

## Habitat and Coral Advisory Panels' Comments on the SAFMC's Draft Invasive Species Policy

- Concern that the Council is trying to avoid taking any kind of leadership role in dealing with the lionfish or orange cup coral issues. This will result in no action being taken for a long time which will exacerbate the problem.
- Recommendations to remove the orange cup coral from the list of prohibited stony corals, and specifically point out that it is an invasive species of concern.
- Do not consider allowing standard fish traps as a way to control lionfish.
- Recommend that the Council allow marine life fishermen to test out all gear types on the orange cup coral in order to find the most efficient ones with the least effect on the substrate.
- Collecting orange cup coral for the aquarium trade is not going to be enough to control it if it starts growing on natural substrate.
- The draft policy is too fish- and coral-centric and too much emphasis on FL. There are many invasive issues occurring in the other SE states that could impact habitat, including critical nursery habitat, and existing biological resources. The policy should include something about invasive estuarine/oligohaline plants (like *Phragmites*) that can and have overwhelmed existing estuarine/oligohaline vegetation, with unknown consequences to impacts on nursery habitats, especially for anadromous/diadromous species that use the saltwater/freshwater interface as nursery habitat.
- There is no SAMFC representative on the ANS Gulf and South Atlantic Region Panel. The Panel is coordinated and funded by the ANS Task Force through the GSMFC.
- One of the priorities of the ANS Task Force is to encourage states to develop ANS Management Plans, but these are not species-specific. The SAFMC should be more specific about how it would like to see the Task Force develop such plans.
- Marine Life fishermen are the most qualified and experienced people to conceive, develop, and test unconventional harvest methods, and should be allowed to try everything they can think of. However, in the case of orange cup corals, these methods need to be developed before the corals start growing on natural substrates. This means letting the fishermen test harvest methods on artificial substrates.
- Strong support for integrating the monitoring of invasive species into existing fishery-independent and dependent programs.