



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

33 East Quay Road
Key West, Florida 33040

TO: South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

FROM: Sarah Fangman, Superintendent
Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

DATE: June 4, 2024

SUBJECT: FKNMS proposed summer 2024 emergency rulemaking to protect coral nurseries.

Background:

- 2023 saw unprecedented temperature stress in the Florida Keys (timing, duration and intensity)
- Coral restoration practitioners responded by moving corals to land-based nurseries, including moving fragments of "founders" (i.e. unique, unrelated individual genotypes of elkhorn and staghorn corals) into two land-based facilities
- Land based facilities could not house all the corals in Keys nurseries so for the first time, a deepwater nursery was created off Tavernier (in the upper Keys) to reduce temperature stress and light intensity.
- FKNMS used emergency rulemaking to establish temporary protections for this deepwater nursery (0.07 square mile area) to reduce threats from unintended impacts from fishing gear
- Coral relocated to this deepwater area experienced double the rate of survivorship as compared to nursery coral that remained at inshore, shallow sites.
- Water temperatures in 2024 are also predicted to be significantly elevated, and temperatures in May are already exceeding average values that are typically seen in August.
- In preparation, and informed by last years' experience, NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries is proposing to issue a temporary emergency rule to protect Tavernier Key again and two additional offshore coral nursery sites, one in each region of the Florida Keys.
- NOAA is currently reviewing a draft of an emergency rule that we hope will become effective in the near future.
- We plan to take public comment for a 30-day period to inform future management action including the potential for more permanent rulemaking options to protect coral nurseries.



