

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 28, 2014

The Honorable Kathryn D. Sullivan
Acting Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and
Acting Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Room 5128
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Dr. Sullivan:

We write to call your attention to the additional \$2,000,000 that Congress has appropriated in Fiscal Year 2014 through the “Oceanic and Atmospheric Research, Ocean, Coastal, and Great Lakes Research, Laboratories and Cooperative Institutes” budget line of the NOAA Operations, Research, and Facilities account, and to the accompanying report language emphasizing the expectation of Congress that this increase be applied by NOAA to formalize—through the Cooperative Institutes model—its partnerships with well-established academic institutions that specialize in coral reef research. We respectfully urge you to fulfill the purpose of this appropriation increase by working to ensure that these funds are allocated for coral reef research to the academic institutions in the states and territories that have corals within their boundaries.

Four institutions in particular have well-established core competencies in coral reef research and sponsor applied science that is aligned with national objectives and that is responsive to the needs of state and territorial resource management agencies that are directly responsible for conserving coral reefs and coral reef ecosystems. These institutions are the Caribbean Coral Reef Institute in Puerto Rico, the National Coral Reef Institute in Florida, the Hawaii Coral Reef Initiative in Hawaii, and the Western Pacific Coral Reef Institute in Guam. Traditionally, the science sponsored by these four institutes has been supported by NOAA through the Center for Sponsored Coastal Ocean Research (CSCOR) under the National Ocean Service. However, it troubles us that such support has waned in recent years and been inconsistent year-to-year and institution-by-institution.

Today, it is apparent that NOAA is neither sufficiently resourced nor internally determined to support the critical needs for coral reef research that informs local management decisions through its CSCOR budget alone or through the specific appropriation it annually receives for its Coral Reef Conservation Program. Therefore, we are encouraged that Congress through the *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014* (Public Law 113-76) is providing an important opportunity for NOAA to shift, grow and institutionalize its support for external coral reef research under a more stable program and budget line. By funding this research at these four institutes through its OAR budget NOAA would complement its existing Cooperative Institute partnerships, and foster long-term collaborations of the kind desperately needed for sustaining coral reef research that promotes scientific exchange and technology transfer.

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The protection and resiliency of coral reef ecosystems is essential to public health, environmental sustainability, and economic advancement for the U.S. jurisdictions that have corals within their waters. Corals are increasingly in dire straits and are facing pressures that range from over-fishing, land-based sources of pollution, recreational overuse and misuse, lack of public awareness, climate change and coral bleaching, and disease. These realities are manifested in the fact that NOAA is proposing Endangered Species Act listings for 66 coral species found in U.S. waters. Now is a critical opportunity for NOAA to obligate the appropriated amount it received above the President's requested level in Fiscal Year 2014—through the OAR Ocean, Coastal, and Great Lakes Research, Laboratories and Cooperative Institutes budget line—for coral reef research at the four well-established institutes that have the capacity and competencies to sponsor the applied science needed to protect corals and sustainably manage coral reef resources.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for working to ensure NOAA obligates this Congressional appropriation on as timely of a basis as possible and in a manner consistent with Congressional intent for advancing coral reef research by its external partners.

We look forward to working with you on this priority.

Sincerely,


Pedro R. Pierluisi


Debbie Wasserman Schultz


Jose E. Serrano


Lois Frankel


Donna M. Christensen


Alcee L. Hastings

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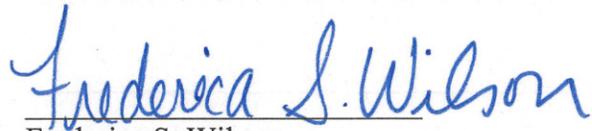
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