

WATER, OCEANS, AND WILDLIFE SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING

Defending Our National Marine Sanctuaries from Damaging Chemicals Act

Testimony by Congressman Francis Rooney

Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to comment on H.R. 1834, the Defending Our National Marine Sanctuaries from Damaging Chemicals Act. I want to thank my Florida colleague Representative Mucarsel-Powell for co-sponsoring this legislation and thank the members of this committee who have cosponsored H.R. 1834.

This narrowly tailored bill prohibits the human use of oxybenzone and octinoxate near coral reefs in Federally protected waters, within the National Marine Sanctuary System. This legislation **does not** restrict state or local governments in any way, and there are many safe and effective organic sunscreens to substitute for harmful products that contain these toxic chemicals. I just tried a few over the Christmas break.

Coral reefs are the foundation of the marine ecosystem. The important nurturing of marine life and the fish that feed on them that begins on coral reefs works through the entire biota, culminating with the large pelagics.

Coral reefs also play a **major role** in preventing shore erosion and protect coastal wetlands. Additionally, coral reefs are tourism resources. In South Florida alone, reefs contribute significantly to an \$8.5 billion a year tourism economy.

This legislation will protect these critical components of our marine environment and assure that they can be enjoyed and studied for generations to come. We must act now to prevent the use of these chemicals in National Marine Sanctuaries.

Tragically, in the last three decades, two-thirds Florida's coral has been lost. Here is a visual of coral bleaching, i.e. a dead reef.



While many factors may play a role in damaging our coral reefs, including acidification and rising temperatures of the sea water and pollution and the hypoxia that results from it, we **should also act now to stop** these chemicals from damaging on our coral.

There are plenty of effective and safe organic sunscreen products on the market today. I am happy to work on adding to this legislation that sunscreen is essential for healthy skin and that we must protect against melanoma. National companies are manufacturing and selling reef-safe sunscreens. Now consumers have easy access to environmentally safe sunscreen options.

In closing, Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member and Members of the Committee, thank you for considering H.R. 1834 and for your concern for protecting the marine environment in Florida and the United States by banning these harmful chemicals.

I yield back the balance of my time