

Summary Report Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panel

Joint advisory panel webinar on proposed changes to the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

October 29, 2019

On October 29th, 2019, Beth Dieveney, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) staff, presented via webinar an overview of the Sanctuary's proposed modifications to interested members of the Dolphin Wahoo, Coral, Mackerel Cobia, and Shrimp advisory panels (APs). The presentation was followed up by a question and answer session. Afterwards, this webinar ended and interested Dolphin Wahoo AP members were given the opportunity to breakout into a separate webinar to develop recommendations on how the FKNMS proposed actions should be addressed. The discussion questions shown below were offered to help gather feedback.

Since this meeting topic was narrowly focused on the Florida Keys, not all advisory AP members were expected to attend. Overall, two Dolphin Wahoo AP members attended the FKNMS webinar and one AP member attended the AP specific webinar to offer comments. The ensuing draft version of the comments were sent for AP review via email, with one AP member concurring with the viewpoints expressed and another AP member largely concurring as well, with the exception of alternative sentiments on questions 3 and 4, which are captured in the comments below.

AP Members

Ray Rosher, Chair	Christopher Burrows, Vice Chair
Wendell Barnett	Brice Barr ^{1,2}
Ty Conti	Robert Frevert ^{1,3}
Richard Harris	Earl Harris, Jr.
Glen Hopkins	Harris Huddle
Fred Kinard	Daniel Owsley
Jonathon Reynolds ³	Tim Scalise
Charles Yeomans	

¹attended the FKNMS webinar

²attended the DW AP breakout webinar

³provided feedback on the draft comments

South Atlantic Staff

John Hadley

Discussion Questions for the Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panel:

1) Do you feel like the stocks are sustainable?

Stocks of dolphin, wahoo, snappers, groupers, and many other fish species seem to be adequately managed for sustainability by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council and

the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The additional fisheries management measures being proposed by the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) feel as though they may be an overreach into the jurisdiction of these existing fisheries management bodies.

2) Do you feel like these changes are going to impact fishing in your area? What are some of the social and economic impacts?

Some of the proposed zones that would restrict or prohibit fishing occur in areas where dolphin and wahoo are targeted at times. Of note are deepwater wrecks that are within some of these zones that can congregate wahoo. Additionally, when ballyhoo congregate in some of the zones, dolphin and wahoo can follow the ballyhoo schools into these areas and are subsequently targeted by fishermen. Fishing activity for snapper grouper species will also be negatively affected in some circumstances. Of specific note is the proposed corridor and westward expansion of the closed area to the southwest of the Dry Tortugas near Riley's Hump. This has been noted as an area that is particularly utilized by recreational and commercial fishermen, many of which are concerned about losing access.

Eliminating catch and release trolling in some of the Sanctuary Preservation Areas (SPAs) will negatively affect some recreational trips that are targeting sailfish and barracuda. Since possession of non-bait species in these areas is prohibited, enforcement of catch and release fishing is straight forward. These SPAS are also used by FKNMS Baitfishing Permit holders for catching bait. The proposed management measures would remove the ability to catch bait in these areas, thus impacting fishing activity.

The patchwork of proposed areas will make it more confusing to know where fishing can and cannot occur. There is great concern over this from many in the recreational and commercial fishing community. Overall, preferred Alternative 3 would negatively affect a wide range of businesses in the Florida Keys, including those engaged in or relying on fishing, diving, snorkeling, and ecotourism.

3) Do you feel like there are benefits to the changes proposed by the FKNMS?

It is recognized that the Florida Keys have many visitors and limited resources. One AP member felt that existing measures, such as those that address derelict vessels and reduce vessel groundings, are beneficial. There would be additional benefits from some of the proposed changes, but major overarching issues such as water quality are not being addressed. The overall benefits of the proposed changes do not seem to outweigh the negative impacts.

Another AP member felt that his viewpoint was similar in some respects but not the exact same. This AP member acknowledged that improvements to habitat, whether through protection of degraded natural reefs or additional artificial reefs, can result in benefits to multiple fish species, including forage species. Additionally, protecting areas where these forage species spawn could increase their prevalence in the Keys. Improvements in forage fish populations would result in ensuing improvements for populations of predatory fish species that are commonly targeted by anglers, including dolphin and wahoo.

4) Do you have any recommendations for the Council to consider in December?

It is recommended that Alternative 1 (No Action) is chosen “across the board” as the preferred alternative given the impacts of the other alternatives on businesses and recreational activities. In addition, it is recommended that there are increased efforts to better educate the public on existing regulations for areas that are managed by the FKNMS to achieve better compliance.

If the FKNMS does move forward with closing certain areas to fishing activity, consider still allowing fishing in the upper water column (i.e. trolling) rather than prohibit fishing access all together since this type of activity is still compatible with habitat protection measures such as prohibitions on anchoring or use of gear that can come in contact with coral or hard bottom habitats.