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Congress of the United States
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APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
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ENVIRONMENT

November 23, 2020

Dear NOAA Marine Debris Program Staff and Removal Project Review Panel,

I am writing you today in continued support of the Ocean Aid 360 project proposal for detection and retrieval of derelict crab traps and fishing gear in six Florida estuaries. This proposal has been designed in consultation with Florida's Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and will be submitted in response to NOAA solicitation: *FY21 Marine Debris Removal (NOAA-NOS-ORR-2021-2006587)*.

As Congressman for Florida's 13th Congressional District - which encompasses the Ocean Aid 360 home district and FY18 Ghost Trap Rodeo target site - and member of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, I understand the dangers that derelict traps pose to NOAA Trust Resources as they 'ghost fish' unchecked throughout Florida estuaries.

My District depends on healthy, living marine resources and habitats, to support our coastal economy through tourism, and both commercial and recreational fisheries. As such, this marine debris removal project has wide stakeholder support, as evidenced by Ocean Aid 360's project collaborators at the Coastal Conservation Association of Florida (CCA) and in the private sector.

Based on our local experience hosting the Ghost Trap Rodeo 2018-2019, which collected over 26,000 pounds of marine debris from Tampa Bay waters, including over 400 derelict traps, I can confirm that the proposed project is successful in its approach to mobilizing diverse groups of local stakeholders - boaters, anglers, watershed groups and private entities - who are provided with adequate education and oversight as they engage in sponsored cleanups and a data-driven inventory of bycatch species. Furthermore, I am keen to see this concept exported to assist and inform other Florida districts, to protect natural resources through a hands-on volunteer-based approach.

Finally, Ocean Aid 360 has shared information with my office, related to the proposed project budget; and I support their federal funding request which is anticipated to be approximately \$125,000 per year. I believe that the equivalent, non-federal, cost sharing which has been pledged by this organization demonstrates their dedication to the cause, as well as an opportunity

to leverage public and community partnership toward quantifiable and long-term ecological habitat improvements for NOAA Trust Resources in the six Florida estuaries near Pensacola Bay, St. Andrew Bay, Tampa Bay, Sarasota Bay, Estero Bay, and St. Augustine Beach.

I thank you for your attention to this matter and ask that Ocean Aid 360's application is given fair consideration, in accordance with the rules and regulations for this program. Please contact my office with any questions or concerns with regard to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charlie Crist". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Charlie" and the last name "Crist" clearly legible.

Charlie Crist
US Congressman