



## Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Amendments Act of 2007

**Purpose of the Bill:** To reauthorize the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000 and provide necessary authority to the Secretary of Commerce and the Secretary of the Interior for enhancing the protection of coral reefs.

**What the Bill Will Do:**

- Add new areas of emphasis to the National Program and Coral Reef Conservation Program.
- Provide for consistent guidelines for maintaining environmental data, products, and information.
- Augment authorities to allow for stronger partnerships.
- Provide a suite of tools to facilitate response to injury and restoration of coral reefs.
- Provide for direct removal of marine debris by the federal government.
- Clarify the existing authority of the Department of the Interior to undertake coral reef ecosystem protection.

### Highlights of the Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Amendments Act of 2007

#### Emerging Issues

Ties actions conducted under the Coral Reef Conservation Program and National Program to the emerging issues of coral bleaching and disease, climate change, and vessel impacts to reefs.

#### Marine Debris Removal

**Provides for direct removal of marine debris by the federal government.**

- This allows the federal government to more comprehensively address the threat of marine debris to coral reefs ecosystems by removing abandoned fishing gear, marine debris, and abandoned vessels from coral reef ecosystems in federal waters.
- The Act will still provide for assistance to states for removal of marine debris.

#### Data Management

**Provides for consistent guidelines for maintaining environmental data, products, and information. The Secretary may:**

- Develop standards for coral reef ecosystem data.
- Archive environmental data collected by federal, State, and local agencies.
- Promote widespread availability and dissemination of environmental data and information.
- Develop standards, protocols, and procedures for sharing Federal data.

#### Partnerships

**Facilitates partnerships with other agencies, governments and organizations to better meet the directives and mandates of the Act.**

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## **Response and Restoration of Injured Corals**

A major threat to coral reefs is mechanical damage, often from events such as ship groundings and improper anchoring. There are numerous incidents every year that injure coral reefs. The CRCA should be changed to allow better response to activities resulting in injury to coral reefs, with the costs borne by the parties responsible, not the American tax payers.

### **Establishes an emergency response account to fund emergency response, stabilization, and restoration following incidents that injure coral reefs.**

- Account funds used for immediate response to coral injury events.
- Any funds that are recouped from the responsible party for these activities shall be used to reimburse the account.
- Reimbursement ensures availability of funds for future responses.

### **Holds responsible parties liable for injury to coral reefs.**

- Makes it unlawful to destroy, cause the loss of, or injure any coral reef. The Act provides exemptions for injury caused by: the use of fishing gear authorized by Federal or State fishery management plans; activities authorized by federal or State law; bona fide marine scientific research; or, a Federal Government agency during an emergency or while conducting law enforcement or search and rescue activities.
- The Act allows the Secretary to recover response and restoration costs from responsible parties.
- Individuals who violate the Act may be fined a civil penalty or be subject to criminal enforcement. Penalties may be used in addition to or instead of the Act's liability provision.
- Allows the Secretary to issue permits for activities that are compatible with the purposes of the Act, but cannot practicably be conducted in a way that does not injure coral reefs.
- Provides the Secretary authority to issue regulations to implement the Act.

### **Provides broader authority to provide emergency assistance to states and territories to address unforeseen or disaster-related circumstances pertaining to coral reefs.**

## **Department of the Interior Program**

### **Enhances DOI's ability to provide technical assistance to States and territories, carry out their research and management objectives.**

- Amends several existing general authorities to specify that they apply to coral reefs.
- Provides express authority for grants and technical assistance to the territories.
- These activities would be coordinated with those of other Federal agencies through the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force and directly with individual agencies.