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## **Decades of Harbor Branch Research Leads to New Legislation to Protect Coral Reefs**

**FORT PIERCE, Fla. (August 1, 2013)** – For nearly 40 years, marine researchers with FAU’s Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute have been involved in the discovery of highly diverse deep sea coral communities off the east coast of the United States. As a direct result of this research, east coast fishery managers recently agreed to new legislation that will help protect and conserve these deep sea corals.

The chairmen of the South Atlantic, Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils recently signed a landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in July to help coordinate the protection of deep sea corals off the east coast of the United States from eastern Florida to Maine. The MOU will serve as a framework for cooperation during the development and implementation of management measures to protect coral communities.

“Our work at Harbor Branch on deepwater reefs over the past 38 years was instrumental in establishing this legislation,” said John Reed, a senior scientist and research professor at FAU Harbor Branch, who has been involved in the program since the 1970s. “Now the entire east coast of the United States is recognized to have deep reef corals and habitat.”

FAU Harbor Branch has a long history of studying deep sea corals, by conducting independent research as well as taking part in NOAA’s Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program. Reed was among the team of scientists who first discovered the *Oculina* reefs off the coast of Florida in 1975, and was instrumental in making it a Marine Protected Area through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in 1984.

Deep sea coral communities play a vital role in the marine ecosystem and provide habitat for many species of fish and invertebrates. Most deep sea corals are slow-growing and fragile, making them particularly vulnerable to damage from certain types of fishing gear such as bottom trawls.

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**About Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute:**

*Founded in 1971, Florida Atlantic University's Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute is a research community of marine scientists, engineers, educators and other professionals focused on Ocean Science for a Better World. The institute drives innovation in ocean engineering, at-sea operations, drug discovery and biotechnology from the oceans, coastal ecology and conservation, marine mammal research and conservation, aquaculture, ocean observing systems and marine education. For more information, visit [www.hboi.fau.edu](http://www.hboi.fau.edu).*

**About Florida Atlantic University:**

*Florida Atlantic University, established in 1961, officially opened its doors in 1964 as the fifth public university in Florida. Today, the University, with an annual economic impact of \$6.3 billion, serves more than 30,000 undergraduate and graduate students at sites throughout its six-county service region in southeast Florida. FAU's world-class teaching and research faculty serves students through 10 colleges: the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters, the College of Business, the College for Design and Social Inquiry, the College of Education, the College of Engineering and Computer Science, the Graduate College, the Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College, the Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine, the Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing and the Charles E. Schmidt College of Science. FAU is ranked as a High Research Activity institution by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The University is placing special focus on the rapid development of three signature themes – marine and coastal issues, biotechnology and contemporary societal challenges – which provide opportunities for faculty and students to build upon FAU's existing strengths in research and scholarship. For more information, visit [www.fau.edu](http://www.fau.edu).*