

**Coral Committee Report
August 22, 2022
Dr. Frazer – Chair**

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab N, No. 1**) and approved the minutes (**Tab N, No. 2**) from the June 2022 meeting as written.

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) Proposed Rule (Tab N, No. 4)

Ms. Sarah Fangman (FKNMS Superintendent) provided an overview of the FKNMS Restoration Blueprint Proposed Rule, which pulls from all alternatives included in the 2019 Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The proposed changes include an expansion of Sanctuary boundaries and new regulations, some of which are Sanctuary-wide and others related to specific marine zones.

A Committee member asked about the update to the definition of traditional fishing and suggested further considering regional historical fishing practices. Ms. Fangman mentioned that the Sanctuary is working with partner agencies on updating the definition of traditional fishing. Another Committee member requested additional information on the merger and/or removal of existing Sanctuary Preservation Areas (SPAs). Ms. Fangman responded that two SPAs are being removed as they are no longer considered in need of additional management measures. Ms. Fangman noted that several of the SPAs share similar biological features that allow for monitoring and comparative observation and evaluation of the effectiveness of management practices.

The Council has received a comment period extension until February 2023 and Council staff are in the process of convening the Council's Coral, Shrimp, Spiny Lobster, Reef Fish, and Coastal Migratory Pelagics Advisory Panels (AP). A summary of those AP recommendations will be provided at a future meeting.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Comments on FKNMS Proposed Rule (Tab N, No. 5)

Dr. CJ Sweetman provided an update on the FWC's plans to submit comments in response to the proposed rule. The Commission, like the Council, has been granted a comment period extension and will gather public input at two of their upcoming Commission meetings. FWC staff also plan to meet with various stakeholder groups and organizations in an effort to gather feedback on the Proposed Rule. Of particular interest is feedback on ecosystem changes; water quality issues; coral loss due to disease and bleaching. Specific comments will be provided at the next Council meeting. Dr. Sweetman noted that the agency is taking the lead in fisheries management in state waters and is working with the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils, and FKNMS staff to update the existing Protocol for Cooperative Fisheries Management.

Other Business

The Committee Chair asked Ms. Fangman if there have been any reports of a *Diadema antillarum* (long-spine sea urchin) die-off in the Florida Keys, similar to what is being reported in other parts of the Caribbean. Ms. Fangman replied that, at this time, there are no reports of a significant *Diadema* mortality event in the Florida Keys region and that efforts to repopulate the *Diadema* population after the die-off thirty years ago are still moving forward. Ms. Fangman recognized the ecological importance of sea urchins as grazers in coral reef ecosystems, not only in the Florida Keys, but the Caribbean more broadly.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.