

To whom it may concern,

I would like to express my support for the E.C.R.A. Lionfish Population Control Proposal. I have been very active in promoting lionfish hunting and participating in lionfish hunting since the explosion of the invasive fish began. I have witnessed first hand the success that divers are having in combating the problem, and I personally feel that much of the current lionfish activism has become more focused on self-promotion and handouts of grant money instead of the actual removal of lionfish.

In the beginning of the lionfish invasion raising awareness was a critical and important step to teach divers about the problem and how they could be part of the solution. However, things have changed now. People are aware of the problem; we now know that divers can be effective at reducing lionfish populations. Rather than continue throwing our public money at groups who are simply throwing parties to raise awareness, it's time to start focusing on plans that actually remove lionfish.

Dollar for dollar the lionfish derbies are a waste of taxpayer money. For example, in REEF's 2015 Lionfish Derby series there were 4 tournaments that turned in a total of 1,141 lionfish (with numbers dropping every year since 2013). The FWC provided \$1500 of grant money to each of those 4 tournaments for a price of \$5.25 of taxpayer money to pay for each lionfish removed. So we paid \$5.25 to remove each lionfish which is itself worth \$5.00 a pound. Why? And the divers who participated each paid \$120 per team additional for the opportunity to use their own boat and gear to dive and hunt lionfish that they had to give away instead of eating or selling. Taxpayer money is being used to help REEF increase their own awareness and fundraising while doing very little to actually remove lionfish.

I support the ECRA proposal because it will cost less money and will remove more lionfish from the water than the failing, costly derby model which does little to actually control the lionfish problem. Dedicated divers with spears out hunting on a regular basis will make a much larger impact than the occasional small tournament. It's time to move beyond raising awareness, and to begin removing lionfish in larger numbers with an appropriate incentive program.

Thank you for your consideration,

Andy Lowe
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www.Foldspear.com

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