

REMARKS OF ANTHONY IAROCCI, FISHERMAN AND MEMBER,
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

All I can tell you is times have changed. If it had been ten years ago, coming up speaking after Dr. Bohnsack here, I'd be attacking him. I'd be telling him no way, we can't lose any more of our traditional fishing grounds. Times have changed. I recently just got back from the Pribilof Islands and the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua. Fishermen there are looking at what's happening and being a part of the solutions coming together.

Mike, you alluded to earlier in your comments about it is a people process, and I cannot stress the importance of it, of bringing people together, because together we can achieve some of these solutions. I hope to give you a fisherman's perspective on conserving coral reefs, some issues, solutions, and recommendations to reduce fishery impacts on coral reefs and create sustainable reef fisheries.

I'm going to address water quality first because good water quality is absolutely essential. Without it we don't have healthy reefs and we don't have healthy fisheries. Protecting and improving water quality is something that fishermen, conservationists, business interests, and others can come together and agree on, as we've done in the Florida Keys with the water quality joint action group. This group is made up of a diverse group of people. When we put it together, we had commercial fishermen, recreational fishermen, and environmentalists. We had the net being thrown out. But we all came together and agreed on water quality. It was something we came together on.

In 2000, Congress passed the Florida Keys Water Quality Improvement Act authorizing federal funds to help fix wastewater problems that are hammering the Keys reef ecosystem. This coral reef, which supports valuable commercial and recreational fisheries and helps attract nearly four million visitors every year, is an American treasure. I think we all know that by now. It is North America's only coral barrier reef and it is the world's third largest. In order to protect the reef and its fisheries, we need Congress to appropriate the funds that were authorized. Communities in the Keys are already moving forward to make waste water improvements which cost five times the national average due to higher reef protection standards. Federal support is crucial in ensuring that these efforts be successful.

Next I'd like to talk about, and I can't believe I'm saying this after all this time; I'd like to talk about marine protected areas, marine reserves, marine parks, conservation zones, ecological reserves, whatever the term scientists, fisheries managers, and environmental groups have been discussing the pros and cons on for years. I'd like to touch on the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council's approach to marine protected areas.

First, we define marine protected areas in four types: type 1, which is a permanent closure, no-take; type 2, permanent closure with some take; type 3, limited duration closure, no take allowed, which could include spawning area closures; and type 4, limited

duration closure, some take allowed. I believe that protecting certain areas of the oceans makes common sense. The trick is not to be arbitrary. There are places that over time would prove more valuable as spawning grounds than fishing grounds. But remember, all the fishermen need a place to fish. I recommend we don't use protected areas to play favorites among gear types or user groups. If you allow one user group in to catch and exclude another, you haven't protected the resource; you've allocated it. That's why the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council has looked at type 2 MPA's, to protect the snapper grouper complex and bottom habitat, prohibiting all bottom fishing while letting both sport and commercial fishermen pursue pelagic surface feeders.

A fully protected marine protected area that I believe was done right and should prove the full benefit of a closed area is the Tortugas Ecological Reserve. The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary took in both great science and socioeconomic data to protect some of the best coral reefs and spawning sites. Most important, a lot of time was put into this, and all user groups were treated equally and very involved in the process. The sanctuary also just passed a no-discharge rule. This zone is a step toward cleaner water and a healthier coral reef. Remember, coral reef ecosystems depend on clear, nutrient-poor water to thrive.

Banning fish traps in 1991, and bottom cable long lines in the South Atlantic have addressed reducing fishing impacts on coral reefs and creating sustainable reef fisheries in '92. Also spawning closures and the elimination of trawl gear were put through and size limits, so most reef fish species have a place to spawn and to get a chance to spawn before being harvested.

Lastly, I want to bring a few examples of where stakeholders get involved with final solutions. Mike, I was going to bring your slides the you showed at the last council meeting, which I made copies of, and pass those around. The first is how the fishing industry teams up with divers and does a yearly reef clean up, cleaning up everything from monofilament fishing line to trap material. Also, in the closed season of the lobster fishing lobstermen do a trap cleanup and remove lots of lost traps throughout the Florida Keys. Another example of working together was the Sentinel fisheries project in the western Sandbox Ecological Reserve. This gave local commercial fishermen a direct involvement in this project. This invaluable cooperative effort between industry and government was unfortunately terminated in 2001 due to a lack of funding, although it has been proven time and again that when research projects directly involve the fishing industry both management and industry benefit.

If I can get one message across today it would be that it is very important for NOAA, NMFS, and NOS to develop a greater number of collaborative research monitoring programs with both the commercial and recreational fishing industries to help protect critical habitats like coral reefs and sustainable fisheries. By working together, we can get a lot more done and hopefully learn to trust one another.

The sanctuary process and the council process both work. They need all of us to work to its full potential in the future. That is the key message. I look around the room

now and I've worked with quite a few of you people on issues. There are more commercial fishermen out there; especially associations that want to come to the table. We've got to find the common ground right now. I think this is a good format to go forward with, and I hope there's going to be more outreach in these kinds of meetings we've got going that bring in our industry.

I don't want to be the token commercial fishermen any more. There are other people out there that want to come in. I've been dealing with people from New England to Alaska and to the Gulf of Mexico and to the Caribbean and Central and South America. There's a great group of people out there. This MPA advisory panel we're talking about, you know, how long is that going to take to bring people to the table where we can come forward with some things? Time goes by, we get people excited, we get them talking about meetings. We go back, we leave a meeting; how much follow-up comes out of it? Please, let's take this and go with it.