

Opening Statement Outline for Ranking Member Cliff Bentz
House Water, Oceans and Wildlife Legislative Hearing on
H.R. 160, the *Restoring Resilient Reefs Act*
May 4, 2021

Today's hearing will focus on bipartisan legislation aimed at expediting coral reef restoration. Three Republican Subcommittee Members -- Congressman Daniel Webster, Congresswoman Radewagen and Congresswoman Jenniffer González Colón – are cosponsors of this bill, and I thank them for their leadership.

As they know, coral reefs can provide multiple benefits, from enhancing fisheries to helping protect coastlines from storm flooding and erosion. In the U.S., reefs are found in both state and federal waters, thus requiring a cooperative partnership.

The law this bill amends and reauthorizes expired seventeen years ago. Even though the law's programs still receive appropriations, the bill's authors and supporters have proposed a restructuring of the Coastal Reef Conservation Act with the goal of giving states, U.S. territories and local communities more autonomy and flexibility in coral reef protection and restoration efforts.

Other changes, supporters maintain, will lead to leveraging increased non-federal dollars for reef restoration. I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses about the opportunities and challenges associated with coral reef protection and restoration, and how this legislation impacts those efforts.

In particular, I want to thank Mrs. Radewagen for bringing her witness, Ms. Kelley Anderson Tagarino, to the table – or for today's purposes – to our Webex hearing.

In the same way that our coastal communities have their needs, so do our western communities. With that, I once again want to take this opportunity to highlight that our western states are experiencing record drought. Mr. Chairman, I am happy to hear that this Subcommittee will hold a hearing on drought at the end of the month. Without a doubt, this issue needs our attention.

I note that my Subcommittee staff asked the Majority staff over two weeks ago to add legislation offered by Mr. Valadao and others to this hearing agenda. That obviously didn't happen and that is disappointing. Mr. Chairman, I want to emphasize again the impact of the drought. Over 70 million people in the West are experiencing drought, and almost 40 million are experiencing the most severe drought conditions. Our communities are drying up or are on the verge of burning up. They are depending on us to help them. That time is now. I yield back my time.