



**NOAA**

**NATIONAL OCEANIC AND  
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION**  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **NOAA Prohibits Spearfishing in Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary**

Spearfishing will be prohibited in NOAA's Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary under a new rule effective Monday, March 22. Boaters with spearfishing gear in their vessels will be allowed to travel through the sanctuary without stopping if the gear is stowed and not available for use.

The rule will help protect reef-dwelling fish species in sanctuary waters like gag and scamp and assist enforcement of an existing rule prohibiting powerheads – attachments to spearfishing gear that allow the use of ammunition cartridges to catch fish. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources, in cooperation with NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement, is authorized to enforce this and other sanctuary regulations.

According to a socioeconomic study conducted by NOAA, a ban would have little economic effect since businesses offering spearfishing charter trips to Gray's Reef have waned and there are abundant spearfishing opportunities outside the sanctuary. An environmental assessment also found no significant impact as a result of the ban.

A spearfishing ban was considered during the 1981 designation of the sanctuary and raised again during the sanctuary's management plan review in the early 2000s. Public comments were collected in spring 2009 on a proposed rule, including those received at a public hearing held on March 19, 2009, in Richmond Hill, Ga. Complete details of the new regulation, including the *Federal Register* notice, can be found at <http://graysreef.noaa.gov/management/spearfishing.html>.

Designated in 1981, NOAA's Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary is one of the largest near-shore live-bottom reefs off the southeastern United States, encompassing approximately 22 square miles. The live bottom and ledge habitat support an abundant reef fish and invertebrate community. Loggerhead sea turtles, a threatened species, also use Gray's Reef year-round for foraging and resting, and the highly endangered North Atlantic right whale is occasionally seen in the sanctuary.

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### **On the Web:**

Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary: <http://graysreef.noaa.gov/>