



Colleen Castille  
Secretary

# Department of Environmental Protection

## Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission



Ken Haddad  
Executive Director

June 17, 2004

The Honorable Jeb Bush  
Governor of Florida  
Office of the Governor  
The Capitol  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0001

Dear Governor Bush:

Over the last six weeks, the Department of Environmental Protection and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission have made a thoughtful and thorough review of the Preliminary Report of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy. We reviewed comments from dozens of individuals and organizations, such as the Florida Ocean Alliance, The Nature Conservancy, and Boat US. On behalf of the State, we are enclosing the formal recommendations arrived at with input from a wide range of stakeholders. Key recommendations include:

### Ocean Governance

To effectively manage the marine environment, federal, state and local agencies must coordinate efforts:

- Florida encourages streamlining federal agency roles and programs to better support the efforts of coastal states, including clarification of the mission of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.
- The Coastal Zone Management Act should be reauthorized and strengthened so that federal consistency authorities are not eroded.
- While Florida supports the Commission's ecosystem-based approach to coastal management, it cannot be implemented successfully through the proposed 'federal-centric,' top-down system. Ecosystems must be managed in the watersheds, along the coasts and on the water.
- Florida supports strengthening regional governance. To that end, Florida has initiated discussions with neighboring Gulf of Mexico states to manage shared waters through an existing framework. Efforts should reach beyond national waters to include Mexico, whose economy and quality of life also depend on the health of the Gulf.
- Rather than creating new structures of governance, Florida recommends assigning legal responsibilities and authorities within the Large Marine Ecosystems described in the Preliminary Report. If the federal government creates consistent and meaningful authorities nationwide, regions can determine the best structures and processes by which to manage marine ecosystems.

### **Ecosystem-Based Management**

The comprehensive, integrated management of a geographic area is the most effective approach to conserving coastal and ocean resources:

- An ecosystem based approach to coastal management should include consideration of Marine Managed Areas (MMAs), which provide environmental benefits if sited and designed appropriately and administered at the local level.
- Florida is effectively managing marine resources through ecosystem-based approaches such as the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and the National Estuarine Research Reserves.
- Together with NOAA, Florida established one of the largest marine reserves in the world. Initial scientific data indicate that the Tortugas Ecological Reserve is already enhancing the abundance and diversity of marine life.
- Florida has used MMAs for decades through its system of 41 Aquatic Preserves, which have largely maintained their biological and aesthetic values even with unprecedented growth in the state.

### **Science-Based Decision Making**

Sound science should drive our management decisions. While we cannot always wait for scientific certainty before taking reasonable action, we need to invest in ocean science in order to make better management decisions.

- An Integrated Ocean Observing System is needed to better manage marine ecosystems, protect human health, facilitate safe and efficient marine transportation and better predict coastal hazards. Regional observation systems should be designed to meet the needs of the states as well -- Florida is already participating in the development of two such systems in the Gulf of Mexico and the Southeast Atlantic.
- Management and research goals, rather than dollar amounts, should drive budget decisions to ensure that the nation invests its resources towards our priorities.

### **Education and Stewardship**

Education and coastal management should not be considered independently. Instead, educating our citizens and students should be a key part of coastal management science and management goals should be complimentary:

- While a national clearinghouse for ocean education may improve stronger coordination, it is more critical that we enhance our ability to deliver and incorporate curricula into classrooms and community centers. Improving the availability of the many existing education programs to our communities and schools will promote stewardship of our oceans. Education programs should incorporate lifelong learning such as those offered by the National Estuarine Research Reserves and Florida Seagrass.
- Achieving sustainable marine fisheries is one of the fundamental endpoints associated with an effective ocean protection strategy. The Commission offers sound recommendations to strengthen the science, explore the full range of fisheries management tools, and effectively coordinate the management of fisheries that cross jurisdictional boundaries.
- Greater legal clarity of the Marine Mammal Protection Act is needed. While marine mammals deserve significant attention, issues regarding endangered and threatened sea turtles also need to be addressed.

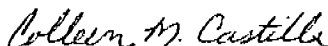
**Preserving Coral Reefs**

Coral reefs support the most biologically diverse ecosystems in the marine environment. The nation's focused attention can further protect these unique natural environments:

- Florida is encouraged by the leadership of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force and implementation of locally developed strategies to address threats to coral reefs.
- With assistance from NOAA, Florida and the individual members of the All Islands Committee are working with local communities to develop and implement on the ground conservation strategies.
- While research remains important, Florida believes more funding should be directed to local projects that address threats to coral reefs. Just \$2.7 million in new funding will fully support implementation of the states, territories and commonwealths local action strategies for the first year.

We have begun discussions with our counterparts in the Gulf States. Our coordination at the regional and local levels to protect the Gulf waters will effectively target resources for the greatest return. Comprehensive management of our marine environment will benefit our oceans as well as the nation's economy and quality of life. We are confident the work of this state along with our regional approach to ocean protection will provide a model for the nation.

Sincerely,



Colleen M. Castille  
Secretary  
Department of Environmental Protection

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Kenneth Haddad  
Executive Director  
Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission

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