

Comments to Coral Reef Task Force October 25, 2006

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We came to the Task Force 5 years ago to show you that there were great reef resources in South Florida north of the Keys. We showed pictures of the Staghorn reefs and coral 100's of years old.

You rewarded us by passing the Puerto Rico resolution that created SFCRI and I thank you!

However since that time we have tried to get a reef management plan that would include comprehensive water quality monitoring.

This still has not happened.

- We still do not have a reef management plan.
- We still continue to pump partially treated sewer onto the reefs.
- We don't have storm water and waste water Master Plan to deal with growth.

In May of 2003 we petitioned Florida Department of Environmental Protection in Tallahassee to add the Ft. Lauderdale reefs to their list of Outstanding Florida Waters (OFW). We have also provided FDEP with video and photos showing the rich marine life in this area. It is the only place in the State of Florida where you can swim from the beach with a mask and snorkel and see massive centuries old corals among fields of Threatened Staghorn coral. We believe through the photos and back up material we have sent to FDEP that we have properly documented this. It has been over three years and we have not received an official response as to the status of our petition.

We do not feel that the proper Rulemaking procedure pursuant to Chapter 120, F.S. has been followed.

We were told in a phone conversation last month with a lawyer from FDEP Council's office that the "Policy Makers in Tallahassee" had chosen not to process our petition.

In a correspondent dated September 27, 2006 to FDEP we made an official request to the following the questions

1. Who are the Policy Makers?
2. Why was our petition not processed since this area is truly some of Florida's most Outstanding Waters?
3. Were proper Rulemaking procedures followed with our petition?

4. What is the official current status of our OFW petition?

We still have not heard officially from the State. It is for that reason that we ask the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force to require the FDEP to officially respond to the questions above.

OFW does not come with a management plan but it will bring us a water quality standard.

The current administration has been rewriting laws and rules for air quality, water quality, and endangered species act and in many cases the rewrites don't benefit the resource at stake but rather benefit the developer, polluter or the large corporations.

I am not a reef hugger, I'm a stakeholder, a fisherman, and a diver. We just had a great year for billfishing (Sailfish, marlin). The main reason for the recovery of the billfish is the environmental ethic of the billfishing angler has changed. All tournaments and most billfish anglers practice catch and release.

We are using circle hooks instead of J hooks with barbs, these practices have had a tremendous positive impact on the fisheries.

Fishermen, both recreational and commercial are continually asked to make changes to preserve fisheries.

It's time that we ask the developers, dredgers, polluters and large corporation to make changes to preserve our reefs.

- We have the knowledge.
We know sewer is bad for reefs. We must remove sewer outfalls from the reef tract.
- We have technology.
Advanced Water Treatment (AWT) All wastewater must be properly treated.
- We have a source for the money.
Make the developer pay. Put a water resource impact fee on every new unit built in South Florida. Use this money to upgrade to AWT.

If the developers don't want to pay put a moratorium on building until upgrades to AWT are made much like what was done in the Keys.

We have a chance to save the reefs, fisheries and multi-billion dollar industries that they support. But the window of opportunity is quickly closing.

- We need to quit writing loopholes into the clean water act, clean air act and the endangered species act.
- We need to enforce compliance with the rules that are in place.

- We need to suitably fund the agencies so that they can conduct proper oversight and enforcement.
- We must stop the political meddling in the regulatory process.

There are many good, hard working people in the agencies who are afraid to do their jobs.

I have seen a Broward County commissioner say at a televised commission meeting “I used to be a state politician and I know how to deal with biologist that say what we don’t want them to say, we threaten to cut their funding”

The threats and intimidation to both agency people and NGO’s like us needs to stop!

We are about to elect a new governor and administration in Florida

We hope that the new administration will adopt an environmental ethic far different from the old administration. We ask the new administration to consider the comments that have been sent to this Task Force along with the Blueprint to Florida’s Coastal and Ocean Future of which Cry of the Water is one of many endorsing organizations.

See the Full Text of Blueprint to Florida’s Coastal and Ocean Future at:

<http://www.nrdc.org/water/oceans/florida/flfuture.pdf>

It is time we take a common sense approach to marine resource management if we all work together we can save the natural resources that fuel our states economy and make Florida a truly unique place to live.

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