

# MEMORANDUM



**To:** Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners

**From:** Jessica McCawley, Director, Division of Marine Fisheries Management

**Date:** December 6, 2017

**Subject:** Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Report

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**Purpose:**

Staff will report on actions from the GMFMC's August 7-10 meeting in San Antonio, TX and Oct. 2-5 meeting in Biloxi, MS.

**Summary:**

In October, the Council voted to hold public hearings on creating several management areas, known as Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPCs), to protect deepwater coral habitats. Four areas off Florida are being considered for additional regulations to protect deepwater corals. The first area would be an expansion of an existing protected area called Pulley Ridge, which is located west of the Dry Tortugas and is home to a large number of diverse coral species. The Council is proposing that bottom longlining be allowed in the Pulley Ridge expansion, but otherwise, use of bottom gears including traps and trawls, as well as anchoring by fishing vessels, would be prohibited. Three sites off southwest Florida with deepwater coral known as Long Mound, Many Mounds, and North Reed are also being considered for additional regulations. Bottom gears and anchoring by fishing vessels would be prohibited at these sites, but they are not known to be fished by vessels using bottom gear. Public hearings on these areas will be held in early 2018. Florida meetings will be held in Madeira Beach and Key West.

**Other items:**

- The Council decided to develop a policy and outreach program to support use of descending devices or venting tools on vessels possessing reef fish to reduce discard mortality.
- Both the Gulf and South Atlantic councils are considering updating federal spiny lobster regulations to be more consistent with FWC regulations.

Council discussions on red snapper and greater amberjack will be reviewed in the agenda items on these topics.

**Staff Recommendation:**

No direction is requested at this time.

**Staff Contact and/or Presenter:**

Martha Guyas, Division of Marine Fisheries Management