Ben Hartig: For the record.

Karl Lessard: Hello, my name is Karl Lessard. I'm President of Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen's Association, former chairman of the Gulf Council, and a unlimited snapper grouper permit holder for – since they've come out – and a 40-year commercial fisherman.

The first thing I'd like to speak about is the ACLs. I understand the position that the councils are in with ACLs – it's a mandated act coming down from Congress – and the accountability measures, I believe that if a fishery goes over their sector allotment, it should be taken off the next year's catch.

I think, or I wish, that we could have more flexibility in a lot of the things that are coming down. I regress for a second and point out like, under the spiny lobster fishery, since we showed all the recruitment for spiny lobster comes from other parts of the Caribbean, and our local lobster here have no contribution to the fishery, we would ask that the South Atlantic Council states attack as high as possible based on the highest years that we catch, which the Gulf Council has at 7.8 million pounds.

My organization is opposed to all catch shares. I myself have met with a lot of the EDF people that are supporting this. I was amazed that NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service, took – it had an allocation of $54 million from their scientific committee to be used for promoting catch shares. I think this is a travesty and as about as anti-American as I can imagine. And I think everyone should contact their senators, and U.S. council members should state that position to National Marine Fisheries Service.

I forgot all my other issues. [Laugher] I'd like to speak for a second on Amendment 17B, in that I think the people in the Keys were impacted severely by the 250-foot seaward limit – pardon me, 240-foot. I've fished out here in the deeper water for a number of years. I've never caught a warsaw grouper or a speckled hind, and I don't think we have the science to back up with the stock assessment that they're being over fished. That's why we need to have a little flexibility in the Act because the science is often so poor.

And let's see. What's the other amendments? Could you run through a few of 'em for me Ben, so that I have 'em on the top of my head?

Ben Hartig: You can see the rest of 'em here.

Karl Lessard: I walked off without my notes. I wrote 'em down so I'd remember, and naturally I forgot 'em.

Ben Hartig: That's _____.

Karl Lessard: On the Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 2, octocorals are a very important part of the habitat. They need to be protected. I'm the co-signer on a cooperative research program with the endangered species people and the Florida Marine Research Institute, and we've developed traps that do not move, and so we can protect the corals with these traps. And after the study is finished, we'll present this to the State of Florida to be able to fish these traps in state waters. Currently, all wire traps are legal in federal waters, and we've shown that where a wood lobster trap in a major storm moved 150 foot, the wire lobster trap moved 2 feet, less than a yard.

I was involved with the Marine Sanctuary in setting up all the essential – the spawn non-consumptive areas here in the Keys. Our organization currently sits on the Marine Sanctuary committee. We've allocated more and given up more territory than any other user group, and we would still like to continue our relationship with them. Then we think we have a very fine way of protecting these octocorals even though they seem to be perishing because of acidities of the ocean and global warming.

I think that is basically all that I would like to speak on. I was at your meetings years ago when the golden crabbers came in and asked for their limited entry program, and you gave them the limited entry program. If that small number of people wanna have a catch-shares program, I would give it to 'em.

I would like to thank the council members and the staff for their time. It's always nice to see you all here again.

Ben Hartig: Well, thank you, Karl. I appreciate you guys taking the time to be here today.

[End of Audio]