

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council
Final Minutes – June 20, 2000

Members Present

Rob Bleser	Debra Harrison
Wayne Blevins	Warren Johnson
Virginia Cronk	Don Kincaid
Tom Davidson	Karen Lee
Fran Decker	Ken Nedimyer
Jim Fryer	George Neugent
Richard Grathwohl	Anita Schwessinger

Alternates Present

Greg DiDomenico for Toni Iarocci
Jerry Lorenz for Deborah Shaw
Sheila Mullins for David Hawtof

Call to Order/Approval of Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 9:10 a.m. On motion by Chairman Neugent, and seconded, the minutes of the April 18, 2000 meeting were approved as presented.

Sanctuary Superintendent's Report – A copy of Billy Causey's report is attached. Mr. Causey also reported on the status of the National Marine Sanctuary Division to be elevated to the office level within the National Ocean Service.

Mr. Causey reported on the recent successful project to capture Pacific Batfish, an invasive species, and deliver them to the New England Aquarium. Discussion followed, with Mr. Beuttler, NOAA legal counsel, giving the definition of exotic species from the FKNMS regulations. Mr. Blevins made comments indicating he did not want to debate the issue at this time, but he disagreed with the project. Mr. Causey apologized for not informing the SAC prior to the action taken to remove the fish from Sanctuary waters.

Mr. Causey introduced the following visitors: Susan White from the Key Deer Refuge; Jim Halpin, Manager of the Keys Refuges; Dave Rostker from the Office of Management and Budget; Ted Beuttler, NOS general counsel; and Gary McKee from Bahia Honda State Park.

Public Comment

Debra Harrison stated that there is an issue of importance for the Florida Keys Sanctuary Advisory Council's consideration. Monroe County Commissioners and Administration are going through an assessment of downsizing County government to respond to community incorporations taking place throughout the County. The County Administrator, Jim Roberts, has introduced his initial recommendations, and one of those recommendations was to dismantle the Marine Resources Department of Monroe County. Ms. Harrison gave a history and described the responsibilities of the department, commenting that the positions would not disappear, but transfer to other departments. Ms. Harrison said she thinks it is critical that the department not be dismantled. Discussion followed, with several members expressing that they did not see the necessity of dismantling this department.

Warren Johnson, representing the Propeller Club of the United States – a copy of his presentation is attached.

Amendment of Agenda

Chairman Neugent moved to amend the agenda to add an item following the reports, relating to Monroe County Resources Department under New Business. The motion was seconded by Warren Johnson. Mr. Johnson commented he would like to see an item on the agenda where people have the opportunity to submit items for the record, which could be under Announcements. Upon vote, the motion to amend the agenda passed unanimously.

Sanctuary Superintendent's Report – continued

June Cradick reported on the first meeting of the National Marine Sanctuary Program Sanctuary Advisory Council Working Group held at the Olympic Coast NMS in April.

Billy Causey reported that November 16 is the tenth anniversary of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, and to kick off the celebration, the meeting of all managers of the National Marine Sanctuaries will be held in the Keys in October or November.

Florida Department of Environmental Protection Report - Fritz Wettstein presented the attached report.

Chairman Neugent expressed his appreciation for DEP's (Secretary Struhs and Assistant Secretary Ballard) interest in Florida Keys issues. Discussion was held relating to oil spill response.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Report – Dr. Russell Nelson reported on the status of the trap reduction program in the stone crab fishery, and explained the fund for trap retrieval. He also reported that he conferred with scientists at the Florida Marine Research Institute, the FWC fishery biologist, as well as their aquaculture in fish production, on the issue of using cracked corn as chum. Their consensus was that it probably was not a problem, that the cracked corn is probably digestible. He suggested putting some fish in a tank that have digested cracked corn, and observe what happens.

Dr. Nelson also reported on the elements included in creating the FWC work plan for the coming fiscal year (7/1/00-6/30/01). He reported on the joint development of a Fisheries Management Plan for Biscayne Bay National Park, and reported they are participating in the Tortugas 2000 workshops, and the results of the public comment will be on their September agenda. He also reported that a high priority for the FWC is the issue of seagrasses. Discussion was held regarding the stone and blue crab fisheries, the harvest of sea anemones, seagrass studies, and current bills in Washington, DC going through the legislative process.

Enforcement Reports – Bob Stone distributed the National Marine Fisheries Service Quarterly Report (attached).

New Business

Monroe County Marine Resources – Debra Harrison moved that the Sanctuary Advisory Council support maintaining the Monroe County Marine Resources Department as a consolidated, unified department within Monroe County government. The motion was seconded by Richard Grathwohl. Warren Johnson commented that the SAC should hear from Mr. Roberts or someone from Monroe County to explain “the other side of the coin”, and moved to table this item. The motion was seconded. Upon vote, the motion failed. Chairman Neugent provided background information on the purpose of the proposal to redefine Monroe County government in an attempt to economize the expense of running County government. Chairman Neugent commented that he does not think it would be out of line for the SAC to express their support of maintaining the Marine Resources Department, and as a County Commissioner, he will be in support of

maintaining the department when it comes up for discussion before the County Commission. Further discussion was held relating to the importance of maintaining the department because it is almost self-sustaining due to grants, and the many valuable programs and projects utilized by the FKNMS which come from that department. Upon vote, the original motion passed, with Warren Johnson abstaining.

Karen Lee moved that the Sanctuary Advisory Council instruct staff to issue a press release immediately regarding this motion which just passed. The motion was seconded by Mr. Blevins, and passed unanimously.

Chairman Neugent addressed Ms. Mullins on an issue for discussion regarding funding problems for water quality projects; asking if she thought the City of Key West would be in favor of requesting an additional surtax, i.e. \$1.00, to the cruise line to fund water quality improvement programs. Ms. Mullins reviewed the history of similar proposals, commenting that she tried very hard when she was Mayor of Key West to increase the \$6.50 per passenger disembarkation fee, and that cruise ship revenues have not been used to address the problems that cruise ships cause. The SAC members discussed a local fee or tax to the cruise lines. Mr. Johnson talked about turbidity in Key West Harbor, mentioning that it has not been dredged in 30 years, indicating that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers lacks funding to dredge the harbor. Chairman Neugent commented that his interest was not in dredging, but in ways to generate revenue to be used throughout Monroe County to address water quality issues. Chairman Neugent also mentioned he would discuss this matter further with the City of Key West.

Unfinished Business

Area to be Avoided/Shaving of the Elbow - Warren Johnson moved that the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council reaffirms support of item 3 of the April, 1998 Resolution (copy attached). The motion was seconded, and upon vote, passed unanimously.

Working Group Reports

Water Quality – Debra Harrison reported on the status of the Florida Keys Water Quality Improvement Act of 2000 which passed the House in May, and will now go to the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

Jim Fryer gave an update of the Conservation & Reinvestment Act (CARA) legislation, which has passed through the House, and has been introduced in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Chairman Neugent commented that Jody Thomas, an employee of The Nature Conservancy, has been working very hard in Washington, DC on these bills, and applauded her for her efforts. Discussion was held regarding central treatment plants and wastewater systems in the Keys. Considerable discussion followed relating to concerns with growth (whether or not the proposed systems will lead to more growth and development). Comments by Mr. Causey and Chairman Neugent included statements relating to there being enough science to show that water quality issues need to be addressed now; it is time to move forward. Additional discussion items included the Rate of Growth Ordinance (ROGO); the carrying capacity study; land-use policies; and that the primary restriction on growth in Monroe County is based on hurricane evacuation.

Personal Watercraft – Karen Lee reported on the most recent meeting of the PWC Working Group, and announced that personal watercraft public education forums will be held July 11 in Key Largo and July 12 in Key West.

Zoning – Karen Lee gave an update on the marking of various zones, reporting that John Halas of FKNMS has added eight more “no motor zone” markers on the Snake Creek flat, which is a Wildlife Management Area (WMA), and he plans to add more markers along the Tavernier Creek WMA. Discussion was held regarding the desire to effectively add more Wildlife Management Areas to FKNMS regulations.

Unfinished Business – Continued

Chumming with Cracked Corn – **Richard Grathwohl** reported that the Marathon Guides Association has taken a stand that the practice of chumming with cracked corn has proven to have a bad influence on the digestive system of the yellowtail snapper. They have found that it causes swelling of their stomachs, it ferments, and is not being dissolved. Mr. Grathwohl said that chumming with cracked corn is not a traditional fishing method in the Keys, and he spoke to Tony Iarocci, Monroe County Commercial Fishermen, Inc., who stated he is also against the practice. Dr. Nelson and Chairman Neugent suggested that minimal research be conducted. Mr. Beuttler talked about whether or not chumming with cracked corn would be constituted as traditional fishing activity according to FKNMS regulations, commenting that if it is not a traditional fishing activity, the regulations regarding prohibiting the deposit or discharge of

materials or other matter might apply. Following further discussion, it was a consensus of the members to gather more information and add this item to the next SAC agenda.

New Business – Continued

Sponging in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary – **Billy Causey** reported on commercial sponging, an issue which has been raised at several SAC meetings and discussed during the planning process of the FKNMS Management Plan; the response in the past has been based on scientific research. Mr. Causey talked about the history of the issue, reporting that it has come up recently in an e-mail exchange with Mr. Frank Hawkins (copy attached). Mr. Causey commented that neither the social nor the fisheries issues that sponging brings fall within FKNMS authority, but indicated that possibly the FKNMS through the Sanctuary Advisory Council, and working with FWC, can try to resolve this very complex issue of concern.

Jerry Lorenz asked what the justification was for Biscayne National Park to prohibit sponging. Dr. Nelson responded that the driving factor was that a liveaboard community developed in the park, and the vessels did not have any facilities. Discussion was held regarding the sociological, cultural, biological and scientific aspects of sponging. Also discussed was the different methods of sponging, the percentage of sponges harvested, harvest limits, and where sponging is allowed and where sponging is prohibited. Debra Harrison suggested staff get in touch with MiMi Stafford who is a sponger, and an active environmentalist. Following further discussion, it was a consensus of the SAC that a panel should be invited to discuss this issue at the next SAC meeting; that this issue needs to be looked at to determine if it is detrimental to the natural resources.

Monroe County Channel Marking Action Plan – **Rich Jones** presented the attached report.

Sport Lobster Season – **Sheila Mullins** commented that many of her constituents complain about lobster “mini” season. Ms. Mullins asked if the SAC could discuss at a future meeting this issue relative to the problem enforcing the catch, and suggested that a simple tag system could be used. Chairman Neugent agreed that this issue would be appropriate for discussion at a future SAC meeting.

Monroe County Wastewater Master Plan – George Garrett gave an update on the Monroe County Wastewater Master Plan, and distributed the following two summaries: “The Draft Monroe County Sanitary Wastewater Master Plan: Addressing Your Environmental and Financial Concerns”, and “The Draft Monroe County Implementation Plan: Community and Regional Wastewater Systems for Your Neighborhood”. To receive a copy of these documents, or for more information about the Plan, please contact Mr. Garrett, Director of the Department of Marine Resources, at 305-289-2500.

Storm Water Management Issues – Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program – Jeff Stotts presented the report; a copy is available by calling 305-292-4501.

Announcements

Billy Causey encouraged everyone to participate in the PWC forums, and the Tortugas 2000 public hearings in Marathon at the Sombrero Country Club, and in Key West at the Holiday Inn Beachside.

Wayne Blevins announced that Barley’s Bay Festival will be held July 28 and July 29, which includes a reef cleanup and a music festival, and all proceeds go to the Everglades Foundation.

Items for August 15, 2000 Agenda

- 1) Chumming With Cracked Corn
- 2) Sponging

The meeting was adjourned at 3:45 p.m.