



THE SECRETARY OF COMMERCE
Washington, D.C. 20230

December 7, 2007

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Dr. Thomas McIlwain
Chairman
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
2203 North Lois Avenue, Suite 1100
Tampa, Florida 33607

Dear Dr. McIlwain:

Thank you for your letter regarding the creation of an international network of marine protected areas (MPAs) in the Gulf of Mexico. I understand your concerns and appreciate your recommendations for considering such a proposal.

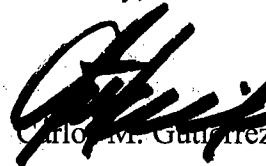
After the establishment of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in June 2006, the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) indicated that it would consider proposals for additional marine area designations. Several ideas were presented to CEQ, one of which concerned the establishment of a network of MPAs in the Gulf of Mexico.

At this time, a brief concept paper describing this idea is being circulated in discussions with other federal agencies. I understand representatives from the National Ocean Service presented this concept paper to the Council at your last meeting, and you have referred this issue to your Habitat Committee.

The Bush Administration has not made a decision on whether to more fully develop this idea. Creation of a formal proposal would involve the participation of the Commerce Department in concert with other Departments and agencies. NOAA will ensure that any deliberations are informed by the recommendations and concerns of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, the Marine Protected Area Advisory Committee, and all other interested stakeholders.

I appreciate your interest in this matter. I assure you the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council will be a vital partner if a proposal to establish a network of MPAs in the Gulf of Mexico is developed.

Sincerely,


Carlos M. Gutierrez

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GULF FISHERIES COUNCIL