response to recreational survey data improvements. They expect to see those estimates late this year or early next year.
- The South Atlantic Council also began forming a new Citizen Science Advisory Panel, which will help develop policy recommendations on the use of volunteers, data management, communications, and other topical areas. That group is expected to meet about twice per month via webinar. Applications are due April 26 for that Advisory Panel, and for membership on the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee.
- The Fisheries Marine Recreational Information Program is requesting input on its draft five-year Strategic Plan (<http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/recreational-fisheries/MRIP/mrip-strategic-plan-review>). They are particularly interested in feedback on whether the strategies outlined

for improving and implementing new survey methods are likely to meet partner and stakeholder needs. The comment period on that closes June 30.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission/Florida Wildlife Research Institute, John Hunt

- A presentation on the status of the black bear population in Florida will be given at the next commission meeting. Information about the status of the bear population and how they have expanded is provided with materials related to the upcoming meeting. Another presentation of interest will cover the marine fisheries work plan including top priorities in the next fiscal year ([http://myfwc.com/about/commission/commission-meetings/2017/april/19/agenda/.](http://myfwc.com/about/commission/commission-meetings/2017/april/19/agenda/))
- In regards to a question was about goliath grouper, Mr. Hunt explained that no decisions have been made at this time. At the last commission meeting, Gil McRae gave a good presentation on the status of the goliath grouper (posted on myfwc.com).

US Coast Guard, LT. Quentin Long

- Derelict vessels are a priority and they are working hard with FWC and the County to have less of them throughout the area.
- USCG has taken an education stance for National Response Center (NRC) reports and discharge/release incidents over the last couple of years; however, they will take enforcement action on all cases involving responsible parties that discharge/release oil or hazardous substances within the sanctuary.
- USCG had a PREP exercise in accordance with our Area Contingency Plan last week. They simulated a worst case discharge and participated with port partners to draw up a tabletop plan. The event was well attended and involved a great discussion about how each agency/trustee would respond.
- USCG has had 60 NRC this fiscal year in comparison to 77 the same time last fiscal year.
- USCG has federalized 9 cases this year in comparison to 13 the same time last fiscal year; involving either the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund or CERCLA.

US Navy, Ed Barham

- The Navy is supporting Earth Day by coordinating a shoreline clean-up of the Truman Annex shoreline on 21 April, and by hosting an informational/educational booth at the Bahia Honda State Park Earth Day Celebration on 22 April.
- The Navy started 2017 sea turtle nesting surveys on 15 April. Volunteers monitor sea turtle nesting activity on the Station's Boca Chica and Truman Annex shorelines.
- In April, the Institute for Regional Conservation completed the removal/control of invasive, exotic vegetation from approx. 20 acres of natural area on Boca Chica. This project was funded through the FWC Invasive Plant Management Program.
- The Navy completed the installation of a demonstration shorebird nesting habitat on Big Coppitt Key and will begin monitoring this habitat and roof-tops for nesting of the endangered Roseate tern.
- The Navy completed an enhancement project for the Lower Keys Marsh Rabbit by removing native trees from approx. 11 acres of habitat. Large trees encroach and shade out grasses and other forbs, which are the preferred/high-value habitat for the LKMR.

US Fish and Wildlife Service, Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Dan Clark

- No new screwworm infestations of key deer have occurred since the first week in January. The incident command staff are still based at the refuge office and sterile fly releases will be taking place through April 25. They have stopped giving medication to key deer because things are looking so good now. Fawning is taking place and they are monitoring the situation closely.
- Screwworm caused the mortality of 135 key deer; mortality from car accidents has been about that much since the screwworm began. Total mortality of deer has been 261 (including collisions). The herd is still fairly stable with 600 to 800 individuals post-screwworm incident.
- In terms of chug removal, one of the important outcomes from coordinating a project amongst agencies is that the mechanism for documenting environmental compliance is in place for next time. He acknowledged Steve Werndli's contribution to the compliance process component of this interagency effort. All uplands involved are part of Key West NWR within the sanctuary. These lands are a congressionally designated wilderness and that adds a level of complexity to the project. He and his team were happy and pleased to be part of this project.
- The Refuge nature center has been built on US 1 in Big Pine Key. They are putting the funding pieces together for the completion of the facility, which is not open to the public at this time.
- FWS is working internally with the sanctuary (Beth Dieveney/Joanne Delaney) on the DEIS process and update of the Backcountry Management Plan. This is a high priority as they shift from the screwworm response.
- FWS is examining prescribed fire management options where it is needed in the pine rock lands.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Captain David Dipre

- During the months of January, February and March, FWC had approximately 25 resource cases throughout the Keys.
- One case involved working with refuge officers to remove someone inhabiting the refuge.
- FWC made a shark fin case that was written about in the newspaper (Miami Herald). The photograph that appeared with the article did not pertain directly to the case and greatly exaggerated the number of fins. The case, which involved taking 70 fins from probably about 30 sharks, is being handled through the federal system.
- The FWC dive team along with marine sanctuary divers entered the water to collect evidence and document damage done to the reef by a vessel that was on auto-pilot. This accident caused significant damage to the reef and will be turned over to NOAA council.
- The majority of fishing citations during this quarter were made on the bridges and were recreational in nature. There were not a lot of commercial violations at all.

XIII. UPCOMING MEETING AND CLOSING REMARKS

Council Recognition

Beth Dieveney thanked Chris and Ken for their contributions and time during their tenures on the council. During these past few years, it has been a privilege for her to work with them in the advisory council on the marine zoning review. Ken indicated that he has appreciated the chance to be part of the process and make a difference in sanctuary management. Chris thanked her for her kind words and stated that it has been a pleasure serving as vice chair.

Closing Business

Vice Chair Bergh wanted to called attention to the new species that was discovered in the sanctuary that may or may not be invasive. He circulated a paper on this topic recently to council members. The species, which appeared on a wreck, is new to the area and is known to be a problem on coral reefs in the Pacific. He would like to know if the sanctuary or any other resource agency has a plan in place to address the issue/monitor for it to see if it is spreading. Beth stated they do need to investigate the potential impact of this species.

Chairperson Nedimyer reiterated the opportunity to make a difference in the way sanctuary resources are managed. Better results can only be achieved when everyone chooses to do things in a better way. He encourages everyone to do the right thing in terms of managing resources for future generations.

Adjourn