

MIAMIBEACH

City of Miami Beach, 1700 Convention Center Drive, Miami Beach, Florida 33139, www.miamibeachfl.gov

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NO. LTC #

LETTER TO COMMISSION

TO: Mayor Dan Gelber and Members of the City Commission

FROM: Jimmy L. Morales, City Manager

DATE: May 9, 2019

SUBJECT: Higher Than Average Seaweed Accumulation

Over the past few weeks, we have received numerous questions and concerns regarding higher than average seaweed accumulating along our beaches. The purpose of this Letter to Commission is to provide you with information regarding the nature of these concerns and the steps we are taking to address them.

Sargassum seaweed is a natural element of the marine environment that usually floats on the surface of the open ocean. It is carried close to shore by the currents and deposited along the shoreline with each incoming tide. The amount of seaweed that accumulates on our beaches varies seasonally, with higher than average accumulations observed from late Spring into the early Fall months. Over the last few years, the volume of seaweed that accumulates during this period has been increasing.

In Miami Beach, the beaches are owned by the State of Florida and fall under several jurisdictions. Miami-Dade County is responsible for beach maintenance and the City is responsible for managing activities that occur on the beach. Beach management is a team effort. As it relates to seaweed, Miami-Dade County Beach Operations and Maintenance is responsible for beach maintenance activities, including cleaning and grooming of the shoreline. Consistent with the City's Beachfront Management Plan approved by the State, County staff regularly turns the seaweed accumulated along the shoreline into the sand to reduce its visibility and smell, while preserving the ecological value it offers the beach and dune system, such as providing food for shorebird communities and nutrients for a healthy dune. In addition, covering seaweed with sand and turning the seaweed into the shoreline helps to reduce sand erosion.

Miami Beach staff works closely with County staff on every aspect of their beach maintenance work, regularly discussing and evaluating their performance on our beaches. In response to the higher than average seaweed observed over the last few weeks, City staff has contacted Miami-Dade County and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) to pursue alternatives for addressing the seaweed over the coming months, including removing seaweed in areas with the heaviest accumulations. This permit is particularly challenging to obtain during sea turtle nesting season (April 1 through October 31) due to the heavy equipment required, but FDEP has advised that seaweed removal can be approved on a case-by-case basis. To expedite the permit process, the City has engaged FDEP to obtain a permit to remove seaweed in areas with high accumulation. The City has requested that Miami -Dade County assist with

these beach maintenance operations. Once the permit is approved, the City will also be evaluating hiring a second party to compliment Miami-Dade County's efforts. At this time, Miami-Dade County has not committed to removing seaweed from the beaches.

City staff is working with FDEP to provide the necessary information to review our request. We will continue working diligently with the County and the State to communicate our community's concerns and get permission to enhance the County's management of seaweed on our beaches.

Should you have any questions regarding beach maintenance, please contact John Ripple at x2635. For questions regarding the on-going coordination with FDEP, please contact Elizabeth Wheaton at x6121.

Cc: Commissioner Sally A. Heyman
Commissioner Eileen Higgins
Michael Spring, Senior Advisor/Director for Miami Dade County Office of the Mayor
Maria Nardi, Director for Miami-Dade County Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces
James Martinello, Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Jenna Caderas, Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Tom Reinhart, Regional Director for Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

SMT/MJT/ESW/JR/MKW