

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: Dec. 30, 2013
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SUBJECT: Save The Barracuda!

Lower Keys Anglers come to the aid of an important predator fish in decline

The Great Barracuda, known as a voracious predator of our shallow waters, is now in jeopardy, as it becomes a popular commercial catch. Listed as an unregulated species by the Florida Fish & Wildlife Commission, the Great Barracuda brings about \$1 a pound at market. Data provided by FWC shows the Florida Keys had a 65% increase in commercial barracuda landings in 2012 over the previous year.

The Lower Keys Guides Association (LKGA), a group of professional fishing guides and anglers dedicated to sustainable fisheries, is taking a stand to protect this species that plays an important role in the Keys marine ecology.

Because any commercially viable species that is not regulated at the State or Federal level is highly susceptible to overfishing, LKGA is launching a Save the Barracuda campaign to bring more awareness to their decline and the potential threat to this unprotected species.

As back country guides, sports fishermen and the diving community witness a decrease in sightings of Barracuda in the waters of the Florida Keys, many are concerned that they are destined for the same fate as seen in the Caribbean, where Barracuda have been drastically overfished. To prevent overfishing, LKGA is asking the FWC to call for a stock assessment and the development of wise regulations.

Barracuda researcher Evan D'Alessandro, Ph.D., at the University of Miami Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science, says the Barracuda provides an important link in the marine ecosystem, as they inhabit both nearshore and open water environments during different parts of their life cycle. Dr. D'Alessandro says one negative effect of the Great Barracuda's decline would be a "reduction of competition and direct predation on invasive lionfish, which are a great concern to reefs throughout the Caribbean and Florida."

In recent years, harvesting of Barracuda for commercial profit has become more common, despite the species reputation for carrying the ciguatera bacteria. Ciguatera poisoning is caused by the bioaccumulation of ciguatoxins in the flesh of tropical marine fishes. People poisoned by ciguatera report gastrointestinal maladies that may last several days, a general weakness in their arms and legs, and a reversal in the ability to differentiate hot versus cold. The illness is serious and symptoms may persist for weeks.

For sports fishermen, the Barracuda puts up a good fight and is therefore esteemed by some anglers as an excellent gamefish. Barracuda sightings also provide many a thrill to snorkelers and divers in the waters of the Keys.

"We cannot stand by and watch a fish this valuable to our ecology and our economy be fished out due to lack of regulations," says John O'Hearn, president of the Lower Keys Guides Association.

According to Melissa Recks, FWC Section leader for Analysis and Rule Making, Barracuda are on the FWC's work plan for possible consideration for next year, starting July 2014. This consideration is due to the many comments received from anglers in the Keys, as well as the FWC data that shows an increase in Barracuda commercial catch. "We don't have much data at this time," said Recks, "But we are keenly aware of the situation in the Keys."

To register your support for a reclassification of the Barracuda, Contact the FWC at <http://myfwc.com/contact/fwc-staff/senior-staff/contact-commissioners>.

Facts about Barracudas:

- Although they can be large and look menacing, Barracudas are rarely known to attack humans.
- With a lifespan of at least 14 years, Great Barracuda can grow to be more than five-feet in length and can travel at 36 mph.
- It is believed that they go to deeper waters and away from the reefs in order to reproduce. This might reduce the likelihood of smaller fish that live around the reef eating their larvae.
- Young fish live in inshore seagrass beds, but adults range from inshore channels to open ocean.

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