

# Marine reserve plan done

▶ TORTUGAS, FROM 1B

fishing areas along Florida and up the Eastern Seaboard.

"It really is a precedent-setting decision that was taken today," said Kathryn Fuller, president of World Wildlife Fund, who testified before the governor and the Cabinet on the reserve.

"I think the Tortugas is the first example of a number [of marine reserves] we will see."

Last year, marine authorities drafted a rule closing more than 151 square nautical miles of state and federal waters off the Keys to fishing as part of a plan that would expand the boundaries of Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary to bolster and protect dwindling sea life.

The federal regulation that prohibits fishing — and, in one area, scuba diving and snorkeling — in a 74-square-nautical-mile area of the reserve went into effect last month.

Boats are now required to keep moving through 60 square miles of the area, since most activities, including anchoring, are banned there.

With Tuesday's vote in Tallahassee, the state waters

within the fragile preserve — encompassing about 77 square nautical miles — will be closed to fishing beginning July 1.

Marine officials don't plan to actively enforce the regulations until word spreads, sanctuary spokeswoman Cheva Heck said.

While the reserve won unprecedented support from diverse interests, including commercial fishermen whose livelihoods are vested in Tortugas waters, some had mixed feelings about its passage.

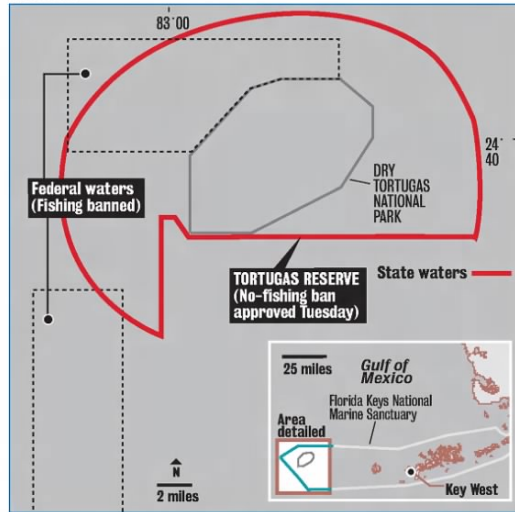
"I can't say everyone is overly thrilled with the Tortugas Reserve, but I can say the process was done correctly if we're going to have to have marine reserves," said Greg DiDomenico, executive director of Monroe County Commercial Fishermen, which was consulted in the lengthy rule-making process.

The Tortugas, until the last few decades protected by its relative isolation, is a critical breeding ground for reef species such as snapper, grouper and spiny lobster across the southeastern United States.

Waters of the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico pass through the Tortugas region,

## TORTUGAS FISHING BAN

Gov. Jeb Bush and the state Cabinet unanimously approved creating a no-fishing ecological preserve in the Dry Tortugas on Tuesday. Regulations already ban fishing in federal waters within the Tortugas Reserve.



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washing larvae northward and helping sustain fish populations.

In addition, the area boasts the richest coral content and healthiest coral in the sanctu-

ary, as well as the highest water quality because of its remoteness.

Herald staff writer Curtis Morgan contributed to this report.