

A Resolution of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council in Support of High-Level Federal Funding to Advance the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) to Advance Restoration of Everglades National Park, Florida Bay, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, and the Surrounding Lands and Waters of the Greater Everglades Ecosystem

WHEREAS, the Florida Keys are part of a complex hydrological system that is influenced by waters from the upstream Greater Everglades ecosystem, spanning from Lake Okeechobee and its headwaters, to the Everglades Agricultural Area, Water Conservation Areas, Everglades National Park, Florida Bay, Biscayne Bay, Biscayne National Park, and mainland South Florida; and

WHEREAS, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) helps protect the unique marine waters of the Florida Keys that are a national treasure and of international significance; and

WHEREAS, the ecological health of the FKNMS is inextricably linked to that of Florida Bay, Everglades National Park, and the Greater Everglades ecosystem, being the primary source of freshwater essential to the health of the FKNMS and its marine wildlife, including iconic coral reefs, sea turtles, and myriad species of tropical fish; and

WHEREAS, Florida Bay and the interconnected habitats of the South Florida coral reef ecosystem are vital to the multi-billion dollar fishing and tourism industry of the Florida Keys and South Florida, including commercial and recreational fishing, snorkeling, diving, boat and equipment rentals, other tourism related businesses, and taxable property values in South Florida; and

WHEREAS, chronic lack of freshwater flow, coupled with increasingly high temperatures and salinity in Florida Bay, has contributed to mass seagrass die-offs, algal blooms, sponge die-offs, and degraded fisheries habitat; and

WHEREAS, the dire situation in Florida Bay is a sign of a larger water crisis plaguing Florida whereby the northern coastal Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries are suffering from polluted Lake Okeechobee discharges while Everglades National Park, Biscayne Bay, and Florida Bay are starved for clean, freshwater due to lack of infrastructure for treatment and storage of water and restoration of flow; and

WHEREAS, the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) was passed by Congress in 2000 as a roadmap to protect, preserve, and restore the Greater Everglades ecosystem, yet has been chronically under-funded contributing to project delays; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and South Florida Water Management District are the federal and local sponsors, respectively, for the implementation of CERP and are actively advancing the planning, construction, and operation of numerous restoration projects that stand to impact Florida Bay and the southern coastal system; and

WHEREAS, numerous environmental, recreational, and community groups have joined with elected leaders throughout South Florida to call for increased state and federal funding to advance and expedite CERP; and

WHEREAS, the FKNMS has the authority to coordinate the conservation and management of these marine areas and activities affecting them and to ensure cooperation between Sanctuary managers and other federal, state, and local authorities with jurisdiction within or adjacent to the Sanctuary;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council:

1. Expresses appreciation for recent record-high levels of federal funding to advance CERP secured in the FY22 budget and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, totaling nearly \$1.5B to advance Everglades restoration.
2. Supports continued efforts to advance key CERP projects with sustained high-level funding, consistent with the 2021 Integrated Delivery Schedule, that will deliver clean freshwater to Everglades National Park, Florida Bay, and FKNMS.
3. Requests the Sanctuary Superintendent transmit copies of this resolution to Michael Connor, Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Army for Civil Works, Shannon Estenoz, Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, U.S. Department of the Interior, and Col. James Booth, District Commander, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Jacksonville District.

Disclaimer: The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council is an interactive liaison between the residents and visitors of the Florida Keys and the staff and management of the FKNMS. The opinions and findings of this publication do not necessarily reflect the position of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, or the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.