

CARIBBEAN FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL  
270 MUÑOZ RIVERA AVENUE, SUITE 401  
SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO 00918-1903

SCOPING MEETINGS

MAYAGÜEZ, P. R.  
NOVEMBER 25, 2013

The meeting was opened at 7:00 p.m. by the Council's Chairman, Mr. Carlos Farchette. Mr. Miguel A. Rolón, Executive Director gave introductory remarks. Dr. Graciela García-Moliner presented the different alternatives. Staff members Mrs. Diana Martino and Helena Antoun attended the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 9:55 p.m. There were 50 people in attendance including commercial and recreational fishers, NGOs, staff from the DNER, students and scientists.

The following comments were received from 13 deponents:

1. Richard Jaeck - Recreational Fisher, Mayagüez
  - a. Keep Bajo de Sico under current regulations.
  - b. Open the water column so that pelagics, such as wahoo, can be fished. Allow recreationalists to harvest for food.
  - c. Should manage instead of prohibiting activities. Regulate recreational fishing by X number of fish harvested per day to a maximum of Y or number of hooks allowed.
  - d. Fishes with vertical longlines and vertical jigging for deep water snappers, among other fishing gear and species.
  - e. Enforcement agents need to be able to identify fish correctly, especially HMS (e.g., blue vs. white marlin).
  - f. Education for enforcement agents, fishers and the public is needed.
  - g. Promote that restaurants and the public buy local fish from commercial fishers.
  - h. Mark or tag fish so that recreationally caught fish be easily identified. Recreational fishers should not make money from selling fish.
  - i. There should be local recreational fishing licenses and the fees charged for these should be used to improve local fisheries.
2. Alexis López – Commercial Fisher, Aguadilla
  - a. Allow commercial spearfishing of reef fish and pelagics, both free diving and while SCUBA diving, in Tourmaline and Abrir La Sierra during the whole year. Open the areas during the seasonal closure to spearfishing.
  - b. There is no anchoring while fishing free diving of SCUBA.
  - c. Our fisheries are multi species/ multi gear fisheries and fishers change targets depending on availability and weather, among other things. The commercial fishing statistics should reflect this if not, they are not being used correctly.
  - d. There are seasons when the weather protects fish species because no one is able to fish.

- e. The government needs to deal with the sale of fish by recreational fishers, it should be prohibited.
3. Javier Hernández Quiñones – Puerto Rico Free Divers and Commercial Fisher
    - a. Opposes prohibition of spearfishing
    - b. Spearfishing is a very selective fishing gear that should be allowed. There is no incidental catch and therefore it doesn't impact other species.
    - c. There is no impact to the habitat because there is no anchoring while SCUBA and free diving.
    - d. Open the water column. Allow spearfishing in the 3 areas. Allow fishing for pelagics (dolphinfish, wahoo, mackerels and tunas).
    - e. Continue the seasonal closure for reef fish.
  4. Norberto Figueroa –Recreational Spear Fisher, Puerto Rico Freedivers
    - a. Allow spearfishing because it has no impact in the area. It is a very selective fishing practice and fish are selected by size and regulation. There is no valid reason to prohibit spearfishing.
    - b. Allow at least Hawaiian slings in protected areas to fish for lionfish. Take commercial fishers to fish around Mona and other marine reserves to fish for lionfish and keep the populations down.
  5. Nelson Crespo – Commercial Fisher, President, Asociación de Pescadores de Pargos de Profundidad de Rincón and Representing Unión de Pescadores Comerciales (Written Statement).
    - a. Establish the same management regime currently at Bajo de Sico in Abrir La Sierra and Tourmaline. This will benefit the protection of the fish spawning aggregations and at the same time benefit recreational, charter and commercial fishers.
    - b. It would be necessary to change the seasonal closure of snapper unit 1 (SU1) from October-December to April-June to mitigate the actual problems caused by the false and wrong data submitted by both commercial and recreational fishers that resulted in the closure of the fishery. However, we understand that this is not the time to amend the management plans.
    - c. We have been requesting during the past 3 years that the local government establish compatible regulations. We are still waiting and the DNER has already had 2 Secretaries.
    - d. There is much lack of trust on NMFS, CFMC, DNER and even fishers don't trust me because of the rumors that this is all a plan for closing all fisheries.
    - e. There is a need to stop issuing commercial fishing licenses.
    - f. Deep water snapper fishers are currently unemployed because of the closure of the snapper unit 2 fishery and the seasonal closure of the snapper unit 1. This will most likely be the same in 2014 since the Fisheries Research Laboratory has no staff to provide the catch data on time. It is not fair that fishers have to be punished when data are provided as requested but the problems with government continue.

6. Edwin Font (Pauco)- Commercial Fisher, Rincón
  - a. Why the changes?
  - b. Spearfishers are selective in their harvest, this activity is not detrimental.
  - c. There are too many regulations in place, no need for changes. There is a serious lack of enforcement. The DNER Rangers should also intervene with recreational fishers.
  - d. There are issues with the catch data and this causes problems between the commercial fishers and the DNER and the staff from the Fisheries Research Laboratory and the federal government. Port agents are needed to monitor the landings data; they know the fishers and those that really fish. Catch reports that show landings in the 1000's pounds per trip are not real.
  - e. There are also very big changes in the economy that have caused commercial fishers to file for bankruptcy and others to sell the vessels and gear and move to the mainland.
  - f. Recreational harvest has to be regulated and the maximum number of dolphinfish and wahoo allowed should be 15 not 30 per boat.
  - g. Supports Nelson Crespo's statement regarding the compatibility among the areas.
7. Robert Long Lugo, Freediver spearfishing, Cabo Rojo
  - a. Allow spearfishing at Abrir La Sierra and Tourmaline
  - b. There is a need to identify and protect subsistence fishers; we consume what we fish.
  - c. Allow spearfishing lionfish in the marine reserves.
8. Sein López Román – Commercial Spearfisher
  - a. No need to change the seasonal closures.
  - b. Allow spearfishing at Abrir La Sierra and Tourmaline as it is allowed in Bajo de Sico for pelagics and non-managed species (wahoo, jacks, mackerels, rainbow runner).
  - c. Allow vertical jigging.
9. Héctor L. Benitez – Commercial Fisher, Representing Independent Fishers of Aguada
  - a. This group of fishers have been fishing for deep water snappers over 10 years as well as fishing for pelagics.
  - b. Support Nelson Crespo's statement and his interest in maintaining sustainable fisheries as well as better conditions for commercial fishers.
  - c. This is not the time to make changes to these areas but to deal with the catch reports issues and the future overages in annual catch limits that are expected for 2014. We are at present unemployed because of the closure of the deep water snappers this year.
  - d. We need to deal with these issues and with providing help to the commercial fishers.

10. Victor Padilla – Commercial Trap Fisher West Coast, Mayagüez

- a. Agrees with Nelson Crespo’s deposition.
- b. The minimum expense incurred by commercial fishers to be able to go out fishing is between \$75 and \$100, so need to make as much to cover the expenses. The investment in new gear or an engine are very high (40 HP is about \$5,000 -6,000).
- c. There are no new fishers coming in to the fishery, the trap fishers are fewer and fewer.
- d. There are more and more regulations, specifically seasonal closures. There should be quotas for “selected” commercial fishers during the seasonal closures; this would allow fishers to cover minimum expenses.
- e. There should be a prohibition on the imports of the species that are under the seasonal closure; for example during the seasonal closure of queen conch in Puerto Rico there should be no imports of queen conch. The imported conch is sold as fresh conch and this impact the local fishers because it is sold at a lower price and it is not the same quality.
- f. Local restaurants should support the local commercial fishers.
- g. Fishers should be allowed transit through the closed areas.
- h. The minimum size of lobster should be 3.0” CL as it is in Florida. There is no problem with the lobster – his great grandfather used lobster as bait.

11. Alexis Loyola – Commercial Fisher Cabo Rojo, San German

- a. Keep the seasonally closed areas as they are but allow spearfishing during the seasonal closures at Abrir La Sierra and Tourmaline.

12. David Casson Ortiz – Recreational Independent Fisher, Aguadilla

- a. Allow recreational fisher to sell lionfish only.
- b. Allow spearfishing during the months of the seasonal closures

13. Mariano Carrero Ramírez – Commercial Fisher, Mayagüez

- a. Tag or mark recreationally caught fish so that they can be identified as recreationally caught – for example, clip a fin. Therefore, those buying the fish would know not to buy it from the recreational fishers.
- b. Allow anchoring in the seasonally closed areas because when fishing for yellowtail snapper and mackerels, commercial fishers need to anchor while fishing for these species.

There is still confusion about the regulations that are in place in the seasonally closed areas off the west coast of Puerto Rico including: (1) many believe that spearfishing is allowed at Bajo de Sico for reef fish, (2) that traps and pots are allowed at the three seasonally closed areas.

Daniel Matos Caraballo commented on the following issues: (1) there is a DNER permit to fish for lionfish at the marine reserves and they certify fishers who want to remove lionfish from these areas; fishers are accompanied by an enforcement agent while they fish for lionfish; (2) the FRL staff is aware of problems such as the large number of licenses [Daniel explained that there are over 1,400 “active” commercial fishing licenses but there are only about 800-1,000 active

commercial fishers, fishing trips have decreased from 10-12 per week to 3-4 per week and the costs have increased (fuel, etc.) and all these issues impact commercial fishers]; (3) the DNER finally hired staff for the FRL to enter data and they will begin working on the 2012 catch reports that are essential to determine the annual catch limits; and (4) the current regulations allow commercial fishers to use spear guns while SCUBA diving and allow recreational fishers to use spear guns while free diving and the DNER has no intention of changing these regulations.

Miguel Rolón explained about (1) the need for better communication, the CFMC was not aware about the permits for harvesting lionfish from the reserves; (2) the committee to be formed to deal with the catch reporting problems (including Daniel Matos, Edwin Font, Victor Padilla).

Written Comments were submitted on time by:

14. Andrés Maldonado –Commercial Fisher, Cabo Rojo
  - a. Bajo de Sico should be a no-take marine reserve.
  - b. Should allow fishing in Abrir La Sierra and Tourmaline.
  - c. Should allow fishing for queen conch in the EEZ to relieve fishing pressure on the state stocks.
  
15. Roberto Rodríguez Morales – Commercial Fisher, Cabo Rojo
  - a. Recreational fishers harvesting 30 dolphing fish per trip have an impact on commercial fishers. These fish are sold below the commercial price per pound.
  - b. Recreational or commercial spearfishing is a selective fishing method.
  - c. There are too many seasonal closures for fishers that abide by the regulations yet there is no enforcement.