

Proposed Resolution Supporting the Reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act

Issue: Coral reefs in Florida and throughout the United States and its territories are critically threatened due to increasing global and local stressors. In particular, the Florida Reef Tract, North America's only coral barrier reef, is currently facing an unprecedented coral disease outbreak.

Proposed Policy: The National Association of Counties (NACo) supports the State of Florida delegation working with the State of Hawaii delegation, and other delegations represented on the U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Committee and NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program, to hold a Congressional hearing on the status, trends, and urgent issues facing the U.S.'s coral reefs. NACo also supports reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Reauthorization Act of 2000, and additional recurring funding dedicated to improving the health of the nation's coral reefs. Specifically, NACo supports:

1. Reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000, or creation of new authority(ies) that maintains current funding levels, and provides new reoccurring funding with the following goals:
 - a. Establish an emergency mechanism with an appropriate level of funding scaled to the risk and urgency of the issues and needs of the U.S. coral reef jurisdictions and Freely Associated States. An example of such an emergency would be large-scale coral disease outbreaks, coral reef bleaching events, crown of thorns outbreaks, etc.
 - i. Support increased capacity and funding for Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD) response as it continues to spread in Florida and to other Caribbean reefs, including the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.
 - ii. Establish a dedicated national coral disease response coordinator position through NOAA's Coral Disease Health Consortium.
 - iii. Direct the Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Coast Guard to provide dedicated leadership to explore and address the potential of ballast water or vessel biofilms as a disease vector(s).
 1. Establish new regulatory requirements, and develop new technology, to ensure ballast water treatments fully eliminate pathogenic bacteria.
 2. Require periodic 3rd party monitoring of treated ballast water to ensure performance / compliance with discharge standards.
 - iv. Establish infrastructure funding for large-scale restoration of Southeast Florida's coastal water quality through urban wastewater infrastructure upgrades; accelerated coastal septic to sewer conversions; improved stormwater treatment; expedited closure of ocean wastewater outfalls; and additional strategies to greatly reduce nutrient loading from human sources and pathways.
 - b. Provide infrastructure funding for establishment of new, and expansion of existing, coral propagation nursery infrastructure, including maintenance and staffing, to ensure future large-scale ecosystem restoration is possible.
 - c. Dedicate new funding to state and territorial coral reef management agencies to address increasing local threats to the US's coral reefs.

- d. Issue a congressional authorization for the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF), which gives full representation to state and territorial governments.
 - e. Establish a U.S. Department of the Interior authorization to conserve coral reefs in our national parks, national wildlife refuges, and marine national monuments.
 - f. Establish consistent legal definitions for coral, coral reef, and coral reef (and associated hardbottom) ecosystems.
 - g. Support public-private partnerships that advance coral reef conservation and stewardship.
2. Fully incorporate valuation data from the U.S. Geological Survey's new report "*Rigorously Valuing the Role of U.S. Coral Reefs in Coastal Hazard Risk Reduction*" into federal decisions.
 - a. Recommend that Federal Emergency Management Agency join the USCRTF as a voting member; incorporate coral reefs as "natural infrastructure"; and incorporate findings to justify emergency access to funds for assessment, triage, and restoration of coral reefs after extreme events (e.g., hurricanes, bleaching events, etc.).
 - b. Recommend that U.S. Army Corps of Engineers join the USCRTF as a voting member and use findings from the USGS report to conduct cost/benefit analyses and compensatory mitigation reviews for all currently planned projects that may impact coral reef and hardbottom habitats.
 - c. Recommend that the US Department of Transportation (DOT) work within the USCRTF to review and incorporate plans to reduce stormwater and pollution run off in DOT projects located in coastal areas near coral reefs.
 - d. Recommend that NOAA, in coordination with the states and territories, update the economic value of coral reefs for each region and establish a regular update schedule for these studies.

Background: Florida's coral reefs attract more than 16 million visitors every year, bring more than \$6 billion in sales and income revenue annually, and support more than 71,000 full- and part-time jobs.. Additionally, coral reefs serve as the "rainforests of the sea" for their biodiversity and are an essential part of the food web for commercial and recreational fishing. The health of coral reefs has a direct impact on the condition of Florida's environment and on the health of the economy through the tourism and commercial fishing industries. Well-paying American jobs in the tourism, commercial fishing, recreational fishing, boating, and outdoor industries depend on the nation's coral reefs. Florida's reefs also provide more than \$675 million in flood protection benefits to people, property and jobs every year, rising to as much as \$1.6 billion during a severe storm.

Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact: Coral reefs support jobs in the tourism, commercial and recreational fishing industries. Healthy coral reefs would have a positive employment impact on both urban and rural counties.

Sponsor(s): Doug Smith, Commissioner, Martin County, Fla.; Marty Cassini, Intergovernmental Affairs Manager, Broward County, Fla.