

From: [Kate Quigley](#)
To: [Mike Collins](#)
Subject: FW: Fishing story ...
Date: Tuesday, September 14, 2010 8:58:24 AM

Mike,

Can you please forward the attached article to Council members, staff, and Jack and Monica at the request of Bill Kelly? Thanks.

Kate

Local fishermen rail against 'catch-share' idea - 08/04/2010

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KEY LARGO -- The latest controversial proposal working its way through the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council aroused strong reactions last week from some members of the Upper Keys fishing industry, exposing a possible rift within the commercial fishing community.

At issue during the July 28 meeting at the Hilton Key Largo Grande Resort was a proposed individual quota system now under consideration by the Atlantic council for eight fish species. The species affected by what is known as Amendment 21 would be vermilion snapper, red grouper, black grouper, golden tilefish, black sea bass, gag grouper and greater amberjack.

The council has not yet developed any specifics, and it is also considering more traditional management tools for those fisheries, such as annual aggregate quotas and limits on how much of a targeted species each boat can catch per trip.

But generally speaking, under fishing quota systems, also known as catch shares, each fisherman is assigned an annual quota that he is allowed to catch. The size of the quota is typically determined by the fisherman's recent history of production. Bigger players are granted a larger quota. And some smaller players sometimes aren't granted a catch share at all as fishery managers work to reduce overall catch numbers. Those who do have assignments can sell or lease those rights to people who have been frozen out, or to those seeking entry into the industry.

Catch-share systems often replace annual quota systems, under which a total catch limit for a particular species is set for all fishermen combined, but no individual annual limits are set. For example, the catch limit for greater amberjack in the South Atlantic is currently 1.17 million pounds per year. Once the total is reached, the fishery is closed for the year.

Several fishermen, as well as Key Largo Fisheries owner Tom Hill and Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen's Association Executive Director Bill Kelly, were among those who turned out for last week's meeting, which was hosted by the Environmental Defense Fund, a strong advocate of catch-share programs.

On its website, EDF argues that individual quota systems make for more efficiency and better resource protection than annual aggregate quotas. Fishermen, who no longer feel compelled to race to catch as many fish as they can before the annual aggregate is reached, can instead pace themselves, bringing fish to market not in one big glut, but rather when

demand exceeds supply. That means higher prices for the fishermen.

In addition, catch-share advocates say that by encouraging fishing in a more deliberate fashion, individual quota systems lead to less by-catch and a safer fishing environment than the so-called "derby fishing" that is a staple of fisheries governed by an aggregate annual haul limit.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administrator Jane Lubchenco, a former EDF trustee, has come out in favor of catch-share systems, and among the programs already in place are two in the Gulf of Mexico: one for red snapper, and the other, implemented this past winter, for grouper and tilefish.

But among the local fishermen who attended EDF's Key Largo meeting last week, most didn't share Lubchenco's optimism about catch shares.

At the root of much of the concern is the fear that individual quotas would freeze out small players, who can't demonstrate enough landings in recent years to get an allocation. Entering the business could also become tougher, as those without an allocation would have to lease a quota from someone else before putting a boat in the water. Conversely, those with quotas would be able to make money through leases without even leaving the dock.

"Guys that are left out of the loop are really out," said Ernie Piton, a commercial fisherman who explained that for personal reasons he hasn't spent much time on the water in the past three years. Piton is also worried for his 17-year-old son, who wants to fish amberjack.

Indeed, Piton's fears are not unfounded. According to a 2009 report by Pew Trusts, an organization that supports catch-share programs, the number of permitted commercial red snapper fishermen dropped 39 percent in the first two years after the Gulf of Mexico individual quota program began.

Hill, of Key Largo Fisheries, said he fears that catch shares could eventually be bought up by a conglomerate, who would control the market on a given fish.

"Eighty percent will be owned by a mother ship out there processing its own fish," he said.

Individual quota systems don't necessarily improve the health of fisheries either. An analysis of 20 fisheries managed under catch-share programs found that 12 of those populations improved after implementation and eight continued to decline, the Pew report says.

But those who showed up at the meeting last week weren't unanimous in their opposition to such a program. Fisherman Scott Vaeth decried the current management system for golden tilefish, in which he said the annual aggregate quota is often reached in just a couple months.

"What are we supposed to do for the other 10 months?" he said.

Fisherman Peter Boehm said that with the South Atlantic Council currently moving toward a ban on deepwater fishing for several grouper and snapper species, and with so many other closures and limits already in place, dividing the remaining fisheries into catch shares may be the only way for anyone to survive.

Advocates, including the EDF, say fears about catch-share programs freezing out the little guy can be addressed in the design of the program, which should be developed with heavy input from the local industry. The

rules could set a cap on how many shares of any particular fish one business can have, thereby limiting concerns about conglomeration. And the original assignment of catch shares can be decided in ways that give more credence to small players, or to those who haven't necessarily fished every year.

But when EDF Fisheries Policies Specialist Eileen Dougherty attempted to enroll fishermen in developing such ideas at last week's meeting, most got up and left instead, attendees said.

Kelly, of the commercial fisherman's association, said he didn't want EDF to be able to go back to Washington and say that his organization had taken part in developing a South Atlantic catch-share program.

If the South Atlantic council moves forward in developing such a program, it has the potential to divide the Keys commercial industry among those who would stand to be allocated many catch shares, and those more likely to get few or none, he said.

rsilk@keysnews.com