



# *South Atlantic Fishery Management Council*

## *News Release*

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### **Measures to Enhance Protection of Deepwater Corals Receive Final Approval** *Council works cooperatively with fishermen to establish allowable fishing areas while Protecting over 23,000 square miles of deepwater coral habitat*

The South Atlantic region is home to what may be the largest continuous distribution of deepwater corals in the world. New management measures proposed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council to help protect these sensitive habitats recently received approval from NOAA Fisheries Service and the Secretary of Commerce and become effective July 22, 2010. Five areas, located off the southeastern coast of the U.S. and encompassing more than 23,000 square miles (about the size of the State of West Virginia) will be designated Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (Coral HAPCs). The designation affords added protection to the areas that house an invaluable array of fish and invertebrate species, some of which may have biomedical applications in the treatment of human diseases.



A blackbelly rose fish and squat lobster rest on *Lophelia* coral. New measures will help protect deepwater coral habitats off the South Atlantic coast in cold water areas ranging in depths from 400 meters (1200 ft.) to 700 meters (2300 ft.).

Established through the Council's Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 1, management regulations in the Coral HAPCs enhance protection of the sensitive habitats from impacts associated with bottom fishing practices. The use of bottom damaging gear such as longlines, trawls, dredges and pots plus the use of grapples, chains and anchors are prohibited within the designated areas. Working closely with fishermen that specialize in deepwater fisheries, the Council crafted the amendment to restrict fisheries that occur within the same depth zone to areas where they have traditionally operated.

"The approval of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 1 and the protection of the most significant coral habitat in the South Atlantic is perhaps the most rewarding accomplishment of my Council career," stated

Council Chairman Duane Harris. "This accomplishment is only possible because of extremely hard work of our Habitat and Coral Advisory Panels and the excellent cooperative spirit of the fishing community, especially the deepwater shrimp and golden crab fishers."

For many years fishermen targeting golden crab and royal red shrimp have set their traps and hauled their nets near areas now known to provide suitable habitat for deepwater corals. These small traditional fisheries, however, operate in distinct areas where fishermen can be sure their gear will not become damaged. Therefore, Allowable Golden Crab Fishing Areas and Shrimp Fishery Access Areas within two of the deepwater Coral HAPCs will ensure the continued existence of these fisheries and the communities they support.

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***Deepwater Corals (Continued)***

“The Council initiated efforts to alert us of all the ramifications of the designations and worked to minimize the impact on the golden crab fishery,” said Bill Whipple, chairman of the Golden Crab Advisory Panel. “The outcome proved to be an invaluable learning experience for everyone involved.” The protective measures will also protect deepwater coral ecosystems against any possible future shifts of fishing efforts to these areas.

While the Council’s mandate is limited to conservation and management of fisheries, there is now heightened concern regarding future offshore energy development. The designation of these extensive coral areas as Coral HAPCs also elevates their importance in the permitting process.

“The historic, final approval of the Southeast deepwater Coral HAPCs is great news for the scientists, managers and fishermen who worked together so long and hard to make this a reality, and for all Americans who love the ocean,” said Dr. Douglas Rader, past chairman of the Council’s Habitat and Environmental Protection Advisory Panel and Chief Ocean Scientist for Environmental Defense Fund. “The timing – while we are all reeling from the still-ongoing oil disaster in the Gulf – is especially important, as a breath of fresh air, and as a down-payment in protecting the most special places in the sea.”

For additional information on deepwater corals, including photos and area maps of the Coral HAPCs, visit [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net). A DVD copy of the Council’s award-winning film *Revealing the Deep* is available from the Council office. The film uses stunning underwater photography to highlight deepwater coral ecology, research, and the Council’s management efforts to conserve the unique ecosystems.

**The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, one of eight regional councils, conserves and manages fish stocks from three to 200 miles offshore of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and east Florida.**