

South Florida Workshops Summary

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Workshop Attendance:

Dania Beach – 23

Key Largo – 15

Key Colony Beach – 19

Key West – 50

Marco Island – 15

FWC Staff Present: Martha Bademan, Jessica McCawley, John Hunt, Tony Bresnen, Mason Smith (except Marco Island and Key Largo)

Council Members Present: Gulf - John Sanchez (except Marco Island); South Atlantic - Ben Hartig, John Jolley (Dania Beach only)



General Comments

- State should require everyone with any charter license to report their data electronically, modeled after the national parks system that works well
- More recreational fishery data needs to be captured
- Strengthen reporting requirements for commercial fishermen
- Need consistency between state and federal rules, on both coasts if possible
- Close down known fish spawning areas
- Several comments about selling fish from charters – some in favor, some against
- Several commenters would like to see more law enforcement presence on the water in the Keys
- Commercial fishermen would like to see drones used by law enforcement to stop poaching
- Keep species open all year (no spawning closures), just decrease the bag limit to protect the populations
- Encourage development of marine hatcheries and grow out facilities
- FWC needs to be more proactive with water quality

FKNMS process

- Many commenters spoke against the idea of having any new area closures within the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary
- Proposals could heavily impact the Keys community
- Closed areas would only benefit lionfish expansion

Regional management comments

- Need regional management of species like yellowtail snapper
- Several commenters liked the idea of creating a Florida Keys Regional Fishery Management Council
- Many commenters felt that the Keys don't get representation in fisheries management and would like someone from the Keys on one of the Councils
- South Florida and the Florida Keys is a unique ecosystem not found anywhere in the Gulf or South Atlantic
- Council management works fine for some species, but the population of red grouper in the keys is different from the population in North Carolina
- Think about island FMPs like is being done in the Caribbean Council – could keys be added to the Caribbean Council?
- Make all of the keys either Gulf or South Atlantic
- Regulations too complex now, a Florida Keys management plan would help simplify things
- Possible south Florida regional management area from Jupiter Inlet south through the Keys
- Manage based on species, not boundary lines

Barracuda

- Barracuda are concentrated on artificial structures around Jupiter Inlet, no longer on natural reefs
- Commercial harvest of barracuda seems dangerous – commonly carry ciguatera
- Barracuda are being shipped up to Miami and sold as food
- Charterboats target barracuda for mounts
- Species not as abundant since 2009 freeze
- End commercial harvest of barracuda
- Make barracuda catch and release only
- Need to protect declining barracuda stocks

Grouper, Gag

- Gag groupers were overfished in south Florida, Atlantic grouper closure allowed gags to back a comeback
- One commenter from Key Largo stated that gags aren't in this area, so why did the January – April closure also happen here?
- Atlantic closure hurts fishing for other species such as red grouper
- Groupers are available in the Keys when they are closed – winter the best time to grouper fish in the keys
- Several commenters suggested that they would like to see the Atlantic grouper closure reduced in length/eliminated. Suggestion: have January and February to fish

for groupers, and let groupers be closed in May (January – April closure would become March – May)

- In SW FL gags move inshore and are easier to catch in the winter months – would like gags to be open in state waters from December through February

Grouper, Goliath

- Goliaths are more valuable alive than dead and should remain closed
- Way too many goliath grouper now
- Eat many important reef fish and lobster
- Allow harvest through a tag system – require that to get another tag, you turn in data from the first tag
- Consider using a catch and release tagging system to collect more data for assessments
- Protecting this species while fishing down others has created an imbalance in the ecosystem

Grouper, Snowy

- Several commenters upset with the recreational snowy grouper closure (Atlantic federal waters)
- Snowy grouper are common in the Keys, species not in trouble
- If you want to close snowy grouper, need to close all deepwater species – can't avoid snowy grouper
- If the species is open commercially, it should be open recreationally
- Make regulations 1 per person with no size limit
- Hard to distinguish between a large snowy and small warsaw grouper

Hogfish

- Hogfish abundant in no spearing zones, absent from spearing areas
- If you increase the minimum size limit for hogfish, it could encourage people to shoot smaller ones

Jacks

- Quotas for the jacks complex are too low and do not make biological sense (some abundant species have low quotas)
- Misidentification of some species of jacks could throw off landings data

Lionfish

- Try fish traps for lionfish

Lobster/Stone crab

- One commenter would like to be able to transfer or sell crawfish dive permits
- Number of crawfish dive permits needs to fall; don't end the moratorium on permits
- Concerns about trap line entanglements with endangered or protected species
- Increase penalties for violators
- One commenter wanted a recreational spiny lobster trap fishery

Pelagics (Mackerels, Cobia, Dolphin, and Wahoo)

- Several commenters suggested that federal rules need to be fixed to allow pelagics to be filleted (like snapper and grouper) when returning from the Bahamas
- Confusion between Bahamian and U.S. rules is a problem
- Eliminate minimum size limit for dolphin - impossible to measure without killing them
- Don't need 10 dolphin per person
- Would like to see the king mackerel commercial limits increased from 1,250 to 3,000 pounds and transit through state waters
- Expand the Spanish mackerel fishery

Sea cucumbers

- Concerns about declining populations
- Only seen on the Gulf side
- Markets for export as food to Japan and China developing
- Unsure of what limits should be; maybe 200 per vessel?
- People in Asian markets will buy them by the thousands
- Make a trip limit before it gets out of hand

Sharks

- Overpopulated in the Keys, hurting fishing for many reef species
- Too many species protected from harvest
- Learned behavior – associate boat noise with a free meal

Snapper, Mangrove

- Differences between state and federal rules are not logical
- Make state and federal regulations the same
- Use the federal regulations – 10 fish bag limit 12" TL
- May be difficult to catch 12" mangrove snappers in Florida state waters

Snapper, Mutton

- Several commenters suggested close mutton snapper during spawning (May and June)
- Too easy to catch mutton snapper during spawning
- Reduce bag limit to 2-3 per person, 10 per person is too many
- Make a vessel limit of 15-20 per vessel
- Other commenters suggested that bag limit reductions with no spawning closure would be the best option
- Another commenter suggested that populations are healthy and there is no need for a closure

Snapper, Red

- Red snapper becoming more common in south Florida. Can catch big ones in state waters
- The mini-season on the Atlantic could cause safety issues, need to discourage derby fishing
- Spillover of the species due to rebuilding of the stock can now be seen in the Keys

Snapper, Vermilion

- No problem with the species – fishing is great
- Would like to see vermilion made part of the snapper aggregate, and increase the aggregate from 5 to 10

Snapper, Yellowtail

- Yellowtail snapper fishing is the best it's ever been, species not in any trouble
- FWC should take over management of the species
- Manage as a joint-stock
- J hooks can reduce discard mortality of the species
- A few commenters in favor of circle hook requirements, and don't want to see exemption

Tarpon

- Make tarpon a federal gamefish species