



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary
33 East Quay Road
Key West, FL 33040

January 23, 2015

The Honorable Mayor Craig Cates and Key West City Commission
City of Key West
P.O. Box 1409
Key West, Florida 33041

Dear Mayor Cates,

Thank you for the opportunity to address some of the issues raised at the January 21st City of Key West Commission meeting. I appreciate the opportunities your Commission has provided in the past to update them and the public on the ongoing review of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) management plans and regulations. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) began this review in 2012 and staff has been working diligently with the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council (Council), composed of community volunteers representing all sectors of marine activity including recreational, charter, commercial and marine life (aquarium trade) fishermen. The Council and its stakeholder working groups have conducted almost 60 public meetings gathering input and drafting various ideas for modifications to the existing regulations and zoning plan to be analyzed by NOAA, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and State of Florida co-trustees who cooperatively manage the marine resources in FKNMS.

Similar to the City of Key West land use plans, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary is required to periodically review its management plan and regulations and has not done so in a comprehensive manner since 1997. Our scientific and socioeconomic monitoring programs have shown the need for potential changes based on and documented in our 2011 Condition Report. This report, which was prepared by over forty marine scientists and rigorously peer reviewed, is available with all of our science reports and summaries on our website at <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov>.

Following the Condition Report's findings, the Council unanimously adopted goals and objectives for the review, identified special working groups of stakeholders to provide input and has put forward a large suite of ideas and potential management changes they would like to see analyzed for their environmental and economic consequences. Though the Council has not made any recommendations on management changes, they have gathered a wide suite of ideas ranging from no changes to significant changes in management that they unanimously agreed are worthy of further study. Accordingly, NOAA and its management partners are currently analyzing the environmental and socioeconomic impacts of this range of ideas. We expect to release the findings in a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) toward the end of calendar year 2015. This DEIS will be available for public review for at least 90 days to ensure a robust public comment period and I would encourage input from the City of Key West at that time.



It is important to note that NOAA and its partners have not and will not be proposing any changes in management or regulations until after the public has had the opportunity to review and comment on the environmental and economic analysis of the range of alternatives put forward by the community and the Council.

During recent public discussion, members of the public and the Key West Chamber of Commerce have asked about the authorities which govern FKNMS. The United States Congress passed, and President George H. W. Bush signed, The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and Protection Act (Public Law 101-605) in 1990 creating FKNMS. The management and regulatory authority granted in this law and the Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act of 1972 (amended as the National Marine Sanctuaries Act in 2000) mandates development of a comprehensive management plan and regulations ensuring protection of sanctuary resources and facilitating public and private uses of the sanctuary consistent with the primary objective of resource protection. FKNMS regulations include an array of geographic zoning and spatial regulations to achieve this objective.

FKNMS is managed cooperatively with the State of Florida under a Memorandum of Agreement which clarifies relative jurisdictions and authorities. NOAA and the State of Florida cooperate on many matters including regulatory amendments, permitting and management changes. FKNMS management plans and regulations are developed in coordination with the State of Florida as co-trustees of the Florida Keys marine environment. FKNMS fishing regulations are developed in coordination with appropriate fishery management councils (Gulf or Mexico or South Atlantic), NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service and when potentially applicable in State waters, subject to review by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. All regulatory changes, fishing or otherwise, are coordinated through the Governor of the State of Florida. These agreements have been in place since adoption of the original management plan in 1997 and can be accessed on our website.

To ensure we are best managing the natural and cultural marine resources of the Florida Keys, we consistently monitor activities and the health of both sanctuary resources as well as the marine economy. NOAA's socioeconomic monitoring program has published studies showing more than 33,000 jobs in the Florida Keys are supported by ocean recreation and tourism, accounting for 58 percent of the local economy. Commercial fishing generates over \$50 million in harvest revenue and generates almost \$100 million in sales and output in Monroe County. NOAA and our management partners are committed to ensuring a healthy recreational and commercial fishery and extensive opportunities for marine related recreation. We can all agree our economy depends on a healthy and productive marine environment. With that in mind, we have studied the earnings by commercial fishermen before and after management changes like implementation of the Western Sambo and Tortugas Ecological Reserves. After implementation of the reserves, the studies showed that fishermen did not suffer losses associated with the reserves while demonstrating increases in both numbers and sizes of snapper, grouper and lobster that spilled over into adjacent areas that are open to fishing. The snorkel and dive industry also significantly benefitted from reserves as their customers can see fish populations and diversity they are unable to see at other Caribbean tourism locations. The dive and snorkel industry is a critical component of the Florida Keys economy; the latest NOAA / Monroe County Tourism Development Council study showed \$51.7 million was spent on dive and snorkel operations in



2008 and the divers spent a total of \$450 million in Monroe County supporting more than 7,500 jobs.

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and the City of Key West are long standing partners in resource protection and can point to many successes in improving water quality, coral restoration, and environmental education benefitting the residents and visitors to the Florida Keys. We look forward to many years of continued cooperation and partnerships and encourage the City to participate in the review of our management activities and any potential options for changes when they are released for public review in the coming year.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input and information. It would be my pleasure to provide any of the scientific data, legal documentation or management agreements referenced in this letter. As always, please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

Sincerely,


Sean Morton
Superintendent

