



*MIAPBC is a not-for-profit organization created to promote and protect the sound growth of the marine industry in Palm Beach County for the benefit and education of its members, the community, and the environment*

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**Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative:**

The Marine Industries Association of Palm Beach County (“MIA PBC”) has reviewed and submits this its initial comments on the the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative (SEFCRI) draft Recommended Management Actions of the Our Florida Reefs working groups which were empaneled by a cooperative agreement between the Coral Reef Conservation Programs of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. We have chosen to submit our comments via a letter rather than using the cumbersome and time consuming process on the Our Florida Reefs Website. The OFR protocol requires shifting from page to page to which our organization and many of our constituents find difficult to use.

MIA PBC and its members well recognize the need for sustainable fisheries and healthy marine resources. MIA PBC also represents those businesses and entities that directly and indirectly economically benefit from those fisheries and marine resources. The recreational boating and fishing industries are major sectors of Southeast Florida’s economy. According to a study done by Thomas J. Murray & Associates, Inc. the estimated economic impact of the marine industry in Palm Beach, Broward, and Miami-Dade counties in 2014 is as follows:

**Total Jobs-136,465 Total Earnings-\$4,047,215,928 and Total Output-\$11,505,510,406**

The Marine Industries of Palm Beach County strongly supports the work our agencies do maintaining healthy fisheries and our various inshore, nearshore, and off shore habitats. Their management, especially that of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission have proven to be successful over the years by ensuring we have sustainable fisheries and for the most part a healthy habitat. The main degradation to our marine habitat has not come from recreational boating and/or fishing but has been driven by climate change and water quality. Yet the SEFCRI through the Our Florida Reefs working groups is putting forth recommendations for management actions (RMA) that exclude areas and many of the current uses of our marine environment from the general public. Below is an analysis of the proposals with notations denoting why we support, oppose, and/or need more information on the recommendations.

**1. Education and Outreach**

- This topic contains 13 recommendations. Most are innocuous however we need to closely monitor how these would be funded. Example, the Marine Industries of Palm Beach County supports the online education recommendation in N7 however funding must not be at the expense of existing funding for the FWC. It is counter-intuitive to remove funding from Florida’s marine/resource law enforcement and regulatory agency. MIA PBC opposes N7 to the extent it would have a negative effect of the FWC’s funding.

**2. Enforcement**

- This topic contains 10 recommendations. I recommending support for the following 4 recommendations:
  - i. N-25: Strengthen Penalties for Reef-Related Violations
  - ii. N-35: Implement Conservation Regulation Training for Marine Enforcement Units
  - iii. S-99: Increase the Number of FWC Enforcement Officers
  - iv. S-125: Request that FWC Better Define the Word “Take”

N-27, N-44, S-95, S-98 are already being done. N-36 proposes to raise the cost of a recreation lobster stamp which the MIA PBC opposes. In addition fee increases are under the purview of the legislature, not the agency.

3. Fishing, Diving, Boating & Boating & Other Uses/Recreation

- This topic contains 9 recommendations. All but S-2 (number x) should be strongly opposed by the MIA PBC. N-59 seeks to ban the practice of spearfishing on SCUBA to enable sustainable use of our Florida reefs. FWC monitors and if necessary implements gear and harvest restrictions to ensure healthy and sustainable fisheries. If there is a recommendation based on biological data that a restriction of this type needs to be implemented it should go through the FWC public process. MIA PBC opposes N-59.
  - i. N-64: Require Registration of Fishing Gear in St. Lucie Inlet Preserve N-64 requires registration and tagging of lead line for all cast nets over six feet and traps, as well as reporting the coordinates of any lost nets to Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) for retrieval, for commercial and recreational fisherman, within St. Lucie Inlet Preserve State Park to prevent and track lost gear (ghost nets). If there is a recommendation based on biological data that a restriction of this type needs to be implemented it should go through the FWC public process. MIA PBC opposes N-64
  - ii. N-70: Protect and Restore Estuarine Habitats N-70 seeks to protect and restore mangroves, seagrass beds, oyster reefs and other estuarine habitats. The FDEP and FWC has the responsibility to protect these important habitats. The MIA PBC opposes N-70 because there are two agencies already enforcing compliance to ensure this habitat is protected.
  - iii. N-137: Designate SEFCRI Region as PSSA or ATBA S-8: Establish Coral Reefs Gardens N-137 would designate the entire Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative region as a Particularly Sensitive Areas (PSA) and/or an Area To Be Avoided (ATBA). The intended outcome of this action is to create the boundary lines of the reef area which should be protected as a sensitive area from Key Biscayne to St. Lucie Inlet. This action plan has the potential to reduce direct impacts to benthic habitats in Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative region from shipping activity and eliminate direct impacts from tug/barge cable drags and vessel groundings on the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative reef tract. The MIA PBC could support the concept of restricting damage from large commercial entities transversing the reef tract, however we are not convinced the (PSA) and (ATBA) designations would be the best course of action. Currently there are already strong regulations in place to address reef tract damage.
  - iv. S-8 Establish coral reef gardens, which are areas for the recovery, restoration, and recruitment of corals and fish, created under strong guidance from scientists and monitored by the community through an educational campaign. The intended outcome of this action is to help overcome recruitment limitation to degraded sites and improve coral stocks for restoration. Recovery zones could serve ecological functions of natural reefs and enhance and accelerate the recovery of the system in light of increased pressure in the future. MIA PBC strongly opposes this recommendation because it is a veiled attempt to establish a MPA under a different name.
  - v. S-54 Apply for United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) world heritage site status for entire Florida

Reef Tract to increase awareness and protection of Florida's coral reefs. The stated intended outcome of this action is to add The Florida Reef Tract to the UNESCO World Heritage list in order to preserve the rich Caribbean biota, maintain the cultural and historical importance of the reef, including its many shipwrecks, increase global and local awareness of the spatial extent, interdependence, and ecological and cultural importance of the Florida Reef Tract. MIA PBC opposes this because as with any additional designation there comes requirements that managing agencies must comply. This creates management issues with the added layer of bureaucratic compliance.

- vi. S-65: Nominate SEFCRI Region as a National Marine Sanctuary RMA S65 proposes the application of the creation of a National Marine Sanctuary for the entire Southeast Florida reef track. This is strongly opposed by MIA PBC and should absolutely be opposed by the state of Florida because it is an unnecessary delegation of state authority over its sovereign waters to a Federal agency. The sanctuary process has become a major bureaucratic undertaking and is viewed as being unfriendly to boaters and anglers. There is no accountability in the process. Again MIA PBC strongly opposes RMA S65
- vii. S-86 seeks to ban live mounts of all shark species to reduce shark mortality due to charter fishing practices that ensure mount sales and dockside marketing and promote proper handling and release techniques for shark species to reduce mortality in catch & release scenarios. MIA PBC supports education that promotes proper catch and release techniques, however there are many species of sharks that can be sustainably harvested. For this reason the MIA PBC does not support the banning of live harvest. The FWC monitors fishery stocks including those of sharks and regulates them accordingly.
- viii. S-87 seeks to modify or enhance existing regulations to increase protection for parrotfish and other important herbivores for coral ecosystem protection. MIA PBC supports sustainable reef herbivores for coral ecosystem protection, however this is the responsibility of the FWC and if additional protections are warranted the FWC public process should be followed.
- ix. S-97 seeks to maintain lobster mini season but reduce the bag limit to six lobsters per person per day to be consistent state wide, and require the review of educational materials and completion of an educational quiz in order to receive an annual license. MIA PBC does not support this regulation. FWC does an excellent job managing the Florida Lobster fishery and had different bag limits between Monroe County and the rest of the state to reduce the overcrowding issues in the Florida Keys and promote harvest throughout the rest of the state. By making the bag limits consistent during mini season throughout the state the issues to reduce the traffic and congestion associated with mini season would return to the Florida Keys.
- x. S-2: Create a SEFCRI-Wide Mooring Buoy Program. Mooring balls have provided an alternative to anchoring, however they must be accessible for divers, snorklers, and fisherman.

4. Land Based Sources of Pollution

- This topic contains 14 recommendations most of which could be supported by the MIA PBC.
  - i. N-1 Seeks to Educate the public on the effects of land-based sources of pollution to reduce the amount of pollutants entering storm drains and waterways. MIA PBC supports this proposal providing it is not being duplicated by other agencies and/or it does not impact the funding of existing funding for the FWC.
  - ii. N-116 would need to be carefully looked at due to the potential to limit working waterfronts.

5. Maritime Industry & Coastal Construction

- This topic contains 15 recommendations. N-113 would eliminate projects like the Lake Worth inlet port expansion project in order to reduce siltation on coral reefs and keep coastal communities and habitat in balance. The stated reason this recommended management action is being put forth is because the working group feels this project has a high potential to negative impacts on the environment and the community. Dredging is crucial to maintaining safety and access in our waterways. Furthermore the Florida Department of Environmental Protection has the responsibility to monitor water quality during dredging operations. The MIA PBC strongly opposes N-113 because there is a responsible agency that enforces water quality compliance to ensure this vital activity takes place.

6. Place-Based Draft Management Strategy

- RMA N-146 creates 28 marine protected areas (MPA's) that in some cases will ban fishing over 20% to 30% of the reef track from the northern boundary of Martin County to the southern boundary of Dade County. MPA's and especially marine reserves should only be used as a tool of last resort and only if other measures have proven ineffective. Management actions that employ bag limits along with time and area closures have been shown to be successful tools in managing our fisheries without the need to employ marine reserves or no take areas. These less draconian measures allow South Florida's boaters and anglers to continue to enjoy the resources and support the local businesses that are dependent of boating and fishing. Spawning aggregation closures however can be supported if implemented based on science and the recommendations of our state agency's biologist and fisheries managers. If warranted these spawning aggregation closures should be limited in time- the spawning period, place-known aggregation spots, and zone within the water column. i.e. the protection of bottom/demeral fish, should not prohibit trolling for pelagic fish in the upper water column. MIA PBC Strongly opposes N 146.

MIA PBC also notes that almost all of these recommendations of Our Florida Reefs were presented to, discussed by and evaluated by the Coastal Ocean Task Force ("COTF"), a group established by Dade, Broward, Palm Beach and Martin Counties and composed of four (4) elected officials from each of the four counties and members from specific user groups. The COTF spent almost two (2) years receiving input, considering proposals and voting on a number of recommendations. The members/representative stakeholder groups of COTF and Our Florida Reefs show a significant overlap in members.

Name of Addressee

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Date

In summary these recommendations have come via a process that goes against and contrary to processes developed and currently in use by agencies that promulgate rules and regulations to protect these resources. The question is why? If we have public processes in place that employ our scientists, law enforcement officials, and habitat managers to protect these resources, why invent a separate group to make recommendations that create a set of unrealistic expectations that if implemented will prove catastrophic to South Florida's economy. Especially since the COTF, which was also composed of a broad group of stakeholders including elected officials, has just concluded its work.

The Our Florida Reefs working groups could have been managed in a manner that would have been more efficient and effective by focusing members to examine areas of protection that are not currently being addressed through the processes established by our regulatory agencies. While we applaud the efforts of the groups we remain steadfast in our opposition to most of their recommendations.

Sincerely,



Chuck Collins, Executive Director  
Marine Industries Association of Palm Beach County, Inc.

