

## **History of Management for the FMP for Coral, Coral Reefs and Live/Hard bottom Habitat**

### **History of Management**

Management of coral resources was originally promulgated under the joint Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Coral Fishery Management Plan (GMFMC and SAFMC 1982). The FMP's intent was to optimize the benefits generated from the coral resource while conserving the coral and coral reefs. Specific management objectives addressed through the FMP were to (1) develop scientific information necessary to determine feasibility and advisability of harvest of coral; (2) minimize, as appropriate, adverse human impacts on coral and coral reefs; (3) provide, where appropriate, special management for Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (C-HAPCs); (4) increase public awareness of the importance and sensitivity of coral and coral reefs and (5) provide a coordinated management regime for the conservation of coral and coral reefs. The FMP implemented the following management measures for coral and coral reefs; (1) disallowed any level of foreign fishing and established the domestic annual harvest to equal the Optimum Yield (OY); (2) prohibited the taking of stony corals and sea fans or the destruction of these corals and coral reefs anywhere in the EEZ of the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils' area of jurisdiction; (3) established that stony corals and sea fans taken incidentally in other fisheries must be returned to the water in the general area of capture as soon as possible (with the exception for the groundfish, scallop or other similar fisheries where the entire unsorted catch is landed, in which case stony corals and sea fans may be landed but not sold); (4) established that the Councils may notify the Secretary of the threat of widespread or localized depletion from overharvest of one or more species of octocorals and recommend specific actions; (5) established a permit system for the use of chemicals for the taking of fish or other organisms that inhabit coral reefs; (6) established a permit system for taking prohibited corals for scientific and educational purposes and (7) identified Habitat Areas of Particular Concern and established time and area restrictions in Habitat Areas of Particular Concern.

**Amendment 1** to the FMP (September 1990) implemented the following regulations: (1) included octocorals in the management unit as a controlled species; (2) implemented a combined octocoral quota for the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic EEZ of 50,000 individual colonies; (3) stated the Optimum Yield (OY) for coral reefs, stony corals and sea fans to be zero; (4) included a definition of overfishing; (5) established a permit system to take octocorals; (6) provided reporting requirements for those taking corals under federal permit (7) included a section on Vessel Safety Considerations and (8) revised the section on Habitat.

**Amendment 2** to the FMP (GMFMC and SAFMC 1994) included the following regulations: (1) defined live rock and added it to the Coral FMP management unit (live rock is defined as living marine organisms or an assemblage thereof attached to a hard substrate including dead coral or rock); (2) redefined allowable octocorals to mean erect non-encrusting species of the subclass Octocorallia, except the prohibited sea fans, including only the substrate covered by and within one inch of the holdfast; (3) revised

management measures to address bycatch of octocorals; (4) provided for different management in the jurisdictional areas of the two Councils by promulgating a separate set of management measures and regulations for the South Atlantic; (5) prohibited all wild live rock harvest north of Dade County, Florida, and prohibited chipping throughout the jurisdiction of the South Atlantic Council; (6) capped harvest of wild live rock to 485,000 pounds annually until January 1, 1996 when all wild live rock harvest was prohibited; (7) allowed and facilitated aquaculture of live rock in the EEZ and required live rock harvest federal permits; (8) required a federal permit for harvest and possession of prohibited corals and prohibited live rock from the EEZ for scientific, educational, and restoration purposes.

**Amendment 3** (July 1995) implemented the following: (1) established a live rock aquaculture permit system for the South Atlantic EEZ; (2) prohibited octocoral harvest north of Cape Canaveral to prevent expansion of the fishery to areas where octocorals constitute a more significant portion of the live/hard bottom habitat and (3) prohibited anchoring of all fishing vessels in the *Oculina* Habitat Area of Particular Concern.

Amendments 4 and 5 (SAFMC 1998) were comprehensive amendments to address Essential Fish Habitat and requirements of the Sustainable Fisheries Act, respectively.

**Amendment 4** designated Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) and Essential Fish Habitat-Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (EFH-HAPC). **Amendment 5** extended the Optimum Yield (OY) definition to include harvest allowances under live rock aquaculture permits.