

Title:

S-25: Discourage public officials from granting or requesting extensions to current ocean outfall legislation to ensure the timely closure (prior to 2025) of all treated wastewater outfall pipes and build/upgrade infrastructure for advanced water treatment and reuse to improve ocean water quality, reduce destructive algal blooms, and increase water reuse in the SEFCRI region.

Background:

- The Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative (SEFCRI) team, Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and Community Working Group (CWG) members of group 10 do not recommend implementing this recommended management action as there are potential unintended consequences i.e. bringing this statute to the attention of the Florida legislature and having them postpone the implementation date or add other loopholes. The CWG members feel this is not worth the risk. One ocean outfall has already closed and SEFCRI counties have committed more than \$3B in initial design and implementation costs. This concern was brought before the entire CWG, which voted to keep this recommended management action active.
- This recommended management action relates to Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties and the associated coastal areas (coral reefs, nearshore hardbottom, offshore habitats, etc.).
- This recommended management action is being proposed because poor water quality is: affecting the health of coral reefs and coastal habitats, related to poor diving conditions, and causing potential health hazards for coastal residents. There is a problem of partially treated wastewater being discharged directly into the ocean, potentially affecting fish populations by promoting algal growth on reefs. Pharmaceuticals in wastewater may be adversely affecting the growth and reproduction of fishes.

Objective:

- The intended outcome of this action is to end direct releases of wastewater onto coral reefs by closing outfall pipes and creating advanced water treatment systems in the SEFCRI region to improve water quality and increase water reuse. This recommended management action would take place before 2025 and without the 5 percent loophole.
- This would be a discrete action to create better upgrades to current wastewater systems and should be recurring as technology improves.

Intended Benefits and/or Potential Adverse Effects:

- Some potential benefits of implementation of this recommended management action are: (1) improved water quality, (2) elimination of known point sources of pollution, (3) assurances of compliance by sewer outfall operators, (4) improved human and fish health, (5) improved swimming areas along the beaches, and (6) decreased nutrient loading on coral reefs. Implementation of this recommended management action will result in a decrease in algal blooms and a decrease in pharmaceutical loading, which will increase the functionality of the reef ecosystem.
- Some possible issues that may arise with implementation of this recommended management action include: (1) the potential that sewer outfall operators will not comply, (2) alternative ways of treating and disposing of sewage will need to be addressed, (3)

View the Entire RMA Document at: www.ourfloridareefs.org/RMAcomment

funding will be needed for water quality monitoring, (4) potential job losses, (5) potential increases in utility costs and fees, (6) issues with municipal jurisdictions, responsibility, consistency and coordination may arise, (7) changing existing legislation to enact this prior to the 2025 date entails a political challenge, and (8) bringing this proposal to the legislature's attention may have the exact opposite effect of the desired intention i.e. the legislature may rescind or delay the existing statute.

- These negative impacts could be long lasting, as costs to treat wastewater will be passed to residents. However, a market exists for re-using secondary treated wastewater for irrigation in South Florida. This practice is common throughout Florida and will help offset long-term costs.
- Short-term costs may occur until systems are retrofitted. Federal grants may be available to defray initial costs.
- If this recommended management action is not implemented, the process to improve water quality will be delayed and continued offshore disposal of wastewater will increase nutrient loads on reefs, thereby reducing the overall health of the reefs and potentially leading to a decrease in coastal tourism.

Agencies/ Organizations:

- The lead agencies for implementation of this recommended management action are the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and local health departments.
- Other agencies or organizations that could be involved include the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, United States Fish and Wildlife Service and Florida Department of Health (DOH).
- The key stakeholders for this recommended management action are utilities, residents, tourists and local municipalities, who would have to cover the costs of retrofitting structures and finding alternative ways of disposing of wastewater.
- There is existing legislation. If utilities are currently meeting water quality standards, requiring them to eliminate/reduce outfalls would require a change in the legislation.

Permitting/ Enforcement Requirements of RMA:

- Permits would be required for outfall removal and implementing alternative means of treating existing wastewater. Any physical modifications to the existing pipes will require permits.
- Means of measuring success of this recommended management action include: water quality monitoring to track nutrient and pollutant loads, and complete elimination of ocean outfalls.

Cost:

- The estimated direct cost of implementing this recommended management action is greater than \$250,000.
- Potential funding could come from residents/tax payers who use utilities and depend on the wastewater treatment facilities. FDEP, SFWMD, and DOH are other possible sources.

Time Frame & Extent:

- No timeframe for implementation of this action was put forth because of the recommendations of the SEFCRI Team, TAC and CWG members of Group 10 to *not* implement this recommended management.

Miscellaneous Info:

- This recommended management action is not linked to any other recommended actions.
- Some uncertainties or gaps with this recommended management action include: what alternatives exist for disposal of the wastewater currently discharged into the ocean; and are Total Maximum Daily Loads being calculated accurately in regards to wastewater reaching reefs?
- Supporting and relevant data include current water quality standards and the need to determine if more stringent limits need to be implemented.
- Currently, an existing plan to eliminate ocean outfalls by 2025 is in place.

Goals/ Objectives to be achieved:

Refer to the [SEFCRI Coral Reef Management Goals and Objectives Reference Guide](#)

- FL Priorities Goal C1 / FL Priorities Goal C1 Obj. 4 / FL Priorities Goal C4 / FL Priorities Goal C4 Obj. 4.
- FDEP CRCP Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Goal B / FDEP CRCP Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Obj. 3.
- SEFCRI LAS LBSP Issue 4 Goal / SEFCRI LAS LBSP Issue 4 Goal Obj. 2 / SEFCRI LAS LBSP Issue 4 Goal Obj. 3 / SEFCRI LAS MICCI Issue 2 Goal.