Moderator: Or you can get from all the years of ___ _____.

Jeff Turner: That's correct, very good to see you again, Ben. Good afternoon, gentlemen, my name is Jeff Turner, vice president of the Florida Marine Life Association.

Moderator: ___ _____.

Jeff Turner: And I'm a marine life collector for the past over 40 years. Gorgonians are an extremely important part of my business. I build living coral reef aquariums for a living and employ six people full time in the south Florida area, many people across the country as well.

Gorgonians are three-dimensional. They add a very nice look inside of an aquarium. They do super well in the reef aquariums that we have nowadays. When we first collected them back in the '70s, I can remember, as a kid, putting in our aquariums. They did okay. We did water changes. And sometimes we'd have to replace them. They just didn't grow as much. The lighting now is just so much greater and the systems really allow them to grow and we can culture them, harvest them. And I actually grow them from aquarium to aquarium, that's how successful they are.

You know, I was looking at the information here. From what I can ascertain, the gorgonians are the only item in our fishery with a maximum harvest level in federal waters. And that number through all the original meetings, going with Henry and Pete _____ and others of us, at that time, was a number that was created without a stock assessment data. And it was kind of asked of us, "You know, how many do you think you need," and we figured, you know, maybe 100,000, 50,000, something like that, and that's how the number really came about.

Henry has a plethora of data related to the original assessments. You know, at the beginning of it, you know, we thought there was at least a few billion, and now with the studies that have gone on it's anywhere from 8 billion to, as Henry said, 28 billion. I would even go towards the 8 billion number and say it's unbelievable how many are out there.

Keeping the 50,000 harvest level in federal waters is certainly sustainable. And what I'm afraid of, if we mix them together in state and federal waters and max out at 50,000, then there may be some of the other collectors, and it's a tight group of us, we're not necessarily in business together, but we really are with resource.

But there's 130 of us out there with a marine life dive license. There may be a group of guys, mainly men, who would go out there and just harvest the heck out of them and think, "Okay, I can keep 1,000. I can keep 2,000 of them," but it really isn't the case.

As in Henry's collecting practices for years and years, he catches them by order. And the same thing I do with my aquariums, I catch them by order. So suddenly, the number starts hitting 40,000 or something and everybody says, "Okay, we're going to crazy and get as many as we can." I'm going to tell you that there's a good portion of those that are going to die for no reason.

And again, we collect animals to feed people's brains not their stomachs. And it is a very sustainable fishery and I would like to have the council keep it within their domain. And if we did move it to the state, then we've got to have a really good discussion about that, look at the number, make sure that the substrate is allowable, the ___ ____ substrate on the bottom of the gorgonian, and keep this fishery going, that is a very nice little niche within our overall fishery.

So that's what I have to say. Thank you very much.

[End of Audio]