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**Testimony of Rep. Ron Klein (FL-22)
Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice and Science
National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration
Coral Reef Programs**

Thank you, Chairman Mollohan and Ranking Member Frelinghuysen, for holding this important hearing today for the Commerce, Justice and Science budget for fiscal year 2009, and for giving me this unique opportunity to address the importance of coral reef research and the National Coral Reef Institute, which is located in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida.

As you well know, 2008 is the International Year of the Reef. As such, I want to focus my remarks on the importance of supporting the U.S. National Action Plan for coral reefs and NOAA's stated mission to conserve and preserve our nation's precious coral reef resources, particularly since they are under ever-increasing threats from natural and man-made causes.

My Congressional District is home to a large population of coral reefs, many of them near our world-renowned shoreline. Along with their intrinsic environmental value, these marine resources provide billions of dollars in direct economic impact, support important fisheries, and are cornerstones of vital tourism industries. Perhaps most importantly, coral reefs provide a vital first-line of defense against hurricanes and storm surges for our coastal communities, protecting precious human lives along with vast amounts of personal and commercial property.

The economic value of Florida's coral reefs is staggering. In 2000, Broward County, FL and NOAA conducted an economic study that determined Southeast Florida reefs have an annual economic impact of over \$6 billion and account for over 60,000 jobs. In Broward County alone, the economic impact is over \$2 billion.

These numbers reflect what has become known about Florida's coral reef population. We are not just a significant source of coral reefs. Florida in fact has the greatest proportion of coral reefs in America. Publishing in the scientific journal *Coral Reefs* in 2005, a team of NOAA scientists measured the area of coral reef ecosystems within the various regions of the United States. They found that Florida has 84% of the nation's reefs. Combined with Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, Atlantic and Caribbean reefs account for nearly 91% of all reefs in U.S. waters.

But funding for coral reef conservation and research does not reflect the actual distribution of reefs across U.S. waters. Under the current funding formula established in the *Coral Reef Conservation Act*, funds under the Coral Reef Conservation Programs are distributed 40% to the Atlantic and Caribbean, 40% to the Pacific, and 20% for NOAA to be used at its discretion. It

should be noted that NOAA has long sought to eliminate this formula in order to gain flexibility to spend additional funds on Pacific reefs.

Make no mistake that in no way do I intend to minimize the value or importance of Pacific reefs. Coral reefs are precious and valuable throughout our great country as well as the world, and in no way would I wish to jeopardize coral reef conservation and research by robbing Peter to pay Paul.

My purpose here today is to emphasize the importance of continued funding for Atlantic and Caribbean reefs. They are an essential part of our ocean's ecosystem and support significant amounts of economic activity while maintaining coastal population densities twenty times those of the Pacific. Coral reefs are dying in alarming numbers in Atlantic and Caribbean waters. Last summer, a bleaching event affected 80% of Caribbean reefs and killed half of the coral population. In addition, two coral species indigenous to Atlantic and Caribbean waters recently were placed on the endangered species list.

With this knowledge in mind, I respectfully request that the Committee increase overall funding for coral reef programs and in particular for the Coral Reef Institutes. There are three U.S. Coral Reef Institutes that provide outstanding scientific research and capacity, critically supporting state and local coral reef resource managers and local action strategies while providing a highly coordinated approach to pure scientific research that is management oriented.

The three institutes are located Florida, Puerto Rico, and Hawaii. The National Coral Reef Institute (NCRI) in Ft. Lauderdale, FL and the other institutes serve as a ready source of knowledge, research, monitoring, and management support for corals and coral reefs via partnerships between academia, NOAA, and other federal, state and local managers.

The three Institutes have been supported by the Congress since 1998, and their total funding in FY 2006 was \$3 million. Language authorizing funding for all three institutes is contained in H.R. 1205, the *Coral Reef Conservation Amendments Act of 2007*, as well as the Senate version, S. 1580. I am a proud cosponsor of the House version, which passed last year.

In FY 2008, the Omnibus appropriations bill provided in excess of \$4 million above the Administration's request. However, NOAA officials have informed me that only the Hawaii Coral Reef Institute will receive funding, which I believe was not the House Appropriations Committee's intent, and was certainly not my desired allocation.

I want to ensure that this funding oversight will not occur in FY 2009 and ask that the Committee provide clear direction to NOAA that funds are provided for the Coral Reef Institutes in Florida and Puerto Rico as well.

Finally, I would like to extend a warm invitation to all of my colleagues to visit South Florida this summer and participate in the 11th International Coral Reef Symposium, held on July 7-11 in Ft. Lauderdale. The ICRS is the largest meeting of coral reef scientists, managers, and conservationist in the world. NCRI submitted a successful bid on behalf of NOAA and the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Agencies to host the symposium, and it will be the first time that this prestigious meeting has been held in the United States in over 30 years. By visiting, you will not only participate in cutting-edge discussions on coral reefs with over 2,500 attendees from around

the world, but you will get to see firsthand their importance to our ecology, economy, and unparalleled quality-of-life.

I thank you again for providing me this opportunity to share my views and applaud your leadership toward shaping the Commerce, Justice, and Science budget for FY '09.