

## **Rep. Mast (FL-18) TESTIMONY**

Natural Resources Committee Hearing on H.R.335 – South Florida Clean Coastal Waters Act  
Thursday, July 24, 2019

Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member McClintock, Members of the Committee:

**Thank you for recognizing me today to speak on my bill, H.R.335 – the South Florida Clean Coastal Waters Act.**

This bill authorizes a comprehensive study of Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) and hypoxia in South Florida.

**The importance of this study is that it will be conducted by the Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control (HABHRCA) Task Force, an existing collaboration of 13 Federal agencies.**

The resulting report will act as a blueprint for coordinating resources of the Federal government toward environmental strategies jointly developed with Florida stakeholders.

**I am sure all the Members of this Committee are aware that HABs are toxic overgrowths of algae that:**

Cause mass fish kills resulting in thousands of floating corpses;

Contaminate water and impose in serious health effects and potentially death for animals or humans who drink these toxins;

Clogs the air with a putrid odor which causes respiratory distress for anything that breathes;

**Two weeks ago in the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, the Army Corps of Engineers testified that for decades it knowingly has discharged enormous quantities of toxic HAB-laden water from a 730 sq mi lake in the middle of South Florida.**

One of the toxins that makes HABs so dangerous is cyanobacteria.

**On May 22, the EPA released a report on HABs indicating the acceptable threshold for human contact of cyanobacteria is 8 parts per billion.**

Last summer, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection examined samples of water being discharged into my community at 495 parts per billion.

**Across South Florida, the traumatic result of Harmful Algal Blooms impact nearly every part of our lives:**

Cripples our economy with lost fisheries and tourism;

Devastates the environment resulting in dying ecosystems of our reefs and has put the Everglades on life support;

Threatens the health of our families with water our kids can no longer swim in, our pets cannot drink, and renders the air unbreathable.

**For many in South Florida, this is the number one problem and improving our water quality is the highest priority.**

Since the establishment of HABHRCA in 1998, the interagency Task Force has been conducting assessments.

**In the 2014 reauthorization, assessments for the Northern Gulf of Mexico and the Great Lakes were authorized.**

In 2019, the epicenter of unexplained and understudied HAB and Hypoxia activity is in South Florida.

**Senators Rubio and Scott, partnered with Representative Soto and myself, to introduce this bipartisan and bicameral bill authorizing the Task Force to focus attention of the next assessment on South Florida – where HABs and hypoxia are so prevalent.**

The lessons and best practices that come from this assessment will benefit the entire nation;

**Just as the assessments from 2014 gave us all a broader understanding of how these toxins form and a menu of ways to mitigate the damage.**

The South Florida Clean Coastal Waters Act was voted unanimously out of the Science, Space & Technology Committee yesterday.

**I am so pleased to be invited to speak today before the other committee of jurisdiction and welcome your questions.**