

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 25, 2024

The Honorable Richard Spinrad
Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Administrator Spinrad:

We write to request an update on the status of the emergency provisions of the Coral Reef Conservation Act (CRCA), as amended by the *Restoring Resilient Reefs Act*, and to urge you to finalize such implementation prior to coral health emergencies which may occur this summer in the Florida Reef Tract. Florida's coral resources are already facing the dire consequences of stony coral tissue loss disease, as well as last summer's marine heatwave and bleaching event, and we must be prepared to respond to possible impending coral health emergencies.

The Florida Reef Tract is the third-largest coral barrier reef in the world, offering critical ecological, economic, and ecosystem service benefits to South Florida. The reef is a haven for biologically diverse wildlife including endangered species, an economic engine for Florida's tourism economy, and a natural defense for our coastal communities against hurricanes and storm surge. Last summer, the Florida Reef Tract suffered from a severe marine heatwave leading to coral bleaching, further stressing this crucial ecological resource which has already been in decline for decades. Marine temperatures in the Florida Reef Tract are already anomalously high, and it is possible that a marine heatwave similar to the one which occurred in the summer of 2023 could harm corals this summer.

As you know, our *Restoring Resilient Reefs Act*, which was enacted in December 2022, reauthorized and reformed the CRCA for the first time in nearly twenty years. Among other reforms, the *Restoring Resilient Reefs Act* provides you with tools to prepare for, and respond to, coral reef health emergencies caused by bleaching, disease, and other impacts. Specifically, sections 209 and 210 of the CRCA, as amended, authorize you to mobilize federal resources and private donations in coordination with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), on an emergency basis, to respond to exigent crises in the health of American coral reefs. Should an emergency in health of the Florida Reef Tract occur this summer, we expect you will use available funds to implement these emergency response capabilities in an expedited manner. Further, we urge you to consult with NFWF to identify other existing funds which could be used to support the response of coral restoration practitioners in the Florida Reef Tract, including available funds within the National Ocean and Coastal Security Fund (NOCSF). We are appreciative of you and NFWF for making such funds from the NOCSF available last summer to respond to the marine heatwave in the Florida Reef Tract.

Florida's coral barrier reef is an irreplaceable resource which must be preserved and protected. We ask that you be prepared to use the resources and authorities available to you should exigent circumstances arise.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Rick Scott
U.S. Senator



Darren Soto
Member of Congress



Jared Moskowitz
Member of Congress



Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress



Bill Posey
Member of Congress



Carlos A. Gimenez
Member of Congress



Mike Waltz
Member of Congress



Lois Frankel
Member of Congress



Kathy Castor
Member of Congress