

Policy Committee:

Governor of State of Florida
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Designee: Ms. Patricia Harris

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Senator Ana Maria Rodriguez
Designee: Senator Heana Garcia

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Mr. Chancey Goss
Designee: Mr. Scott Wagner

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July 14, 2025

Re: Miami River Commission's (MRC) Recommended Revisions to the Manatee Protection Plan

Dear Honorable Mayor Daniella Levine Cava,

On July 14, 2025 the Miami River Commission's (MRC) public meeting agenda included the Department of Environmental Resource Management's (DERM) draft revisions to the Manatee Protection Plan. I appreciate the participation of DERM employee Rockell Alhale.

The Miami River is a distinct waterway covered by the Countywide Manatee Protection Plan. Port Miami River is one of three Congressionally authorized navigation channels in addition to Government Cut and the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway. While the proposed amended plan breaks out information, e.g., Marine Operating Plans, etc., specifically for the Miami River, the jurisdiction and responsibilities of the MRC are not delineated in the proposed Plan. The MRC recommends that the final adopted plan clearly indicate those portions applicable to only the Miami River and specifies the coordination role of the MRC set out in state legislation.

The Miami River Commission unanimously voted to respectfully recommend the following revisions to the Manatee Protection Plan:

- 1) Create a Manatee Protection Fund dedicated to manatee habitat & law enforcement enforcing the Miami River's idle no wake speed zone, enforcement against illegal operations, and code compliance against illegal charters. This was the Manatee Protection Plan Review Committee's adopted "Motion 22". This revision should be made on page 107-110 of DERM's track changed draft revisions to the Manatee Protection Plan. The County's previous Manatee Protection Plan Review Committee made specific recommendations about funding for a range of actions, including significant increases in enforcement, and that the existing plan and any future amended plan will only be successful if accompanied by a funding increase.

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- 2) Increase fines for violation of the idle no wake speed zone, and escalate fines and consequences for repeat offenders. This was the Manatee Protection Plan Review Committee's adopted "Motion 1". This revision should be made in the policies goals and objective section starting on page on page 112 of DERM's track changed draft revisions to the Manatee Protection Plan.
- 3) Keep the Manatee Protection Plan's current "For the purposes of application of Marine Facility Siting Criteria for manatee protection to permitting of such facilities, an 'existing marine facility' is one that has been in use and possesses all required environmental approvals at any time since October 28, 1984." This was the Manatee Protection Plan Review Committee's adopted "Motion 10". (DERM 's proposed track changed revisions page 16 proposes to revise that date to become, "Existing marine facility—for the purposes of this plan, the definition of an existing boat facility is one which is operating with all required authorizations and is currently producing boat traffic, or has recently produced boat traffic in the past five years"). This revision should be made on page 16 to the definition of Existing Marine Facility in DERM's track changed draft revisions to the Manatee Protection Plan.
- 4) Allow slip transfers from one property to another property in either direction on the Miami River and its tributaries. This was the Manatee Protection Plan Review Committee's adopted "Motion 5 & 6". This revision should be made on page 104 of DERM's track changed draft revisions to the Manatee Protection Plan.
- 5) Currently Waterborne Transportation / Water Taxi is allowed on the Miami River up to the 5 Street Bridge. Revise the Manatee Protection Plan to allow Waterborne Transportation / Water Taxi on the entire Miami River and its tributaries, which is currently allowed in the Broward County Manatee Protection Plan (Fort Lauderdale's "New River") and the Palm Beach Manatee Protection Plan, which were both approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission. This was the Manatee Protection Plan Review Committee's adopted "Motion 9". This revision should be made on page 98 of DERM's track changed draft revisions to the Manatee Protection Plan.

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- 6) On the Miami River, revise the Plan to remove “Waterborne Transportation / Water Taxi”, vessels visiting parks and restaurants from the “Transitory Boat Slip” category / definition. Similar to other counties, do not count transitory slips towards the slip count. This was the Manatee Protection Plan Review Committee’s adopted “Motion 9”. This revision should be made to the definition of “Transitory Boat Slip” found on page 19 of DERM’s track changed draft revisions to the Manatee Protection Plan.
- 7) In City of Miami Riverfront properties zoned D3 Marine Industrial and in Unincorporated Miami Dade County’s portion of the Miami River (west of 27 Ave), allow increased boat slips in order to attract job generating marine industrial businesses. This revision should be made on page 112 forward of DERM’s track changed draft revisions to the Manatee Protection Plan.
- 8) On the Miami River, allow increased flexibility and slip counts for dry stack storage. This revision should be made on page 112 forward of DERM’s track changed draft revisions to the Manatee Protection Plan.
- 9) On the Miami River, revise the vessel to linear feet of shoreline ratio in Parks and Residential to 1 vessel per 50 feet. This revision should be made on page 87, under “new facilities” in DERM’s track changed draft revisions to the Manatee Protection Plan.
- 10) A revision to the Manatee Protection Plan on the Miami River, do not count vessels over 100’ towards the allowable slip count, as currently done in other portions of Miami-Dade County. For example, if a Marine Industrial zoned site with 500 linear feet located west of 27 Ave has a Marine Operating Permit which allows 8 slips, they could have 8 slips in dry stack plus 5 x 100’ vessels along the shoreline. This revision should be made on page 95 of DERM’s track changed draft revisions to the Manatee Protection Plan.

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11) Insert "working with Miami River Commission to help Manatee's." This revision should be made on page 110 of DERM's track changed draft revisions to the Manatee Protection Plan.

Going forward, the MRC respectfully recommends that Miami-Dade County engage the MRC and Miami River stakeholders in any proposed changes to the Plan impacting the Miami River. The MRC cordially invites Miami-Dade County to please participate in the MRC's subsequent public meeting with this item on the agenda again September 8, noon, 101 W Flagler, in the library's auditorium, and other future Public MRC meetings to continue providing a public forum. Open discussion in publicly noticed meetings provides the best opportunity that when this revised legislation is eventually filed with the Miami-Dade County Commission for consideration, it will be successfully adopted.

Sincerely,

Horacio Stuart Aguirre
Chairman,
Miami River Commission

Jim Murley,
Vice Chairman,
Miami River Commission

Cc: Board of County Commissioners
Roy Coley, Chief Utilities and Regulatory Services Officer
Jimmy Morales, Chief of Operations
Loren Parra, Chief, Office of Environment Risk and Resilience
Lourdes Gomez, Director RER
Lisa Spadafina, Deputy Director RER
Rockell Alhale, DERM