**A Resolution of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council Urging the Biscayne Bay and Southeastern Everglades Ecosystem Restoration (BBSEER) Project Delivery Team (PDT) to Maximize the Delivery of Ecological Benefits for Marine Sanctuary Waters in Upcoming Project Modeling and the Tentatively Selected Plan.**

**WHEREAS,** the Florida Keys are part of a complex hydrological system that is influenced by waters from the upstream Greater Everglades ecosystem, spanning from Lake Okeechobee and its headwaters, to the Everglades Agricultural Area, Water Conservation Areas, Everglades National Park, Florida Bay, Biscayne Bay, Biscayne National Park, and mainland South Florida; and

**WHEREAS,** the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) helps protect the unique marine waters of the Florida Keys that are a national treasure and of international significance; and

**WHEREAS,** the ecological health of the FKNMS is inextricably linked to that of Florida Bay, Everglades National Park, and the Greater Everglades ecosystem, being the primary source of freshwater essential to the health of the FKNMS and its marine wildlife, including iconic coral reefs, sea turtles, and myriad species of tropical fish; and

**WHEREAS**, Florida Bay and the interconnected habitats of the South Florida coral reef ecosystem are vital to the multi-billion dollar fishing and tourism industry of the Florida Keys and South Florida, including commercial and recreational fishing, snorkeling, diving, boat and equipment rentals, other tourism-related businesses, and taxable property values in South Florida; and

**WHEREAS**, chronic lack of freshwater flow, coupled with increasingly high temperatures and salinity in Florida Bay, has contributed to mass seagrass die-offs, algal blooms, sponge die-offs, and degraded fisheries habitat; and

**WHEREAS,** the BBSEER project is a Comprehensive Everglades Restoration project focused on restoring freshwater wetlands of the Southern Glades and model lands, including mangrove and seagrass areas of Biscayne Bay, Biscayne National Park, FKNMS (Manatee Bay, Card Sound, and Barnes Sound) and Everglades National Park; and

**WHEREAS,** the goal of this project is to restore freshwater flow to these water bodies to address the artificially lowered water tables, reduced groundwater inflows, alternated natural tributaries, and degraded salinity regimes caused by over-drainage from coastal canals in the region; and

**WHEREAS,** project planning is currently underway for the BBSEER project, and Congressional authorization for this project is expected in the Water Resources Development Act of 2026; and

**WHEREAS,** the Project Delivery Team is developing the penultimate round of modeling for this project; and

**WHEREAS**, the FKNMS Advisory Council (SAC) recognizes that the restoration of America's Everglades is critical to the long-term sustainability of South Florida's economy, quality of life, public health, and environment; and

**WHEREAS,** the FKNMS Advisory Council supports the BBSEER project and the potential it has for positive ecological outcomes for Sanctuary waters.

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council:

1. Urges the BBSEER PDT to prioritize ecological benefits to the Sanctuary waters of Biscayne Bay, Manatee Bay, Card Sound, Barnes Sound, and other coastal embayments in their development of the penultimate round of modeling alternatives and the subsequent Tentatively Selected Plan for the project and to include:

- A review of traditional and natural flows through Taylor Slough and the Transverse Glades. BBSEER models should mimic these flows as closely as possible to ensure that the flows through the Model Lands and Triangle Lands portions of the project and into Sanctuary waters of Card Sound, Barnes Sound, and Manatee Bay are as close to historic flows as practicable; and
- Complete backfilling of the C-111 Canal – a canal that has long altered the entire hydrology of the region, diverting water from Taylor Slough and Florida Bay while stifling water flow patterns south. Complete backfilling is essential for the health of Florida Bay, southern Biscayne Bay, and Sanctuary waters, and partial backfilling will not achieve scaled ecological benefits; and
- Prioritization of coastal water storage solutions in the modeling of this project to increase dry season flows that benefit Biscayne National Park and Sanctuary waters; and
- Critical wetland features such as the Pennsuco and Bird Drive basins to act as recharge areas for the Biscayne Aquifer, provide short-hydroperiod foraging habitat for wading birds, serve as an environmental buffer to the Everglades Protection Area, improve flood resilience across the region, and sequester carbon in alignment with climate resilience goals; and
- Expanding coastal wetland Water Preserve Areas and exploring the viability of groundwater recharge wells to store excess water; and
- Elimination of the agricultural drawdown practices from modeling considerations for BBSEER because this practice lowers groundwater levels when sea level is at its seasonal maximum at the end of the rainy season, increasing saltwater intrusion and compromising groundwater integrity – reducing water availability for restoration; and
- Identification of solutions to conveyance issues to redistribute water flowing more effectively from northern Biscayne Bay to southern Biscayne Bay; and
- Include model runs with and without sea level rise changes so as to best evaluate which components best capture historic flow patterns while also allowing for a better understanding of the sensitivity of these benefits as they relate to sea level rise and ultimately incorporate components for resiliency.

2. Requests the Sanctuary Superintendent to transmit copies of this resolution to Col. James Booth, District Commander, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Jacksonville District, and Drew Bartlett, Executive Director, South Florida Water Management District.

*Disclaimer: The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council is an interactive liaison between the residents and visitors of the Florida Keys and the staff and management of the FKNMS. The opinions and findings of this publication do not necessarily reflect the position of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, or the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.*