

Honoring the Past, Exploring the Future: Human Dimensions of the Caribbean Spiny Lobster Fishery

Lauren Zitzman, May Lehmensiek, Carly Hannah, and Casey Butler

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, Marathon, FL, USA

The Florida spiny lobster (*Panulirus argus*) fishery has been emblematic of the Florida Keys' culture and economy for over 100 years. Today, it faces a shifting landscape of economic, environmental, and social pressures including rising fuel and gear costs, inflation, trade tariffs, a decline in fish houses, and the ongoing loss of working waterfronts. We present the shifting role and vision of this fishery based on historic information and 40 interviews with commercial fishers, fish house operators, scientists, and managers. We highlight the significant structural changes in the fishery over the last few decades and how these changes shape the concerns and hopes of fishers today. The findings highlight the importance of incorporating human dimensions and community values into future research and decision-making. As pressures mount, supporting those who depend on the fishery and drawing from their firsthand experience will be critical to shaping a more adaptable, inclusive, and enduring future.