

Resolution in support of the reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act

Committee: Environment Energy and Land Use Steering Committee

Issue: Coral reefs throughout the United States are threatened. In particular, the Florida Reef Tract, the third largest barrier reef in the world and the only living coral reef in the continental United States, is currently facing an unprecedented disease outbreak.

Proposed Policy: The National Association of Counties (NACO) supports the Coral Reef Conservation Reauthorization Act of 2018, introduced by Congresswoman Madeleine Bordallo, and any similar legislation that will dedicate needed resources to improving the health of coral reefs. Specifically, NACO supports legislation that would:

- Strengthen the federal response to coral reef emergencies, such as the current disease outbreak in Florida;
- Direct new federal grant making for local coral reef conservation projects;
- Provide Congressional authorization for the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, which gives full representation to state and territorial governments;
- Support public-private partnerships that advance coral reef conservation and stewardship;
- Authorize the U.S. Department of the Interior to conserve coral reefs in our national parks, national wildlife refuges, and marine national monuments; and
- Engage our nation's marine laboratories, aquariums, and coral reef institutes in cutting-edge, federally funded research that advances our scientific understanding of coral reef biodiversity and resiliency. Current research has not been able to properly identify or find a cure for the current disease outbreak.

Background: Florida's coral reefs attract over 16 million visitors every year and are estimated to bring in over \$6 billion of revenue to the state. Additionally, coral reefs serve as the "rainforests of the sea" for their biodiversity and importance to the food web for commercial and recreational fishing. The health of coral reefs has a direct impact on the condition of our environment, and the health of our 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 our nation's coral reefs. Over 70,400 full and part time jobs are supported by healthy coral reefs.

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: Doug Smith, Commissioner, Martin County, Florida