



WEST PALM BEACH FISHING CLUB

~ Established 1934 ~



Our Florida Reefs Group,

On behalf of the over 1,300 members of the eighty-year-old West Palm Beach Fishing Club (WPBFC) I would like to submit the following comments regarding the recommendations being made by the Our Florida Reefs working group. First of all thank you for your time and sincere interest in addressing many of the issues having a negative impact on our coral reefs. If nothing else, this process has opened the eyes of many stakeholders who perhaps now have a better understanding of the many challenges our reefs and marine resources currently face. Many of the recommendations outlined on the Our Florida Reefs website are worthy initiatives and in many cases are already being addressed by various agencies and NGO's. For example, the use of reef saving mooring buoys, the creation and distribution of reef conservation outreach materials, estuarine & reef enhancement efforts, regulating fertilizers & pesticides, supporting Everglades restoration, opposition to the deepening and widening of the Port of Palm Beach, etc. are all things that others are, and have been, working on for many years. There are many other items included in the Our Florida Reefs list of recommendations that in our view are duplicative of other efforts being planned or that are currently underway. The WPBFC cautions DEP not to 'reinvent the wheel'.

The WPBFC has serious concerns with several of the overall management objectives being proposed by Our Florida Reefs. The WPBFC opposes designating 20% - 30% of the reef a Marine Protected Area (MPA) that prohibits extractive use. Locking out anglers from significant portions of the reef would cause tremendous economic hardships in coastal communities and throughout the marine industry. In our view such an extreme action would disenfranchise the very stakeholders who are among those who care the most about the health of the reef. It is worth noting that the WPBFC has supported some MPA's and Spawning Aggregation Special Management Zones in the past, but only on a carefully reviewed site by site basis. We believe MPA's should be a 'tool in the box' but only after an exhaustive scientific review, public input and when all other management strategies will not accomplish the desired result. Impacts to the reef associated with fishing can, in most cases, be effectively managed through regulations such as seasonal closures, size limits, bag limits and other commonly used regulations. Unfortunately, the 20% - 30% proposal being forwarded by Our Florida Reefs is an egregious over-reach that overshadows the entire Our Florida Reefs process (even the good recommendations) in skepticism. While 20% - 30% may sound like a reasonable number to those who are not familiar with the distribution of resources along the reef, the fact is that most of the areas being proposed for closure by Our Florida Reefs represents a significant

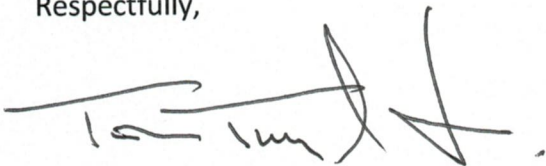
portion of the best fishing spots along the reef tract. If there are biologically unique portions of the reef or critical spawning aggregations that are deserving of a higher level of protection, then the WPBFC will be open to discussion on those specific sites. But to close huge portions of the reef tract to fishing is unacceptable.

The WPBFC opposes designating the entire SEFCRI region as a National Marine Sanctuary. We believe the State of Florida (FWC) is better suited to oversee management of our marine resources and has a proven track record of implementing sound marine fish management regulations.

Again, the WPBFC appreciates the Our Florida Reefs well-meaning recommendations. We concur that the reef is undergoing a 'Death by a thousand cuts', but some of those cuts are far deeper and more harmful than others. We encourage Florida's Department of Environmental Protection to double-down on the major issues that will unite all stakeholders, rather than expending energy and resources to accomplish goals that will have little impact on the health of the reef. Finding solutions to reduce the volume and frequency of the massive nutrient-laden freshwater discharges currently taking place, improving storm water retention in coastal urban areas, reducing the frequency of coastal dredging and beach nourishment operations and reducing the number of septic tanks in the coastal zone are among the big issues we believe DEP should be helping lead the charge on, not micro-managing anglers and divers with regulations that in many cases are already being addressed by other agencies like the FWC and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Twyford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tom Twyford, President
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