

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 17, 2023

The Honorable Richard Spinrad
Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Administrator Spinrad:

We write with grave concern for the health of the Florida Reef Tract, which is being afflicted by coral bleaching due to recent severe heat stress. We urge you to expeditiously use the emergency mechanisms available to you under the Coral Reef Conservation Act (CRCA) to maximize the efforts being undertaken by state and federal managers and their non-profit partners to identify and monitor continuing heat stress across the reef, maintain essential genetic diversity of coral populations, and plan for responsible reintroduction and restoration.

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. In recent weeks, the Florida Reef Tract has suffered from a severe marine heatwave leading to coral bleaching, further stressing this crucial ecological resource which has already been in decline for decades.

As you know, our *Restoring Resilient Reefs Act (RRRA)*, which was enacted last December, reauthorized and reformed the CRCA for the first time in nearly twenty years. Among other reforms, the RRRA provides you with tools to respond to coral reef health emergencies caused by bleaching, disease, and other impacts. Specifically, sections 209 and 210 of the CRCA, as amended, authorizes you to mobilize federal resources, in coordination with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), on an emergency basis, to respond to exigent circumstances in the health of American coral reefs. We urge you to use available funds to fulfill these emergency response responsibilities and to consult with NFWF to identify existing funds that could be used to support the response of jurisdictional managers and coral restoration practitioners in the Florida Reef Tract, including available funds within the National Ocean and Coastal Security Fund.

Florida's coral barrier reef is an irreplaceable resource which must be preserved and protected from this coral bleaching event. We ask that you use the resources and authorities available to you in a timely manner.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Rick Scott
U.S. Senator



Darren Soto
Member of Congress



Maria Elvira Salazar
Member of Congress



Neal P. Dunn, M.D.
Member of Congress



Jared Moskowitz
Member of Congress



C. Scott Franklin
Member of Congress



Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress



Anna Paulina Luna
Member of Congress



Carlos A. Gimenez
Member of Congress



John H. Rutherford
Member of Congress



Kathy Castor
Member of Congress



Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick
Member of Congress



Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress



Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress