

## **Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary Final Management Plan Summary**

Many coastal residents attended one or more of the 15 public meetings on the Gray's Reef Draft Management plan. Some even sent in comments about the draft plan—we received and considered 2,000 or so comments. Now the Final Plan is out and we'd like to give you the basics of the changes.

There are two big regulatory changes in the plan:

1. Anchoring in the sanctuary will be prohibited when the regulations go into effect
2. Fishing will only be allowed with rod and reel, handline, and spearfishing gear without powerheads when the regulations go into effect.

**The regulations are expected to go into effect in early 2007 and will apply to all users of the sanctuary.**

Prohibiting anchoring at GRNMS (except, of course, during an emergency where life or property is at risk) will eliminate physical damage to the reef caused by anchoring. Keeping the bottom habitat intact is important because it is the habitat that attracts the bait fish and the bait fish attract the pelagic fish.

Switching to an allowable gear regulation will simplify things for both anglers and law enforcement officials. Now, we will simply list the gear that is allowed to be used for fishing in Gray's. That gear is "rod and reel, handline, and spearfishing gear without powerheads."

In addition, to keep things simple, we will not impose a limit on the number of hooks which can be attached to a single line that is attached to the "allowable gear." As long as the gear is allowable as defined by the Final Management Plan, there is no hook number limit.

Spearfishing with powerheads continues to be against our regulations. For the next two years, we will continue to allow spearfishing without powerheads. During those two years, we will gather additional information about this activity within the sanctuary. We hope that if you have the opportunity to participate in a survey about your activities at Gray's Reef that you do so.

There is no proposal in this Final Management Plan to close Gray's Reef.

The regulations are expected to go into effect in late October or November. With release of the final plan, various federal laws come into play which requires a 30-day period of no-activity followed by a 45-day review by Congress. The delayed effective date allows for action by Congress and for NOAA to prepare for implementation.

NOAA National Ocean Service is not required to respond to comments received as a result of the issuance of the Final EIS. Comments received will be reviewed and considered for their impact on the issuance of a Record of Decision (ROD) and will be made part of our administrative record.

The Final Plan does include a non-regulatory action to consider the concept of a Marine Research Area.

A working group of the sanctuary's Advisory Council found that significant research questions exist at Gray's Reef that can only be answered by establishing a control (research) area. That concept, the council decided, should be further explored through a public decision-making process. If established, the research area would be a smaller area within the existing boundaries.

The Advisory Council unanimously endorsed and enhanced the recommendations. NOAA GRNMS accepted the council recommendations and will formally consider the concept of a research area in the sanctuary through a public process.

In order for such an area to be established at Gray's Reef, an entirely separate public process will have to take place. The process will include scoping meetings, workshops, public presentations and a variety of others ways for the public to express opinion. Again, we hope you fully participate in the process.

We hope that this information helps to inform our users of the changes in the management plan and we hope you download a copy of the plan at [www.graysreef.noaa.gov](http://www.graysreef.noaa.gov)