

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

FULL COUNCIL

Webinar

September 21, 2022

Transcript

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Additional attendees and invited participants are attached.

The Full Council of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened via webinar on Wednesday, September 21, 2022, and was called to order by Chairman Carolyn Belcher.

DR. BELCHER: Welcome, everybody, and good morning. We're doing this special session to talk about the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Restoration Blueprint, and to get Florida's feedback on that as well, and also to have an introduction to the Western Central Atlantic Fisheries Commission Flyingfish Dolphin Working Group, or WECAFC.

Introducing the folks that will be talking, we have Beth Dieveney, with the Florida Keys, giving the presentation, and I'm assuming standing in for Sarah. Jessica McCawley will be talking for - - Sorry. It's actually going to be C.J. that's going to be doing the Florida FWC presentation, and then both Laura Cimo and Rachel O'Malley will be doing the WECAFC presentation.

The next item on our agenda is the Adoption of the Agenda. Does anybody have any changes that need to be made, or are we good to go with the agenda as it stands? Any opposition to it? Okay. Hearing none, we'll move forward as accepting the agenda, and we'll move into our first presentation, which is the Florida Keys Sanctuary Blueprint, and so, Beth.

MS. DIEVENEY: Thank you. I think we're going to share my screen, and Sarah Fangman, the Superintendent, will do just the opening remarks, and then I will take over.

MS. FANGMAN: I will go ahead and get started, while Beth is getting the presentation on your screens. My name is Sarah Fangman, and I am the Superintendent of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, and I appreciate the opportunity to, along with Beth Dieveney, provide this presentation to you all about the restoration blueprint.

We are going to cover a lot of things here, and we're going to try to do this efficiently and then give you information of where you can find out more, if this is just a teaser. We're going to talk about a little bit of context, why we're having this process with the restoration blueprint, and then we're going to highlight the things in this presentation, or, excuse me, in the restoration blueprint, that are specific to things we heard from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council through this process, and that includes we're going to talk about sanctuary boundary proposals, sanctuary-wide regulations, zones, and the regulations associated with specific zones, and we're going to highlight the updated socioeconomic analysis, talk a little bit about the management plan, which is a really important part of this action, although it doesn't get quite as much attention as the regulatory side of things, but it's really critically important, and then, as I mentioned, the ways that you can find out more information and share with you how we are engaging with the public on this action.

The restoration blueprint we think is a really important activity, because the marine environment in the Florida Keys is critical to this community in so many ways. It is where we live, obviously, and it is just a part of every bit of our lives, but it's also important economically. First and foremost, in tourism, we see over five-million people coming to the Florida Keys every year, and that generates a lot of economic activity, and those people are coming here because of this marine environment, in large part, to recreate, to enjoy, and that translates into, as you can see, spending, jobs, and economic activity, but it's not just tourism.

There is a lot of other economic activities that are connected with our marine environment that really are fundamental to our economy, and you can see some statistics here on this slide, and we've already talked about tourism, and it's not just tourists that are out on the water. It's locals as well, boating, fishing, diving, snorkeling, and commercial fishing, of course, as you all know, is a very, very important economic activity here in the Keys and is dependent upon these marine resources and these marine resources being healthy.

However, most of you know, and anyone down here knows, that our marine resources have been changing, and not always for the better. We have seen increasing numbers of threats, and we've seen lots of impacts to these resources, and it is affecting them and their status, and so we know this not just because we can see it, but because we've done really careful and thorough assessments of the condition of the resources, and what you're seeing here is the cover a report that we put out back in 2011, and this is a comprehensive assessment of all the data that was available at that time, looking specifically at seven questions that asked us about the health and condition of the resources that we are managing and trying to protect.

Unfortunately, this report, again back in 2011, gave us some sobering information about the status of the resources and the trends, and it was not good, and this slide shows you what's been happening since that time, and so, in 2011, looking at all the available data, we concluded that the condition of the resources, in most cases, many cases, was fair or fair to poor, and look at all of these things that have been happening since that time.

There are additional threats, stressors, pressures, many of which are things that we can't really control, like storm events, temperature pressure, massive disease events, and these are things that are affecting these resources upon which so much depends in the Florida Keys, but we're not ready to throw up our hands and say, well, it's over, and it's done. We think that there are things that we can and should do locally, despite the fact that some of those threats and pressures are outside of our control, and we have to do things locally to make this system more resilient.

What you see on this slide are some examples of things we can do, and are doing, to try to protect these resources, our buoy system, restoration, debris cleanups, education. The image on the far-right of that slide is a new app that we just officially launched on Monday, and this is a free app that we've made available to community members, so that they can, when out enjoying the community, and visitors, I should say, but out enjoying the sanctuary, they can know what the rules are and know if they're in a special zone and what those protections are in place.

These are things that we can do to help the system be more resilient, and we have to do that, because, again, we depend upon it, and our job, as sanctuary managers, is to protect this whole system, for all the different types of uses that occur, and so the restoration blueprint is targeted to help and to address some of those threats, and make the system stronger, so that we can continue to enjoy these resources for all the different activities and stakeholders that depend upon it, and so now Beth is going to talk to you about some of the specifics of what is in the restoration blueprint.

MS. DIEVENY: Thank you. Good morning. This slide shows -- The image on the left-hand side is the draft environmental impact statement, and that was released in 2019 for public and agency comment, and, in that draft environmental impact statement, there were four alternatives, status quo and three action alternatives, that we solicited public comment on, and so public and agency comment on that proposal is what is informing our proposed rule at this time, which is a

single proposal that is out for public comment, and that single proposal pulls from each of the alternatives that were presented in the draft environmental impact statement and is informed by the comment that we received, as well as updated environmental and socioeconomic data.

This slide shows the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council comment letter on the draft environmental impact statement, and this slide specifically highlights those areas that this council commented on that are not carried forward in our proposed rule, and so, for example, the issue of large contiguous areas -- The draft environmental impact statement included two proposed large contiguous areas at Carysfort and Long Key Tennessee Reef, and those two areas are not carried forward in this proposed rule.

This slide shows those items that this council commented on that are included in some form in the proposed rule or, as you see the two items below, in our draft management plan that Sarah noted, and we'll talk about at the end. I will -- As the slides go on, I will talk a little bit more in detail about each of these elements, but I did want to also note that, as a part of this overarching process, the Florida Keys, with our state and other relevant partners, is also reviewing and updating all of our cooperative management agreements, and our state partners are key in managing the sanctuary, and we have a series of management agreements that are under review.

Of particular relevance for this body is the protocol for cooperative fisheries management, and specific issues that will be highlighted later in the presentation that will be addressed, through that cooperative fisheries management, include the temporary regulation for emergency and adaptive management, as well as traditional fishing, and so I just wanted to flag that now, but, now, to get into the proposal, and I will talk about this in the categories of sanctuary boundary, sanctuary-wide regulations, and marine zones and associated regulations.

On this slide, this is showing the proposed boundary expansion, and just, big-picture, we're proposing to expand the boundary in three areas, this area to the south, which would align our geographic boundary with an area that we currently regulate as the area to be avoided, which prohibits large ships from entering, this region in the Tortugas, to capture and include the existing Tortugas marine zone and provide additional protections and connectivity in this area, and a distinct area in Pulley Ridge, where we would propose additional no anchoring for all vessels. Current no anchoring regulations in that area, through the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, only apply to fishing vessels.

Specific to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council letter, there were additional comments on the Tortugas South Marine Zone, which I will talk about later in the presentation, but one point on this slide is, in the proposed boundary expansion, sanctuary-wide regulations would apply.

The few sanctuary-wide regulations that I am highlighting, specific to this council and your comment letter, include the temporary regulation for emergency and adaptive management, and this is a modification to an existing regulation that we've had in place since 1997 for emergency action. The proposal is to expand the time period in which we could apply this regulation from sixty days to 180 days, with one optional 186-day extension, and that aligns with NOAA/National Marine Fisheries Service emergency regulations under the Magnuson-Stevens Conservation Act.

In addition, in our proposed rule, and this is informed by comment that we received on the DEIS, we have identified three categories in which this emergency regulation could apply, preventing or

minimizing destruction to sanctuary resources, initiating restoration or recovery, and initiating research in a timely fashion. In addition, and I think specific to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council comment letter, we also outline, in the proposed rule, a process for implementation that aligns with, complies with, the Administrative Procedures Act regarding notice and comment requirements.

Next, traditional fishing, and this is an existing definition in our regulations, and, in our proposed rule, we are proposing to clarify the traditional fishing definition, and the 1996 final environmental impact statement and management plan describe what activities are considered traditional fishing, and we also recognize the decades of fishery management by state and federal partners that promote gear innovations to reduce bycatch and other intended effects of fishing, and, as I noted earlier, our protocols for cooperative fisheries management is being done in conjunction with this rulemaking, and the updated protocol would further clarify what traditional fishing activities consist of and develop a transparent process by which allowing new, or modified, fishing activities, such as those that reduce impacts to sanctuary resources and other relevant changes to fisheries management, can be evaluated for potential future action or rulemaking.

In essence, clarifying the definition of the existing traditional fishing that takes place in the sanctuary and using our cooperative management agreements to develop a process to work collaboratively with our fishery partners to review and evaluate fishing activities.

The next section of slides are specific to our marine zones and associated regulations, and the marine zones -- We have had, and used, marine zoning as a management tool since 1997, and, in this proposed rule, we have evaluated those marine zones, proposed modifications to existing marine zones, as well as proposed additional marine zones, to protect sensitive habitats, ecological function, to facilitate ecosystem restoration, and, where possible, simplify and create consistent regulations both within our own marine zones and with relevant other partners.

Sanctuary preservation areas have been a marine zone since 1997. I highly this pictograph to the left here, and that shows that we are -- The little black symbol shows that we are proposing to combine two existing marine zones into one, and the white circles are existing zones, and the darker-blue are two proposed new zones, and the slashed circles are indicating that we are proposing to eliminate two existing zones. The numbers underneath the title -- The 6.4 is the existing square mileage of our sanctuary preservation areas, and, in the proposed rule, it is 12.1 square miles.

The sanctuary preservation areas prohibit discharge, and we are proposing, in the proposed rule, to prohibit all fishing in sanctuary preservation areas. Currently, four sanctuary preservation areas allow catch-and-release by trolling and allow bait fishing by permit, and we are proposing to eliminate those exceptions within sanctuary preservation areas and also proposing a new regulation of no anchoring in all sanctuary preservation areas.

I will just acknowledge that the South Atlantic Council did comment that they do not support prohibiting all fishing activities in SPAs, particularly those that do not impact coral, and the sanctuary considered these comments, as well as all the comments that we received from other parties and entities, but, however, for several reasons, the proposed rule does not allow fishing in sanctuary preservation areas. These marine zones were originally designated to separate conflicting uses, diving and snorkeling, from fishing, and that intent still remains. The proposal

has consistent regulations within all sanctuary preservations, which is intended to increase user understanding and compliance and to facilitate enforcement.

A few specific examples, and I will go through these fairly quickly, but I just wanted to highlight some of the sanctuary preservation areas that the South Atlantic specifically commented on. Alligator Reef Sanctuary Preservation Area, on the left-hand side, it shows the existing 0.3-square-mile zone, and, on the right-hand side, it shows the proposed 0.5-square-mile zone. It's expanded to capture additional habitats, deep-reef habitats, that are healthy and support a range of species and habitats, and the South Atlantic Council -- This was the Draft Environmental Impact Statement Alternative 2, which the South Atlantic Council supported.

Key Largo, Dry Rocks, and Grecian Rocks SPAs, these are existing SPAs, and, in the image, the existing SPAs are the smaller zones, that may be a little bit difficult to see here, but they are two individual marine zones, and the draft environmental impact statement had proposed to make -- To connect those two zones and expand to include additional coral reef habitat to the north, North Dry Rocks, and, based on public and agency comment, including comment from this body, the proposed rule does not include that larger proposed zone. However, the proposed rule still does propose combining these two marine zones that are very near one another into one larger zone, but smaller than what was included in the draft environmental impact statement.

Sombrero Key is another existing marine zone, showing, on the left, 0.3 square miles, and, on the right, 0.5 square miles, and we're proposing to expand this marine zone, capturing additional habitat, as well as marking and enforcement and user understanding and compliance easier, and this aligns with what the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council supported in their comment letter.

The next marine zone that I will touch on our conservation areas, and this is a new zone type name. However, it includes two existing marine zone types, ecological reserves and special use areas. These areas are the most protected marine zones in the sanctuary and are designed to protect contiguous, diverse habitats, as well as to facilitate research. All of the conservation areas that are included in the proposed rule are existing marine zones, and we propose to eliminate one, and the pictographs there show that the regulations within conservation areas are no discharge, no take, no anchor, transit only, to provide the greatest level of protection to these areas that are important for habitats and research.

Specifically to our marine zones, Tennessee Reef Conservation Area, the proposed rule is shown on the right panel, and it's expanded to include deep-reef habitats, and it's 0.7 square miles, transit only, and this is the proposal that the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council supported in your comment letter.

Tortugas South, an existing marine zone within the sanctuary, and shown here is the proposal to expand this zone by one mile to the west, along its entire length, and I will acknowledge that the council supports the western expansion, to include additional area shown to support fishing spawning aggregation, which is here in the northern region, and I can't find my cursor, but, in the northern region, where that top arrow is pointing, and the proposed rule does include this western expansion.

The comment letter from this council also proposed eliminating the southern portion of this marine zone, noting that there is no known fisheries protection afforded by the southern portion. However, our proposed rule does not remove the southern portion of this marine zone, and the deep-reef habitats in this area include unique features, including ledges and escarpments, and show an abundance of fish and other marine species, and this marine zone aligns with our mission to protect all sanctuary resources and the ecosystems and the connected habitats and not solely the fishery or resources that are specific to fishing, or fisheries, and so our proposed rule does not eliminate that southern portion of the marine zone.

The next marine zone type we will talk about is restoration areas, and this is a new zone type that is included in the proposed rule, largely based on public and agency comments, including those from this council, highlighting the need and interest in protecting coral nurseries and outplanting sites within the Florida Keys, and, therefore, we have included new zone types specifically to acknowledge this activity, and the locations where this takes place, and so the pictograph here --

All the circles are blue, noting that all of these are proposed new marine zones for restoration, and we have two types of restoration areas, habitat restoration areas, and we have four proposed, and these are no discharge, no take, no anchor, and these are sites where the active coral outplanting is taking place. We also have nine proposed nursery restoration areas, and these are no discharge, no take, no anchor, transit only, and these sites protect the coral nursery sites, where the coral is being grown and are the most sensitive and need the most restrictions and protections.

A few specific examples from the council letter that were commented on is, at Carysfort Reef, in the Upper Keys, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council supported expanding that marine zone shoreward, to include an existing coral nursery at that site, and that site is included as a nursery restoration area in the proposed rule. Similarly, at Elbow Reef, rather than expanding the existing SPA to include nursery areas at that site, there is a new Elbow nursery restoration area proposed in that area.

This is one example, at Cheeca Rocks East and Cheeca Rocks South Habitat Restoration Areas, and these are proposed new areas, and this is showing the relative size of these areas, which is largely very targeted around the sites where this activity is taking place.

The final marine zone type that I will highlight is wildlife management areas. Wildlife management areas is an existing marine zone, and we currently have twenty-seven, and we are proposing forty-seven in the proposed rule, which would include adding twenty-three new marine zones.

Wildlife management areas are largely small, nearshore areas designed to protect sensitive habitats, species dependent on those, and the images here show birds nesting, roosting, foraging, and sea turtle nesting habitats, and the habitats that species depend on, like seagrass, hardbottom, nearshore, and the regulations within these marine zones are very specific and tailored to the location and the resource protection goal at that site. Largely, these are vessel restrictions, and so they could be no motor, no anchor, idle speed with no wake, and, in a few cases, no entry, but, again, they are specific to the location and the place.

I will highlight, and these numbers might jump out to you, the existing area of wildlife management areas is 37.5 square miles, and the proposed does jump to 322.6 square miles, and that jump is due

to the fact that we have an existing no-anchor zone in the Tortugas and the proposal to include Pulley Ridge as a no-anchor zone, and so that is largely where the jump in area comes from, is from those two large no-anchor areas.

This map, and it's difficult at this scale, I'm sure, but here are the two -- This area, this is the Tortugas Bank no-anchor area that is existing, and no change is proposed to that area, and, Pulley Ridge, the no-anchor regulation applied in there, and the rest of the wildlife management areas, as I noted, are largely nearshore, and they're small, along the length of the Florida Keys, and they're all within state waters. They're almost 100 percent all within state waters, and the regulations, as I noted, vary from no entry, no anchor, idle speed, et cetera.

Finally, as part of this proposed rule, we did do an updated socioeconomic analysis for the rule. As part of that, we also updated the analysis of the four alternatives in the draft environmental impact statement, and we did this because we used updated, more recent fisheries and tourism data, and we also updated new methods for the quantitative analysis of the economic effects of proposed marine zone boundary changes.

The benefits are to largely maintain the flow of services afforded by healthy marine ecosystems. The impacts are largely due to -- The largest economic impacts are largely due to the marine zone boundary changes. The predicted losses do not account for substitution of activity outside of the proposed zones, and most of the targeted zones are small, and it is likely that the estimated maximum potential loss, which this is what this is showing, would occur.

An important detail about the analysis is that the data that the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries has access to, and the format in which we receive it, does not allow us to evaluate each individual marine zone or the individual user, but rather at the -- It doesn't allow us to analyze each fishery sector, or other relevant user group, but rather at the larger scale.

MS. FANGMAN: Thank you, Beth, for going through sort of examples of the regulatory proposals, but I want to just, again, call your attention to another part of the restoration blueprint, and that is our management plan, and this is a really important, but often overlooked, piece of this story, and I say that it's really important, because this also helps us to address the issues that are in front of us without using regulatory measures, and so it's a good product and effort to go hand-in-hand with the regulatory proposals that Beth just described.

Our management plan really focuses on trying to understand, but also improve, the condition of the resources in the sanctuary, trying to address threats, address emerging issues, as they arise, and we have actions focused within this document that are, as you can see on the screen, about research, compliance, adaptive management, community involvement, stewardship, et cetera.

Based on agency and public comment through the last process, we developed certain priority themes for this management plan, and I want to highlight that the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, through previous comments, had noted some of these issues of concern, and we're hearing about it again. Last night, we had our first public comment in-person session, and, again, we heard, from this community, enforcement, water quality, adaptive management, engagement with the community and education, all things that are really important, and these are highlighted, in our management plan, as areas that we plan to focus on, and we describe in them, in the management plan, how we intend to do that and really advance our efforts on that front.

So this is a lot, a lot of material that we just went through, and we just skimmed the surface, and so I want to call your attention to where you can find out more. It is on our webpage, and very front and center is the restoration blueprint, and you can click on that and find all kinds of different ways to get this information. It is a lot, but our intent was to provide the information in different ways, recognizing that people take in information in different ways, and so we have videos that explain the proposals, and we have the socioeconomic document that Beth was just referencing, if you want to look at that, and we have, of course, the management plan, and we have the draft rule, if you want to read the whole thing, or, if that's not your jam, you can look at the maps.

We have static maps and interactive maps, and we have the presentation, and we presented this, even in more detail than we gave you today, and you can find a presentation that outlines it, and so lots of different ways to dive deeply into this, recognizing that, in the Keys here, a lot of people are really interested in their area, and so we have ways for people to just zoom right into their favorite place and understand what is being proposed.

Most important, however, is that public comment, and comments from organizations and other agencies, and so we have been doing our very best to try to get people to be aware of what's being proposed, understand what is being proposed, and have an opportunity to comment. You do that on our website, commenting from home, any day of the week, and push a button and there and provide comments. Over 650 people have done so already, and you can read them. They're online, and we have -- As you can see on this slide, we did, back in August, a virtual Q&A session, recognizing that this is a lot of information.

People came to that, and I think we had about fifty people join us and ask really good questions, trying to understand what was being proposed, leading into, starting on August 30, a virtual public comment session, and then, as you can see, last night, we had our first in-person, and we've got another one tonight, and then tomorrow night, and the final in-person public comment will be in Marathon, at our Sanctuary Advisory Council, but people have all the way until the 26th of October to provide their comments, and we are really appreciative, because these comments that we are hearing from this community really informed what we presented here, what you will see on our webpage, and it really did take into account what we heard, and recognizing that we have a lot of stakeholders, not just in numbers, but variety.

We represent all of those different user groups, and we have to take into consideration all the range of comments and perspectives on these important decisions, and so, with that, I believe that is the end of our presentation, and we thank you very, very, very much for the opportunity to walk you through this, and I know, if there is time, we'll take questions, but I think C.J. may be presenting first, and I'm not sure, but we will turn it back to you, and thank you, again, for the opportunity.

DR. BELCHER: Thank you, Sarah and Beth. I'm going to go ahead and open up the floor for folks to ask questions of Sarah and Beth at this time. Okay. I am not seeing any hands. Let's go ahead and have Jessica, or C.J., go ahead and give the overview for FWC, and then we'll come back around on questions, and, again, thank you, Beth and Sarah, for the presentation.

DR. SWEETMAN: Can everyone hear me?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and, C.J., can I jump in, real quick, before you start?

DR. SWEETMAN: Absolutely.

MS. MCCAWLEY: First, I wanted to thank Sarah and Beth for this presentation and for council members, and I know that this is not something that we talk about all the time, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, and I know that it can be overwhelming, and I feel like the presentation that Sarah and Beth gave, as well as this FWC presentation, is just kind of scratching the surface here, and so the FWC folks will try to help you, as much as we can.

Just to say a couple more things before we see C.J.'s presentation here, but Sarah mentioned that we have a co-trustee agreement, FWC does, with the sanctuary, and so it's FWC, DEP, and the sanctuary are kind of co-trustees of this resource here, and that particular agreement is being updated, and then Sarah and Beth also mentioned this protocol for cooperative fisheries management inside the sanctuary, and that is being worked on as well, and so that protocol covers a predecessor agency to FWC, the Marine Fisheries Commission, the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils, and the sanctuary, and so that's another one of the agreements that is being updated.

I asked C.J. Sweetman to give us the presentation today, and he's the FWC lead on the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary item and comments, and so, just to note, the FWC will be preparing a comment letter, and we have received an extension on our comments until February of next year, and fisheries are really just one piece of the sanctuary, and there's a lot of other issues inside there that are important to the FWC, things like law enforcement, the number of officers, and how the rules are enforced. There is boating issues, and there is issues with birds, especially in the backcountry portion of the sanctuary, and so lots of different issues that the FWC is going to be commenting on.

Then another piece, just to remind you, as we walk through this FWC presentation, and Sarah and Beth tried to explain this, and so the restoration blueprint is really a series of three documents. It's the draft rule, the socioeconomic analysis, and the management plan, and so the council could comment on any one of those documents, and some of the issues that the council was interested in in the past, like water quality, or outreach, or law enforcement, and, for example, those were in the management plan and not in the draft rule, and so just -- I know that this is complex, and I know it's challenging, and council members probably don't know how to dive in here, but we're going to try to help as much as we can, and then I look forward to discussion, and hopefully this isn't the only time the council will talk about this, because there's a lot to unpack here, and so I'm going to turn it over to C.J.

DR. SWEETMAN: Okay. Thanks, Jessica. Good morning, everyone, and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you all today. As Jessica mentioned, my name is C.J. Sweetman, and I am the Federal Fisheries Section Leader for FWC's Division of Marine Fisheries Management, and I also sit on the Gulf Council, and I am the Gulf Council rep for today's meeting, and so I'm doing a little bit of double-duty.

Here's an outline of what I will be presenting today. First, I'm going to give a broad overview of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, and I will go quick here, as Sarah and Beth already provided some good details here. Second, I will highlight the numerous management authorities throughout the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, of which there are many, and then I will describe how FWC, as a co-trustee of the marine resources of the sanctuary, is evaluating this

updated sanctuary restoration blueprint, and, after that, I will describe some topics within the updated restoration blueprint that may be of interest to the council to consider for their public comments, and then, finally, I will describe FWC's timeline and the process we are using to move forward and ultimately provide our comment letter to the sanctuary.

Just general background here for some council members, and I know there are some new ones on here, and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary currently encompasses about 3,800 square miles. It spans the length of the chain of islands that make up the Florida Keys, and it includes waters of both the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico.

As I mentioned on the previous slide, NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries shares trusteeship of the marine resources with the State of Florida, as 60 percent of the sanctuary falls within state waters. The sanctuary encompasses numerous habitat types, including nursery and essential fish habitat, as well as spawning aggregation locations for many fishes and invertebrates that the South Atlantic Council manages.

These habitats support a high number of diverse species and the largest documented contiguous seagrass community in the northern hemisphere, as well as the largest barrier reef in the continental U.S. Furthermore, the connectivity between these habitat types is critical to supporting the diversity and abundance of fishes and invertebrates observed in the Florida Keys ecosystem. For example, many fishes and invertebrates use mangroves and seagrass habitats as juveniles, for refuge from predators and from foraging, and then, as they grow, many species transition from these habitats to hardbottom and offshore reefs for feeding and reproduction.

The sanctuary includes all of the reef tract that occurs in the Monroe County portion of the Florida Keys, including a portion within John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park. The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary also borders Everglades National Park and Biscayne National Park to the north, and it surrounds the Dry Tortugas National Park in the southwestern part of the sanctuary.

Conservation of the Florida Keys marine ecosystem involves a variety of state and federal partners, including NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries. Many of Florida's important fisheries occur in both state and federally-managed waters, and they are jointly managed by the councils and FWC. Within the sanctuary, marine fisheries regulations within state waters, as well as some fisheries with which we have extended our authority into federal waters, such as stone crab and blackfin tuna, those regulations are implemented by FWC, and then, within federal waters of the sanctuary, marine fisheries regulations are generally promulgated by the councils or by NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries.

As co-managers of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, as I hinted on in the last slide, FWC has authority to implement fisheries regulations within state waters. Additionally, FWC has limited authority to implement boating, habitat, and wildlife regulations within state waters when such regulations are linked to our statutory authority of directly managing fish and wildlife, and an example of this would be some of the manatee slow speed zones in some coastal waters of Florida, as I'm sure many of you all have experienced as you've traveled Florida.

As co-trustees of the marine resources within the sanctuary, FWC has significant interest in all of the proposed regulatory and non-regulatory components of the restoration blueprint. We go

through our own process to evaluate all aspects of the plan, utilizing all of the available data at our disposal, as well as incorporating stakeholder perspectives, in order to prepare our own comments for our agency.

On this slide, I am showing you the principles that FWC is continuing to use, in order to guide the development of our response to the updated sanctuary restoration blueprint. First, we acknowledge that it's important to address ecosystem-level changes that inherently have an impact on the marine resources of the Florida Keys, from the habitats to the fishes and invertebrates. Water quality and water flow are all factors that are influenced by conditions both within and outside of the Florida Keys ecosystem. Addressing these factors are a high priority for FWC, and they should be considered as the sanctuary proposals are evaluated.

A second guiding principle is that fisheries management is reserved to FWC in state waters. Third, area closures and access restrictions should be considered on a case-by-case basis, after evaluating the science and the potential ramifications of such actions. Fourth, as each proposal is discussed, the rationale behind the proposed action should be clearly defined. This includes a clear description of the issues that are being addressed and what has been learned from past experiences, what the likely outcomes are, and an evaluation of the proposed actions relative to the expected stakeholder impacts. That leads to the final bullet here, that the proposed actions must be fair to all stakeholders.

FWC has been heavily involved in the sanctuary restoration blueprint rulemaking process from the beginning. The first version of the restoration blueprint, turned the draft environmental impact statement, or DEIS, and its associated draft management plan, was released in 2019, and FWC staff quickly engaged with a diverse group of stakeholders, in order to understand their perspectives in a variety of proposed actions and topics. Concurrently, FWC staff formed some internal working groups, in order to evaluate each of the proposed actions within the restoration blueprint, and these internal working groups are representatives from FWC's Division of Marine Fisheries Management, our Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, law enforcement, our Division of Habitat and Species Conservation, hunting and game management, as well as our legal counsel, and so we have a broad range of scientists and fisheries managers working on evaluating this plan.

Following a thorough and comprehensive evaluation of the DEIS and its associated management plan, FWC submitted a comment letter to the sanctuary in April of 2020, and then FWC staff utilized the most relevant available science and stakeholder perspectives, in order to inform this comment letter. In July of 2022, as you are all aware at this point, the sanctuary released this updated restoration blueprint, following their past public comment period, and FWC staff have already begun the extensive process to evaluate this updated restoration blueprint, using a similar process that was done for the DEIS.

To this point, FWC staff have already attended multiple sanctuary public information sessions, met with stakeholders and various organizations throughout the Florida Keys, in order to better understand their opinions and perspectives of some of the proposed actions within the updated blueprint. Throughout these entire process, FWC has been coordinating with the councils, and our other state and federal partners, on a variety of items related to the sanctuary. For example, and as Jessica and Sarah and Beth touched on, FWC and the councils began updating the protocol for cooperative fisheries management in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary earlier this year, but I will talk a little bit more about that later on in the presentation.

FWC staff, as I mentioned, they're already actively involved in evaluating some of these topics and the updated plan. In these next several slides that I'm going to show you, we will highlight some specific areas and topics that might be important for the council to consider in their comment letter.

First, there are several key overarching issues that FWC staff has already heard from the public, and, as Sarah mentioned, and that's including the need to improve water quality in the Florida Keys, improve boater education, to prevent damage to sensitive benthic habitats, the need for increased law enforcement in the Keys, as well as the desire to have the sanctuary incorporate more artificial reefs into their marine zoning scheme.

As part of your previous comment letter, the council highlighted some of these issues as a desired priority for the sanctuary to address, and these topics are largely talked about in the management plan, and so I would encourage the council to see what has been proposed and evaluate whether it fits the perspective of the council.

All right. One area that I'm sure the council will have interest in, and the sanctuary already talked about this a little bit, is the expansion of the sanctuary, the proposal that's on the table will expand the sanctuary by approximately a thousand square miles, and I have shown that proposed expansion in the figure on the right. That salmon-peach color, that's the current sanctuary boundary, and the hashed-green line is the proposed expansion.

The figure on the left, that is what the council recommended in your previous comment letter to the sanctuary that Sarah was explaining there, and, as you can see, and from what Sarah provided in her presentation, the sanctuary is proposing to encapsulate areas within the Dry Tortugas region, and I am specifically highlighting that because one thing to note is, since I sit on the Gulf Council, at a recent Spiny Lobster and Shrimp AP meeting, there was some concern from the shrimping industry about the sanctuary incorporating this area to the northern portion, as well as the eastern portion of that Tortugas South Ecological Reserve, due to historical shrimping effort in that area, and some of that area is in federal waters of the South Atlantic's jurisdiction.

At that meeting, it was pointed out, from the sanctuary, that fishing regulations would not be impacted in this region. However, there still seemed to be some consternation, from both the Spiny Lobster and Shrimp APs, to the point where they passed a motion objecting to expansions in this area.

Also, in the council's previous comment letter, you stated that you are not in support of large contiguous habitat protections, and that carries for Long Key and Tennessee Reef, Western Sambo Ecological Reserve, and the Tortugas Corridor. Well, as you can see here, the sanctuary is no longer proposing some of those areas, and so I just wanted to point this out, and it's clear that the sanctuary listened to public comment in informing this latest round of the restoration blueprint. Western Sambo Ecological Reserve is not struck through, because that's already a marine zone within the sanctuary, and so that's the only reason why it's not struck through here, and there are some proposed expansions being proposed there.

Another topic for the council to consider are some proposed expansions of sanctuary preservation areas, or SPAs, which are no-fishing zones, into some deeper-water habitat, as shown on this slide

here. The figure on the left of each of these is the current regulations, the current boundaries, and then the corresponding right figure is the proposed expansion at each of those areas. The sanctuary is looking to do this in order to protect some deeper-water habitat that are not currently incorporated into the current marine zoning scheme, and one thing that I would like to point out here that might be relevant to the councils, based on what we've heard from the public so far on these proposals, is that some of these areas are seasonally important fishing locations.

Mainly, what we've heard from people is that they use these areas, seasonally, for targeting pelagics, such as sailfish, as they migrate through the Keys, and, given the type of fishing that occurs in these deeper areas, which is mainly drift fishing, or trolling, for some of these pelagics, some stakeholders have requested that this type of fishing be allowed, since it would not impact the benthic habitat that the sanctuary is looking to protect here.

Another topic the council commented on last time, that they might want to consider again, are proposed changes to recreational and commercial baitfish permits, and I have this labeled as a proposed phase-out, but I actually think that's inaccurate, and I think it's a proposed elimination at this point, and the proposal aims to eliminate the issuing of baitfish permits that allow the harvest of baitfish, such as ballyhoo and pilchards, within eighteen current sanctuary preservation areas, which I have highlighted on the left-side of the screen here. Twelve of them, in that bottom grid there, those are the ones that occur in South Atlantic federal waters. The ones above that occur in state waters.

The rationale for this proposal is to have consistency in regulations at all sanctuary preservation areas and to reduce user conflict between the commercial and recreational fishing and diving communities. Currently, the sanctuary issues two types of baitfish permits, one for cast nets, lampara nets, and one for hair hooks. The cast net/lampara net permit holders are currently allowed to harvest baitfish in all eigen of these sanctuary preservation areas, and it should be noted that FWC also does issue a limited-entry lampara net endorsement for state waters. FWC has talked to both charter/for-hire captains as well as industry on this topic, and they continue to voice opposition on this proposal, due to the minimal impact that both cast nets and lampara nets cause to hardbottom habitat.

Beth touched on this too, and coral restoration was another component of the council's previous comment letter. The council recommended additional protections to be considered for coral nurseries that are being used to restore Florida's coral reef, and the sanctuary has done just that. They have proposed two brand-new marine zones, and there are nine new nursery restoration areas that would be proposed, and these regulations at these sites would be transit only. These are areas where coral frags are being grown by coral practitioners, until they are of a size and condition to be outplanted onto the reef, as shown in this picture here.

The sanctuary is also proposing a marine zone aimed at protecting some of the specific restoration areas where these corals are actively being outplanted. Regulations at these four locations would be similar to sanctuary preservation areas, essentially no fishing and no anchoring, with the intent of allowing the public to see the restoration in progress, thus potentially facilitating buy-in, and maybe even allowing them to be part of the restoration process itself.

All right. Moving on to another topic the council highlighted in their past comment letter, and that being the sixty closed areas for spiny lobster commercial trap fishing that is covered in the joint

councils Spiny Lobster Amendment 11. For those that are new to the council, or are not familiar with this amendment, the councils worked with fishermen to identify these areas highlighted in the figure, in order to protect ESA-listed corals, and this ultimately resulted in a grid of closed areas to spiny lobster traps, and I think this was in 2011.

Your past comment letter highlighted the desire to reevaluate these areas, to see if they are an appropriate location, as recent surveys by FWC, and others, have illustrated some extremely low coral abundance in these locations, which, ultimately, these areas were designed to protect. Since 2012, Florida's coral reef has been hit with some serious, significant challenges, and Sarah touched on some of these in her presentation, but, just to say a few, coral bleaching and the more recent stony coral tissue loss disease has had a profound impact on the coral cover in the Florida Keys, where I believe we are currently at 2 to 3 percent coral cover, where historical norms were typically in the 30 percent range.

At the South Atlantic Council's most recent Spiny Lobster AP meeting that was held in Key Largo, I was fortunate enough to attend, and it sounded like, for the most part, everyone was onboard with evaluating whether these closed areas were in the appropriate locations, and so I just thought I would bring that to the council's attention, as you consider what to put in your comment letter.

Moving on to traditional fishing, which Beth talked about, the definition of "traditional fishing" previously proposed by the sanctuary was a concern to both the councils and FWC. In this updated restoration blueprint and management plan, the sanctuary has not proposed a new definition for traditional fishing, and instead has stated that they will work with the councils, FWC, and NMFS, through updated agreements, which I will talk about in the next slide, to clarify what traditional fishing activities consist of and to develop a process to evaluate new fishing gear or activities being allowed for use within the sanctuary.

I don't have much to discuss beyond that at this point, but it does lead into this next slide here, which highlights the sanctuary's references to the updated agreements, and this would be the protocol for cooperative fisheries management in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. This agreement was signed in 1997, and I think FWC wasn't even an agency at that time, and so our predecessor agency, the Marine Fisheries Commission, was described, and so this agreement was clearly outdated and needed to be updated.

The agreement describes the protocol and procedure for both state and federal rulemaking that relates to the management of fisheries resources and fishing activities in both state and federal waters of the sanctuary, and this agreement involves FWC, both the South Atlantic and Gulf Councils, as well as NMFS and the sanctuary. To-date, we all have coordinated in updating the protocol for cooperative fisheries management, and so that process is moving along well, and I think I can speak for all of us that are involved in this, that we look forward to working towards finalizing this updated protocol.

I think this is my slide, and I am just showing this slide to show the council the timeline that FWC is operating under, in order to provide our comments to the sanctuary. This fall, we're going to continue to work with the councils, and our other federal partners, in order to continue updating the protocol for cooperative fisheries management. FWC staff are going to continue to attend the sanctuary public information sessions being held throughout the Keys this week, and we are certainly happy to continue to coordinate with council staff on any topics of interest, and that leads

to my next point here and the importance of continued engagement with both our state and federal partners throughout the entire sanctuary rulemaking process.

As I mentioned earlier in the presentation, FWC has formed some internal evaluation teams to look at every single proposed action in the restoration blueprint, and there certainly is a lot to consider within this updated plan, and FWC is more than willing to help out in any way that we can as the council works towards providing their own comment letter to the sanctuary, and, finally, FWC will be discussing this topic at our next two commission meetings, where we expect to be given direction from the commission, and our next meeting that we're going to talk about this will occur on September 29, and so coming right up here.

Ultimately, this is all going to lead to FWC providing comments to the sanctuary in February of 2023, and I should note that the public comment period ends on October 26 of this year, but FWC and the Gulf Council have requested additional time to comprehensively evaluate the proposed actions, and we were granted that request by the sanctuary, and I just wanted to point that out, because I do not believe that the South Atlantic Council has requested such an extension. I think that is my last slide, and I'm happy to answer any questions that the council might have, and I'm sure that Jessica can help with those, too. Thank you.

DR. BELCHER: Thanks, C.J. Are there comments or questions at this point for C.J.? Mel.

MR. BELL: Thanks, Carolyn. Not a comment right now, per se, but I did want to thank C.J. for a great presentation, and also Sarah and Beth, too. One thing to keep in mind is we've got several new council members on here that weren't -- You know, weren't part of this back when we last were discussing it, and so there's, you know, a lot of need to kind of look at it and reflect, but I am certainly in favor of sending another letter, but also in requesting, you know, an extension to December, as we've discussed, so we can give this a little further consideration and let the APs take a stab at it and basically come back in December, maybe, and kind of finalize things, and that would make sense to me, personally. If you need a motion or something at some point, I'm willing to do that.

DR. BELCHER: Okay. Thanks, Mel. Laurilee.

MS. THOMPSON: Actually, Mel said what I was going to say. I think we need to request the same extension that the Gulf Council got, and FWC got, and that will give us time, because we have four, at least four, new members that weren't a part of the process before, me, Judy, Trish, and Gary, and so that would give us an opportunity to learn more, and we could talk about it at the December meeting. Thank you.

DR. BELCHER: Thanks, Laurilee. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: Mel and Laurilee scooped me, and I was going to say the same thing, that I think it would be good for our Habitat Committee, who is meeting in November, to weigh-in on this, and I don't know if it's possible that the same folks could give a presentation to the Habitat Committee and then request an extension, so that we can dig in deep and weigh-in.

DR. BELCHER: Okay. Are there other comments or questions? I don't see anybody else's hands up, and so does the group care to make a motion, at this point, about the extension? Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes. **I would like to make a motion to send a letter to the sanctuary for an extension of the South Atlantic Council comments until February 24 of 2023.**

DR. BELCHER: Do I have a second for that motion? Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: I will second that motion.

DR. BELCHER: Okay. Is there further discussion? Okay. **I am not seeing any hands, and does anybody object to this motion, as stated? Okay. Still seeing no hands, and so the motion passes.** Okay. Thank you, again, all, for your presentations, and -- Go ahead.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Carolyn, I think we should ask if there's any members of the public that want to comment, since the next topic is quite different from this.

DR. BELCHER: Sure. Okay. Do we have anybody in the public who would like to make comments relative to the Florida Keys blueprint?

MR. CARMICHAEL: If people put their hands up, we'll take a count and see how many we have. We probably have time to give people a couple of minutes without any concerns over the meeting time.

DR. SCHMIDTKE: I think that list is all of the hands that I saw go up, John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Okay. Thanks, Mike, and so, Carolyn, do you want to go ahead and take over and call on people?

DR. BELCHER: Sure. First in the queue is Richard Gomez.

MR. GOMEZ: Okay. I got it down to three minutes, after whittling it down a little bit, and here's my comments on the sanctuary presentation. In the 1990s, after a handful of years, the fishermen of the Florida Keys lost the right to fish at a number of our nearshore reefs. These reefs were very important to all fishermen, but more so for the charter/for-hire group, which I represent.

We were promised that there would be a future assessments and that this closures did not have to be permanent, if it was discovered that fishermen were not the largest contributors to the reefs' destruction. Long story short, it is now 2022, and our reefs are around 90 percent dead, even in the places where fishing was outlawed. Nevertheless, we adjusted, and life went on. These closures were hard for us to swallow, not just because we felt they were not based on any real evidence besides some strategically-used pictures of lobster and fishing lines and tangled in some coral, and, understandably, that was damning evidence that fishing did actually damage that very small portion of coral rock on that very large coral structure. For the sanctuary, us fishermen became a starting point for protecting the reef. After all, a picture is worth a thousand words, right?

As the fishermen of the Keys adjusted to the new reality that many of our low-water reefs were now off limits to us coral-killing fishermen, we watched our coral reefs steadily die. As the death toll mounted, the world showed up to watch, also. We are here today as the sanctuary tries, once

again, to explain why fishermen have to be pay another large toll in order to keep our precious coral reefs safe. The offshore fishermen of the Keys do not feel comfortable putting this group in charge of our rules. We feel that they are biased by special interest groups and their own inadequate attempts to save our reefs, which seems beyond the realm of possibility.

That day when they finally succeeded in beating down fishermen, ignoring a bigger threat to our reef, which -- It was the tourist boats that dropped thousands of divers on our reefs daily, year after year, and I will close by asking the fishermen, as well as the scientists, on the council to understand our plight. We depend and trust that all of you have our best interests at heart, and I would like all of you to consider this.

If a picture is worth a thousand words, look at the pictures that we see every day, as thousands of divers are dropped on our reefs, and look at the slick behind the boat from sunscreen and human waste, invading our reefs sometimes three times a day. Look at the picture of the runoff from farming and development that pours into our rivers and oceans by the thousands of gallons every day, and last, but not least, look at the devastating effects of global warming.

After you see these pictures in your mind, ask yourself some big questions. Why is it that the fishermen are more -- Why wasn't the divers ever put under scrutiny, by having a few reefs set aside for the fishermen? If we're trying to see what is more damaging, shouldn't that be part of this grand experiment? Why is it that the biggest picture, the one that shows the effects of manmade pollutants and climate change, the unjust reason for us to lose more grounds? Lastly, if you were tasked with protecting our fisheries, as well as our fishermen, will you protect us now? Thank you.

DR. BELCHER: Thank you, Mr. Gomez. Next up is Martha Guyas.

MS. GUYAS: Good morning. I am Martha Guyas, representing the American Sportfishing Association. I just wanted to say thanks for taking this topic up this morning and for the opportunity to provide comment. We're working with a number of fishing organizations on detailed comments that we'll be sure to share with you well in advance of the December council meeting, so that you can take those into consideration as you draft the council's comments.

Overall, we're glad to see that the sanctuary, you know, did take into account a number of public and agency comments in the draft rule, but we still have a couple of tweaks that we would like to see to make this draft rule and the management plan and the socioeconomic analysis even better for the restoration blueprint, and so, again, we'll share those details with you soon.

I did want to flag the protocol for cooperative fisheries management, and so it's been mentioned a couple of times this morning, but this agreement is super important for the council, because it lays out how fisheries management actions in the sanctuary are handled between the sanctuary, the councils, and FWC. The current agreement is pretty outdated, and you heard that, and it hasn't really been followed in the past, and the plan is to update the agreement prior to issuance of the final rule of the sanctuary plan.

In past discussions, I believe at this council, there have been questions about how Magnuson, the National Marine Sanctuary Act, and the statutes that establish the sanctuary interplay for actions, in particular, that affect fisheries management in the sanctuary, and you heard this morning also

that there are several aspects of the draft rule, like the definition of “traditional fishing” that hinge on how this agreement is updated, and, thus, will determine how the draft rule, or I guess the final rule, ends up affecting management of council-managed fisheries in the sanctuary.

My ask to you this morning is to really engage on edits to the agreement and to think carefully about its implications and then consider how the public can review and weigh-in on this agreement before it’s finalized with the draft rule, since that will, you know, kind of set the path forward for fisheries management in the sanctuary, moving forward. All right. That’s it. Thanks so much.

DR. BELCHER: Thank you, Martha. Next up is Kellie Ralston.

MS. RALSTON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I’m Kellie Ralston, representing the Bonefish and Tarpon Trust. I do want to reiterate a lot of what Martha just said and thank the council for this meeting and overviewing the sanctuary blueprint plan today, and also to the sanctuary and FWC for their overviews and presentations. I really think the outreach by both entities to stakeholders this go-round has been stellar, and we look forward to continuing to work with them, not only on our comments, but in the final stages of blueprint development.

We have been working cooperatively not only with guides in the Keys, but also the fishing and boating community, on some comments that will hopefully be consensus, in many aspects, and really try to kind of lay out the things that we support and the things where we would like to see some tweaks, moving forward. I think our guiding principle really has been one of trying to address resource concerns, but also maintain responsible access, wherever possible, and so that’s kind of how we’ve been approaching this, and, with that, I will close, and we’ll be happy to share our comments in advance of your December council meeting, and I look forward to the ongoing public comment sessions in the Keys, as well as at the FWC meeting next week, and so thank you so much.

DR. BELCHER: Thank you, Kellie. Next is Jon Reynolds.

MR. REYNOLDS: This is Jon Reynolds. Thank you for letting me speak and for the opportunity to comment. I am representing South Atlantic Fishing Environmentalists, which is basically a group of charter boat fishermen, mainly from the Florida Keys and south Florida. We can definitely tell, obviously, the benefits of a lot of these protected SPAs and the spawning habitat that it is creating, and it’s deniably giving us, you know, great benefits for like the regional stock as a whole.

I mean, it’s obvious that there are a lot of different factors involved in the deterioration of the coral reefs, and ecological factors that are also contributing, you know, to a lot of this stuff, but doing nothing is definitely not an option, or keeping the status quo is not an option. You know, we have to move forward, and we have to do things that we know are working, and coral restoration, and larger protected areas, just like we would do on land anywhere, to preserve any type of ecological balance, is absolutely necessary, and we’re denying the ocean of a lot of this stuff, and we definitely support, you know, expansion to the SPAs.

These are very small sacrifices for the fishermen, and we’ve discussed this in great depth amongst the fishermen in our organization, and many other fishermen, and these do not affect us in very large ways, these small expansions. Now, really, really large expansions, yes, possibly you’re

going to see a lot more socioeconomic, you know, effects, but the proposed small expansions of a lot of these -- They're not going to affect as much, but it is going to help with coral restoration, and habitat restoration, and fish spawning especially, as fishermen, is what we want to see.

You know, we discuss these things with our clients on a regular basis, and our clients don't just come here to fish, and they fish, and they love to fish, but they utilize all different types of activities in these resources, and they want to see healthy reefs, and they want to see healthy fisheries. They want to catch more fish, but we need the stock to be able to do that, and they also want to snorkel and dive, and a lot of people have seen these drastic changes, and it is their feedback and input that, within these SPAs and protected areas, the coral, and the reef, and the fishes, and the diversity is a lot better. I mean, it's a drastic difference from outside of them, and so thank you very much for all the proposals, and those are what we are in support of, and I would be glad to elaborate on more of this, and I'm sure that I will at an upcoming AP meeting. Thank you for letting me speak.

DR. BELCHER: Thank you, Jon. Preston Robertson.

MR. ROBERTSON: I will be brief, but I just want to thank all of the council, and all of the staff, for working so hard on the Keys. With Florida Wildlife Federation's perspective, you know, the Keys is not just a state treasure or national treasure, but it's an international treasure, and so we really do need to keep in mind that everybody has a part to play, and make sure that our kids, and our grandchildren, are able to enjoy at least some of the wonderful natural attributes that are there. My comment, and my question, I guess, is how effective do you all think enforcement is of the existing regulations, and how effective would they be if you actually expanded, in a small way, these no fishing zones and the other restrictions that you're going to add to some of these areas?

DR. BELCHER: I guess you're posing the question to the group?

MR. ROBERTSON: Just to anybody, and it just seems -- I just wonder, sometimes, how effective FWC, or anybody, could be on these vast areas, with so many users, to actually enforce these closures, and am I missing something here?

DR. BELCHER: I don't believe so. Jessica or C.J. or Sarah -- Any of you all, can you speak to that question, specifically?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and so, Preston, this is Jessica McCawley from the FWC, and we're definitely going to be talking about this at the commission meeting next week, and this is something that is definitely important to our commissioners, and they always have concerns about the numbers of law enforcement in the woods and on the water in general, but especially in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, and so the FWC did get some additional law enforcement positions the last legislative session, and there are a number of vacancies in the Florida Keys right now for law enforcement, and FWC is looking to have those vacancies filled, I believe by February of 2023.

Even with the number of officers that we will have down there, it's likely not enough. I mean, they can't be everywhere all the time, and they really do the best that they can, and they have details, where they work certain areas in the sanctuary, especially if they get some intel that there might be something occurring in one area over another, but they have multiple priorities, and so, in addition to dealing with the regulations inside the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary,

they're dealing with all other types of issues that you might expect on the water down there, whether it's law enforcement during the mini-season, people that have boating accidents, derelict vessels, et cetera.

I think we can always use more officers, and we usually have the FWC says something to that effect in our comment letter, and there is a joint enforcement agreement between FWC and the feds, and the joint enforcement agreement is where it lays out hours for the sanctuary, and the FWC usually tries to exceed that number of hours, but I think that you raise good points, and it could be something that the South Atlantic Council could put in their letter, about the challenges with enforcing these complex layers of regulations inside the sanctuary, and then, if you make changes, it's challenging for the public to know, and understand, what those changes are, and then it can be challenging for law enforcement to try to enforce the changes or go around and educate people that are on the water that might be in violation, and so I will just stop there.

MR. ROBERTSON: Very good. Thank you so much.

DR. BELCHER: Thank you, Jessica, and thank you, Preston. The last public comment is from Richard DeLizza.

MR. DELIZZA: I kind of -- If you live in the Keys, I represent your neighbors. I'm a long-time resident of the Keys, and I have been enjoying the waters down there for over fifty years, fishing, snorkeling, diving, touching all of the various issues that you guys are trying to preserve, and one of the things that I am curious about, and I'm going to ask a couple of questions, and I think the sanctuary has been trying to protect the reefs for some thirty years now.

The reefs aren't getting any better, and I am looking at the current restrictions and the proposed restrictions, and it's a lot of the same. It's no-fishing zones, and it's no-anchoring zones, and maybe we add some discharge zones, some no-motor zones, and what I have never seen, or am aware of, is a single restriction on any kind of diving activities, and so my first question is, is it the opinion of the sanctuary that diving has no negative impact on the health of the reefs?

DR. BELCHER: Sarah or Beth, can you speak to that question?

MS. FANGMAN: The question is if diving has impacts on the sanctuary?

MR. DELIZZA: The question, specifically, is, is it the position of the sanctuary that diving has no negative impacts?

MS. FANGMAN: Okay. Thank you. No, that is not the position of the sanctuary.

MR. DELIZZA: Okay, and so -- I'm not a student of this, but are there any restrictions, beyond no anchoring, any restrictions whatsoever, on the diving activity, and, specifically, the for-hire diving activity?

MS. DIEVENY: We have additional marine zones, the existing areas, ecological reserves, and four special use areas, and, in the proposed rule, those are proposed to be shifted to be called conservation areas, and they're the most protective marine zones, and are transit only, to provide the greatest level of protection for the habitats within those marine zones.

MR. DELIZZA: Okay. Any feel for the percentage of the sanctuary waters, of the square miles, that that would encompass?

MS. DIEVENNEY: 2 percent -- Sorry. 4 percent of sanctuary waters are protected with that marine zone type.

MR. DELIZZA: Okay, and so, in 96 percent of the sanctuary waters, any kind of diving activity, that anybody would like to do, is fully permitted, correct?

MS. DIEVENNEY: Correct.

MR. DELIZZA: Okay, and so the next question is, while that unregulated diving activity is going on, do you think that has more or less negative impact than trolling lures on the surface over a reef? Come on. You know the answer. It's okay.

MS. FANGMAN: There is no quantitative data from any organization, or scientific research agency, that quantifies that.

MR. DELIZZA: Okay, and so no scientific data to say that trolling over a reef causes any damage whatsoever?

MS. FANGMAN: No data of any kind, scientific or anecdotal.

MR. DELIZZA: Okay, and so -- This is going to be a little harsh. For thirty years you've been doing this, and the reefs have gotten nothing but worse, and so my suggestion is that you try doing something a little bit different than just doing more of what you've already done, and that's my final comment.

DR. BELCHER: Thank you for that. The last person we have on the list at this point is Kelly Cox.

MS. COX: Hi, everyone. Thanks for the opportunity to comment. My name is Kelly Cox, and I'm with Audubon Florida, but I'm also representing the Florida Keys Restoration Partnership, a coalition of environmental non-profit groups that are evaluating this rule and proposed management plan. I am also a Florida Keys resident. I live in the village of Islamorada, and I'm an avid diver and an avid angler and an avid user of sanctuary resources, and so I really appreciate the opportunity to weigh-in, and I just want to echo some of the comments here today, that we're really excited to have the opportunity to review the proposed rule and management plan, because it allows us to evaluate what's working and what is not working in the sanctuary for the variety of users that we have.

The restoration partnership is really supportive of expanding the sanctuary boundary and providing additional habitat connectivity, while balancing those consumptive uses, and we've been coordinating with guides associations and the fishing community to write out more detailed comments about how we can achieve restoration of our resources that have been so imperiled and facing so many threats externally, from external impacts, and also from climate change, ocean acidification, and just numerous other threats. We're really excited about the opportunity that this

presents, and we intend to submit detailed comments to this council, and I just want to thank you all for your thoughtful consideration of those comments and for the presentations we've heard today. Thank you.

DR. BELCHER: Thank you, Kelly. Any other comments or questions from the council proper on this topic? Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: I just wanted to see if the council was, and Roger can maybe weigh-in, if we could send this forward to the Habitat Protection and Ecosystem-Based Management Advisory Panel that is meeting in November, to review and provide input.

DR. BELCHER: Can anyone from staff answer that for Trish? Roger.

MR. PUGLIESE: I was just getting ready to send you a clarification question that you meant to provide this to the November advisory panel, and ask John that we can move forward and add that to the agenda for the --

DR. BELCHER: I definitely feel that it probably should be something that is put to them, and I guess we can talk more about that off-mic, I guess, and I don't know that we need to do that now, John, and I'm kind of not sure on procedure on that.

MR. CARMICHAEL: No, and I think it's fine, and we're still working on the agenda, and it should be no problem at all to get that added, and, just for the council's background information, we invited other advisory panels to sit in on this meeting and hear this presentation, Snapper Grouper and Spiny Lobster, in particular, so that they could hear this. Snapper Grouper is meeting, and we intend to allow them some time to provide comments to the council during their meeting and make it part of their report, and we'll ask Spiny Lobster folks who may be on here, and reach out to them, to also try and get comments from them for the council to consider when they discuss this in December, and so we are trying to work this through the advisory panels, with the meetings that we have planned, as well as ones that aren't necessarily meeting between now and December.

DR. BELCHER: Thanks, John. Roger.

MR. PUGLIESE: Just a quick point, and I'm going to be sitting down with the AP chair this week, and so we can work on crafting that into the agenda.

DR. BELCHER: Okay. Perfect. Any other comments or questions from the council? Okay. Seeing none, we're going to go ahead and propose to take a ten-minute break, before we go into the flyingfish and dolphinfish discussion, and so if everybody could be back at twelve 'til, and we'll see everybody at 10:48.

(Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

DR. BELCHER: The next item on our agenda is the review from WECAFC, the Flyingfish and Dolphinfish Working Group. Laura and Rachel, you're up.

MS. CIMO: Thank you so much. First of all, I want to say hello to everybody and to express our gratitude to the council for the opportunity to present at the seminar on WECAFC. We really

appreciate it. First of all, my name is Laura Cimo, and I work for the NOAA Fisheries Office of International Affairs, Trade, and Commerce, and, during the presentation, I will be providing an overview and some updates of potential interest to the council related to the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission, or WECAFC.

Next, my colleague, Rachel O'Malley, who also works for the NOAA Fisheries Office of International Affairs, Trade, and Commerce, will provide some additional information about a new working group of WECAFC that focuses on flyingfish and dolphinfish, and then we'll open up the discussion to any questions or comments.

During the presentation, we'll provide, as I mentioned, just a brief overview of WECAFC, for those of you who aren't familiar with the organization, and then I will share some updates from our most recent meeting of WECAFC that concluded in July, and then we'll share a couple of updates on some events that may be of interest to the council, and then I will turn it over to Rachel to provide some information on the Flyingfish and Dolphinfish Working Group, and we'll give some additional information and contact information for you, and hopefully, as I mentioned, we can open it up to questions and comments.

WECAFC operates as a regional fisheries body under Article VI of the FAO Constitution, and that just essentially means it's a non-binding body, and so any recommendations that are adopted are not mandatory. It does act in, as I mentioned, an advisory capacity, and it promotes the effective conservation, management, and development of all living marine resources in the wider Caribbean, and it's comprised of thirty-four members, including the United States. Just for those of you who aren't familiar, you can see there's a map, and all the areas that are shown in blue shows the area of competence of WECAFC.

There are essentially eleven working groups under WECAFC, and each focus on a specific species or fisheries issue, and each of the groups has its own specific terms of reference. We have fisheries scientists, experts, and managers who participate in the working groups, through the representation of their member countries, and all relevant international, regional, and sub-regional partner organizations are often represented on the working groups, upon invitation.

The United States has been actively engaged in eight of these groups, and I have basically starred these groups, focusing on Caribbean spiny lobster, although this group has not met in the last several years, queen conch, fish spawning aggregations, and we have a group focused on illegal, unreported, and unregulated IUU fishing, recreational fisheries, moored fish aggregating devices, or MFADs, sharks, and fishery data and statistics. Just to note that one of the working groups that is of interest to the United States is the Deep-Sea Fisheries Working Group, but it just hasn't met in nearly ten years.

Again, another new working group that's been established at WECAFC, in the meeting in 2019, focuses on flyingfish and dolphinfish and other pelagic species that are not covered by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, or ICCAT, and, just to give some brief background, the commission had agreed, at its 2019 meeting, after a U.S. recommendation was put forward, that WECAFC focus on dolphinfish. However, there was a large number of working groups, as you can see here, within WECAFC, and some concerns were expressed about adding yet another group, and so the scope of an existing working group that was

focused on flyingfish was broadened to look at dolphin and other pelagic species not managed by ICCAT.

Unfortunately, this working group was not able to meet prior to the most recent meeting of the commission, but it is tentatively scheduled to meet in 2023, and the United States does plan to play a very active role in this working group, and so this is why we're speaking with you today, and, again, my colleague, Rachel, will speak more to this working group later in the presentation, and just one final note that there is a working group focused on shrimp and groundfish, but its focus is on the North Brazil/Guyana Shelf.

Now I will just provide a brief overview of the 18th meeting of WECAFC and its key outcomes that may be of interest, and just to note that the 18th meeting of WECAFC took place on the 26 to 29 of July of this year, and I do want to just express our deepest gratitude to John Carmichael and Myra Brouwer for their interest in the meeting of WECAFC, and, of course, we would like to thank the council staff and members who attended the meeting. We were really grateful for their attendance and their expertise.

The meeting was held virtually, under the leadership of the U.S. chair, which was basically by the State Department, who is the lead for the U.S. government for WECAFC, and, just as a quick note, the United States does no longer hold the chairmanship of WECAFC. Nicaragua was designated the new chair of WECAFC at the recent July meeting. Seventeen members of WECAFC participated in the meeting, and the U.S. delegation, as I mentioned, was led by the State Department, with participation from staff from our office at NOAA Fisheries, NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office, the Caribbean Fishery Management Council, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and, again, I guess want to express our gratitude for everyone who had given input at the meeting.

Nancie Cummings, who is from our NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fisheries Science Center, also participated as chair of the WECAFC Scientific Advisory Group and convener of the Fisheries Data and Statistics Working Group.

At the meeting, the commission endorsed several very important non-binding documents and recommendations that had been developed by the various WECAFC working groups with U.S. participation, and to note, first, that it included the data collection and reference framework, which provides guidance for standardized data collection on key species in the region, and this was based on an interim framework that had been adopted in 2019 that had been further developed and refined intersessionally, and information that is submitted by WECAFC members, pursuant to this framework, will contribute to a regional database.

It's called the Western Central Atlantic Fisheries Information System, and this will provide WECAFC with the minimum information needed for the monitoring of priority species, stock assessments, and management decisions based on the best available science. The commission also agreed, at this meeting, that the framework will be considered a living document, to be further refined over time and implemented incrementally, and to note that a related recommendation was also adopted by the commission, which endorsed the principles behind the DCRF and strongly encouraged members to proceed with using this framework, but also recognize that we need further

investments to build the national capacities of WECAFC members for both data collection and reporting.

A regional fish spawning aggregation fishery management plan, focused on Nassau grouper and mutton snapper, was also endorsed by the commission, which aims to strengthen the management of fish that aggregate to spawn and reverse the declines of species that are vulnerable to overexploitation and to note that the United States, through the Caribbean Fishery Management Council, had provided support for the development of the plan and accompanying communication strategy, and just to note, of course, the conservation of Nassau grouper is a U.S. priority, since the species is listed as threatened under our U.S. Endangered Species Act.

An accompanying recommendation was supported that called for implementation of the regional fish spawning aggregation management plan and several actions to improve regional data collection and assessment. It also called for communication outreach, for the conservation of fish spawning aggregations, and it also called on WECAFC to mobilize resources for priority research and monitoring.

A recommendation was also adopted aiming at WECAFC members taking action to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing by encouraging strengthened fisheries governance, implementing measures to effectively regulate, monitor, and control transshipment, and the development of mechanisms for sharing fishing vessel information, consistent with any applicable domestic confidentiality requirements.

The commission also addressed a recommendation on queen conch, which reaffirmed its commitment to implement the regional queen conch fishery management and conservation plan, which had been endorsed by the commission at its sixteenth meeting, and it agreed to update the status of the planned implementation on an annual basis, so that WECAFC could monitor progress and identify any implementation gaps and to note that the recommendation also promoted genetic research, to help identify the spatial distribution of queen conch, to provide useful information on connectivity and traceability, and WECAFC members were strongly encouraged to participate in the genetic work and to note that the WECAFC working group on queen conch was also encouraged to collaborate with our regional working group on IUU fishing, to undertake activities that would combat the illegal fishing of queen conch.

Also, several documents were adopted promoting the sustainable management of fishing on moored fish aggregating devices, but I would note that these documents are adopted on an interim basis, and these included a Caribbean regional management plan for MFADs and a guide for improved monitoring of catches and improved assessment of MFAD impacts on stocks.

The commission adopted a related recommendation that charges the MFAD working group with finalizing the regional management plan and the guidance document before the next commission meeting, so that we can inform the development of national management plans and legislation, if relevant, and just to note that ICCAT, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, will be consulted in this process.

The WECAFC Secretariat and sub-regional partner organizations were asked to support a regional assessment of the impacts of and mitigation measures for MFAD fishing in the WECAFC area, and members are encouraged to promote data collection and analysis of MFAD fisheries, support

the establishment of stakeholder outreach and any communication campaigns, and encourage research in several key areas.

Of note also, the commission adopted a regional plan of action for the conservation and management of sharks, and this plan is aimed at ensuring the conservation management of sharks and their long-term sustainable use in the WECAFC area. The regional plan sets out five objectives and provides a table of actions to achieve these objectives, and it's also worth noting that the commission supported WECAFC becoming a signatory to a memorandum of understanding that would establish a non-binding coordination mechanism in the wider Caribbean region towards ocean governance and ocean-based sustainable development.

The commission also endorsed an exchange of letters of cooperation between WECAFC and ICCAT, and these letters will provide a basis for collaborative work between the two organizations on issues of mutual interest, and, also, it's worth noting that WECAFC adopted a new strategic plan for 2022 through 2027 and a comprehensive work program for 2022 through 2024, and, at the request of the United States, the work program was amended so that it included the first meeting of the Flyingfish-Dolphinfish Working Group, as well as a meeting of the recreational fisheries working group.

As I mentioned, I just wanted to throw out a couple of dates that may be of interest to the council, first that there will be the fifth meeting of the working group on spawning aggregations in late January, and that will be followed by a one-day meeting of the queen conch working group, and that -- Hopefully this year we will have the first meeting of our Flyingfish-Dolphinfish Working Group, and I would ask for the next slide, and I will turn the presentation over to Rachel.

MS. O'MALLEY: Thanks, Laura. As Laura mentioned, we hope that the WECAFC Flyingfish-Dolphinfish Working Group will hold its first meeting sometime in 2023. We're seeing preliminary input from U.S. stakeholders now on issues, challenges, and opportunities for this working group to address.

One note on process. For some other international bodies, for example ICCAT, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, there is a formal U.S. advisory committee established by U.S. statute, and that's the mechanism in which we engage U.S. stakeholders, but, for WECAFC, we do not have a formal U.S. advisory process at this time, and so, for that reason, we're engaging the councils directly, and we invite you to share your preliminary views on issues for this working group.

Our goals for the first meeting include to identify regional needs and priorities throughout the wider Caribbean, to highlight areas for potential collaboration, and to develop a workplan and recommendations for future activities of the working group. Just to reiterate, we're here today to begin a dialogue, and Laura and I have expertise in engaging with international organizations, along with our counterparts from the Department of State, and Carolyn Gruber of the Department of State has also joined us today, but we're in no way experts when it comes to the dolphinfish fishery, and this is new to WECAFC, and that's why we will be working closely with NOAA colleagues in the Southeast, to benefit from their experience and expertise, and an open dialogue with the council will help us to understand U.S. interest in this fishery, so that we can represent them effectively in the WECAFC forum, and so now we would like to open the floor to comments and questions.

DR. BELCHER: Thank you for that presentation. Are there questions from the council at this point? Laurilee.

MS. THOMPSON: So this ties in with something that Dewey brings up all the time, and that is the impact, not in U.S. waters, and that is taking place on dolphin, and, you know, what's going on further south and east of us and how that is impacting our dolphin fisheries, and so I guess you guys are going to be -- You're going to be doing some assessments on the dolphins?

MS. O'MALLEY: Thank you. Yes, this question about international fishing effort is a really important question, and we do not have all the answers, and that's why our engagement with WECAFC is so important. I do know that NOAA's Southeast Fisheries Science Center has already begun to look at the available data, and this will continue to inform our approach.

With the adoption of the data collection reference framework that Laura mentioned, and this was adopted at the WECAFC meeting in July 2022, we hope that data reporting will increase from all WECAFC members in the region, and this effort may provide more information on the catch of dolphinfish by other countries, and so we are not in a position to conduct a stock assessment, a broader regional stock assessment, in the short-term, because of the lack of data, but this is something that we are starting to address, and we recognize that it's very important.

DR. BELCHER: Other questions from the group? Mel.

MR. BELL: Thanks. Laura and Rachel, thanks for the presentation, and I will admit that I was kind of ignorant of the existence of WECAFC, but I can certainly see, as you've heard, since our council has responsibility for management of dolphin along the coast, and they don't stay in our region, and they don't even stay in U.S. waters, and so being connected with you all, I think, as we approach an MSE process, and deal with management decisions that we have to make, I think that's very valuable, and so we just need to maintain that connectivity, because where we are kind of blind is the international piece of this.

We do know that the fish have a much longer range of movement than we have management authority or responsibility in, and so it's great to know that there's somebody out there kind of looking at that piece and considering things, so we definitely stay connected, but thanks for the presentation.

MS. O'MALLEY: Thanks for that comment. We couldn't agree more.

DR. BELCHER: John Carmichael.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Thanks. I wanted to ask a few just sort of logistical questions, thinking about this, and I really do echo the appreciation for the presentation and getting to learn more about the group, WECAFC, the dolphinfish in particular, and, you know, our interests certainly align on many areas, and data collection is something we always discuss, and so it's very encouraging to see that being a big part of this.

I do have a few questions, and so we talked about doing assessments, and I totally understand, and, I mean, we're well aware of the data deficiencies with dolphin, particularly on the, you know,

stock-wide front, but I just was curious if WECAFC groups do any assessments of any of those other species, and is that an area that WECAFC is able to get into?

MS. O'MALLEY: Laura, do you want to respond to this one?

MS. CIMO: Thanks, Rachel, and thank you very much, John, for the question, and so, unfortunately, WECAFC does have several limitations, and one of its limitations is the fact that, although it does have a scientific advisory group, that scientific advisory group -- Frankly, the membership is basically -- They are volunteers, and it's not a robust scientific group, as some of our regional fishery management organizations have, and so there is not a capacity to undertake assessments.

What there is an ability and interest in doing, as we've mentioned, is there is this new data collection framework, and a new regional database, that hopefully will provide data that could contribute to stock assessments, but, admittedly, the stock assessment capacity doesn't currently exist at WECAFC, but thanks for the question, and thanks, of course, for the important points, John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and, to follow-up on that, has there ever been an example where perhaps WECAFC, or something like this, under the U.N., contracted out for someone to do an assessment?

MS. CIMO: To my knowledge -- I am trying to think, and I think the only assessments that at least I'm familiar with are those that are conducted by the scientific advisory bodies of our regional fishery management organizations. In that case, the assessments have been done by those particular bodies, and let me turn to you, Rachel, if you're aware of any other examples.

MS. O'MALLEY: No, I'm not, Laura.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Okay. I appreciate that, and I'm sort of not particularly surprised, and just if you will indulge me on the idea of, you know, the dolphinfish working group getting started, and sort of two things there, and one would be what is the timing, because I am interested in how we could get feedback from our advisors, from our SSC, or scientific advisors, as well as our Dolphin AP, on some of the issues that they may have, and so I really appreciate the opportunity to inform the group about our issues, since we have worked on it a lot, and I want to consider if there's time to work it through our regular timing. The AP would probably meet in the spring, and the SSC is meeting in a few weeks, and they've got a pretty full agenda, and so I'm just curious, and, if we were to have feedback say early next spring, late-April-ish, would that be too late, and should we strive to get something to you sooner?

MS. O'MALLEY: No, and there is plenty of time. I'm sure you can appreciate that this kind of international work happens at a pretty glacial pace, and so, even though this working group hopes to meet in 2023, we don't have a date yet, and, also, the meeting is planned in collaboration with the Caribbean Fishery Management Council, and the plan was to hold it in Puerto Rico, and, of course, with the damage we're seeing this week, who knows, and that may affect their ability to host, and we just don't know yet whether that might affect the timing. We definitely have time to get your input, and we're happy to work with council staff on a timeline that makes sense for you all, and so we will have plenty of opportunities to get your input.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Thanks, and that's really encouraging, and then who serves on the working groups, and like what's the level of person? Would this be something appropriate for a council member, or an advisory panel chair, or an SSC member to get involved?

MS. O'MALLEY: Thanks. Yes, the working groups are pretty technical, and so it's not like high-level government people, like ministers or anything like that, and it is really a technical discussion. The members of the working groups are generally representing national governments, but we have had council members participate in some working groups in the past, and C.J. participated in the recent shark working group as well, and so, if there is interest, we definitely want to know about it, and we can figure out the best way to tap into that expertise.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes. Thank you very much. There probably is interest, and so we'll keep in touch with you guys on that, and so, Carolyn, that's all my logistical questions. Thanks.

DR. BELCHER: Thanks, John. Kerry, you're up next.

MR. MARHEFKA: John, I appreciate it, and I thought your questions were great, and so thank you for asking them, and I just really wanted to make a statement that Rachel reached out to myself, and I think a few other council members, last week, ahead of this call, and I had a great talk with her, and it just made me really feel optimistic about this process, about, you know, the council's needs and wants being paid attention to, and so I just wanted to thank you for reaching out ahead of time, for being here today, and it just gives me great positivity as we head down this road.

MS. O'MALLEY: Thanks, Kerry. I also wanted to mention that we are in close contact with Mikheil, who is obviously a great resource to all of us, and so interested council members should feel free to reach out through him as well.

DR. BELCHER: Other comments or questions? Okay. I am not seeing any hands at this time. Again, thank you so much for coming and talking with us about what's going on with WECAFC, and I'm sure that we will have folks that are definitely interested in helping to contribute to the data and your data needs. Laurilee.

MS. THOMPSON: That was a mistake. Sorry. I set a notebook down, and it raised my hand. Sorry.

DR. BELCHER: No worries. Okay. Again, nobody has any further comments or questions?

MR. CARMICHAEL: We've got a few more, Carolyn, and we have Jon Reynolds in the public to make a comment as well.

DR. BELCHER: Okay.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Jon, you can go ahead.

MR. REYNOLDS: Thank you. I just had a question about these upcoming working groups that fishermen are going to be in and localized in south Florida, and, from what I am understanding, there is going to be a member from WECAFC at these working groups, and is that correct?

MS. O'MALLEY: Just a clarification, and are you referring to the MSE working groups that are happening along the U.S. coast or these WECAFC working groups that Laura and I were speaking about today?

MR. REYNOLDS: Yes, the MSE working groups upcoming here, and is there going to be a member from your group at any of these meetings?

MS. O'MALLEY: Unfortunately, no, but, if questions arise, we can certainly work with the Southeast Regional Office team to get information back to you all.

MR. REYNOLDS: Okay. All right. As a fisherman that has witnessed the decline in dolphin, especially in recent years, the drastic decline, and knowing the U.S. reliance upon this fish, and I'm a charter/for-hire fisherman, I want to thank you personally, and, on behalf of our group, South Atlantic Fishing Environmentalists, for pursuing this. This is absolutely necessary, and, any other way that we could be helpful, we would like to be a part of this, as we can, moving forward, with your group and with any other groups pursuing the conservation of the species and collecting more data. Thank you.

DR. BELCHER: Okay. Anybody else from the public interested in asking questions or have any comments? Seeing none, moving down, our last item is Other Business, and does anybody from the council have anything additional that we need to discuss at this time? Okay. Seeing no hands, again, I would like to thank all of the speakers that came forward today to talk to us about the agenda items, for their time and helping us answer some of the questions that were still outstanding, and, at this point in time, I am going to adjourn the meeting, and so thanks, again, everybody, and thank you to council staff for helping me to navigate this here in the virtual world.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on September 21, 2022.)

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Amanda Thomas
November 29, 2022

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Attendee Details

Attended	Last Name	First Name
Yes	Asokan	Anupa
Yes	Baumstark	René
Yes	Belcher	Carolyn
Yes	Bell	00 Mel
Yes	Bibza	Jessica
Yes	Brouwer	Myra
Yes	Bruckner	Andy
Yes	Buie	Jay
Yes	Butler	Casey
Yes	Cimo	Laura
Yes	Constant	Anthony
Yes	Cox	Kelly
Yes	Cox	Derek
Yes	Crowe	Stacie
Yes	Dancy	Kiley
Yes	DeLizza	Richard
Yes	DeVictor	Rick
Yes	Delaney	Joanne
Yes	Dieveney	Beth
Yes	Dilley	Jonelle
Yes	Dixon	Michael
Yes	Eggleston	Christian
Yes	Espittia	Jacob
Yes	Feddern	Henry
Yes	Fogarty	Nicole
Yes	Foss	Kristin
Yes	GOMEZ	RICHARD
Yes	Glazier	Ed
Yes	Gormley	Jaime
Yes	Griner	00 Tim
Yes	Gruber	Carolyn
Yes	Guyas	Martha
Yes	Hadley	01John
Yes	Havel	Lisa
Yes	Helies	Frank

Yes	Helmey	Judy
Yes	Iberle	01Allie
Yes	Iverson	Kim
Yes	Jones	Sarah
Yes	Karnauskas	Mandy
Yes	Keener	Paula
Yes	Kramer	Rob
Yes	Lay	Allison
Yes	Lindeman	Ken
Yes	Lopez-Mercer	Maria
Yes	Lorenz	Robert
Yes	Marhefka	00Kerry
Yes	Matthews	Thomas
Yes	McCawley	00 - Jessica
Yes	McGovern	Jack
Yes	Mehta	Nikhil
Yes	Merrifield	Mike
Yes	Merten	Wessley
Yes	Muller	Robert
Yes	Murphey	Trish
Yes	O'Malley	Rachel
Yes	Oliver	Ashley
Yes	Palmer	William
Yes	Parker	Blaine
Yes	Parr	Nicholas
Yes	Parsons	Kristene
Yes	Pohlot	Bruce
Yes	Pugliese	01Roger
Yes	Puglise	Kimberly
Yes	ROBERTSON	PRESTON
Yes	Ralston	Kellie
Yes	Reeder	Kelly
Yes	Reynolds	Jon
Yes	Roller	00Tom
Yes	Schmidtke	01Michael
Yes	Schwarzmann	Danielle
Yes	Smillie	Nick
Yes	Smit-Brunello	Monica
Yes	Snyder	Dave
Yes	Spurgin	Kali
Yes	Stein	Sarah
Yes	Stephenson	Sarah
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Yes	Sweetman	CJ
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