

**FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GRAY'S REEF NMS ADVISORY
COUNCIL ON THE RESEARCH AREA CONCEPT
August 19, 2008**

The GRNMS Sanctuary Advisory Council recommends that NOAA Gray's Reef NMS consider the following recommendations for inclusion in a Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the research area concept:

1. Boundary option #6 (Southern Option) as the preferred boundary alternative for the following reasons:
 - This option meets the criteria for the minimum number of habitat types as defined by the Research Area Working Group (RAWG);
 - The larger size offers greater or enhanced opportunity for research and monitoring activities;
 - Enforceability and voluntary compliance are improved because it is farther away from frequently fished areas;
 - Three sides of the boundary align with existing sanctuary boundaries for ease of enforcement, user identification and compliance;
 - There is minimal displacement of users and socioeconomic impacts of concern to the fishing community;
 - This option was the most frequently favored option in scoping comments.

2. Boundary options #1 (Optimal Scientific), #2 (Low Displacement), #3 (Compromise) and "no action" as other alternatives to be considered and analyzed, but not as preferred for the following reasons:
 - Boundary option #1 does not address the recommendation to minimize user displacement and has the highest level of displacement (67%) and related socioeconomic impacts of concern to the fishing community;
 - Boundary options #1 and #3 would create open areas on all sides of the boundaries resulting in enforcement and compliance complications;
 - Boundary option #2 would create open areas on 2 sides of the boundaries resulting in enforcement and compliance complications;
 - Boundary marking for options #1, #2 and #3 would require more resources, cost more, and maintenance would be more intensive;
 - Boundary option #2, while minimizing displacement, does include some area preferred by tournament fishermen;
 - The smaller core size of boundary option #2 does not offer adequate research and monitoring opportunity and may result in more user conflicts;
 - Boundary option #3 presents the second highest displacement of known users resulting in socioeconomic impacts of concern to the fishing community;

- The “no action” alternative is not preferred due to expected scientific benefits of including a research area within GRNMS.
- 3. Boundary options #4 and #5 as alternatives considered but eliminated for the following reason:
 - They do not meet the minimum criteria for habitat types as defined by the RAWG.
- 4. That all of the above analyses be considered with the following terms of closure:
 - Prohibit all fishing at all times based on issues of enforceability and increased difficulty with voluntary compliance, and because of the potential impacts to the integrity of the research area;
 - Recreational diving be allowed only by permit *and* with direct supervision of NOAA and/or GRNMS staff;
 - Boundaries be marked by line-of-sight buoys (approximately every 2 miles) around the research area; and that corner buoys also be deployed and maintained at the remaining unmarked corners of the full sanctuary;
 - Transit through the research area be allowed with no stopping; all fishing gear must be stowed and unavailable for use.
 - Establish a scientific advisory group to counsel GRNMS on the types of studies to be conducted in the research area (e.g., manipulative experiments, long-term monitoring), to assist GRNMS in evaluating the suitability of proposals and requests to conduct scientific studies within the research area, and to help GRNMS develop performance criteria for long term evaluation of the benefits of the research area. Advisory group membership should also include sport fishing, sport diving, law enforcement, education and conservation representation. The scientific advisory group will use the soon-to-be-released GRNMS 2008 Condition Report and the 2006 Final Management Plan as guides for setting research priorities within the research area.
- 5. That other terms of closure suggested during the scoping period be eliminated from further consideration; those include:
 - “Allow trolling” – the Advisory Council believes that the research area would be compromised if trolling is allowed due to:
 - Significantly increased enforcement and compliance difficulties;
 - The tight coupling between benthic and pelagic species in the shallow GRNMS marine environment;
 - The potential for increased amounts of marine debris if trolling is allowed;
 - The potential for interference that could render the research area ineffectual.

- “Allow seasonal or timed access for tournament fishing” – eliminate for the same reasons trolling (see above) should be eliminated.
 - “Allow open access recreational diving” – eliminate due to enforcement complications, the potential for damage to the resources, and interference with research projects and equipment that will be left on site.
 - “Allow transit with stopping” – eliminate due to the significantly increased enforcement complications and difficulty for voluntary compliance.
 - “No transit, no entry” – eliminate due to the potential fuel and time loss to boaters having to go around the area.
6. Finally, the Advisory Council believes that a research area should not be conditioned by any limit on the number of years of closure due to the possibility that long periods of time may be needed for significant changes in the ecosystem to occur. In addition, the research area can be evaluated or reviewed and may be subject to change each time the Gray’s Reef NMS Management Plan is reviewed.
7. The Advisory Council does recognize that the public, especially displaced users such as anglers should be kept informed as to the efficacy of the research area. Therefore, it is recommended that GRNMS conduct an annual review of usage and performance criteria of the research area, and that a written report of the findings of this review be made available to all interested parties.

Additional Notes:

- Sand movement in SE quadrant may eliminate some habitat areas that have been counted in option #6. Need to just go back and really looking at that issue. This is something that needs further investigation into the process occurring since the first maps can't be quantified.
- Potential scientific project in RA is to determine what volumes of sand are moving around into and out of sanctuary resulting in live bottom alterations particularly in the SE quadrant.
- Must have good definition for "stowed and unavailable for use"
- Make clear in regulatory preamble that missing buoys will not prevent enforcement action.