

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** July 1, 2008

**CONTACT:** Sarah Williams, (850) 245-2112 or (850) 519-2897

**DEP HIGHLIGHTS MARINE PROTECTION WITH CORAL REEF SYMPOSIUM  
AND NEW LAW PROTECTING OCEAN RESOURCES IN SOUTHEAST FLORIDA**

*--Legislation will improve coastal water quality, better protect the coral reef system--*

**TALLAHASSEE** - Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Secretary Michael W. Sole will provide opening remarks during the 11<sup>th</sup> International Coral Reef Symposium, July 7 - 11, 2008, in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. Hosted by the United States and Florida, this is the first time the conference has been held on the mainland United States in more than 30 years. The worldwide gathering of leaders will discuss coral reef protection strategies as well as research priorities to further protection of sensitive coral ecosystems.

"Florida is proud to help sponsor this internationally-recognized conference that brings together thousands of representatives from the marine science, resource management, conservation and policy-making communities," said DEP Secretary Michael W. Sole. "By collaborating with our partners on the best available current science, as well as future research, we can better protect our coral reef systems, and continue to preserve these vital habitats that provide shelter, food, breeding and nursery areas for a rich and diverse assortment of marine life, including important recreational and commercial fisheries."

Furthering protection for Florida's marine environment, Governor Crist yesterday signed into law Senate Bill 1302, which will eliminate the use of ocean outfalls for wastewater disposal in southeast Florida. Six existing outfalls along the southeast coast between Delray Beach and Miami currently discharge 300 million gallons a day of treated wastewater into the ocean. The law prohibits the construction of new ocean outfall pipes or the expansion of the existing outfalls on the Southeast Florida coast.

"With this law, Florida will protect the coastal environment along the Southeast coast and turn what was a waste product into a valuable water resource - a significant step forward for wastewater policy in our state," said DEP Secretary Michael W. Sole. "I applaud Governor Crist, the Florida Legislature, our agency staff, and all those involved for their support and hard work on this initiative."

The law represents the culmination of years of positive momentum and hard work by environmentalists, citizens and public officials across Florida. To eliminate the use of ocean outfalls, the law requires each wastewater facility to:

- Develop a detailed plan by 2013 to significantly decrease the nutrients discharged through the outfalls by 2018.
- Eliminate the use of outfalls as the primary disposal method for wastewater by 2025.
- Use sixty percent of the water previously discharged from these outfalls for urban and agricultural landscape irrigation, industrial and commercial uses, and for augmenting or recharging surface and groundwater supplies.

Taking place during the International Year of the Reef, the International Coral Reef Symposium convenes every four years, and is recognized as the largest and most important scientific conference disseminating the latest knowledge about coral reefs worldwide. Sponsored in part by the Symposium as well as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the International Coral Reef Initiative, the International Year of the Reef is a worldwide campaign to raise awareness about the value and importance of coral reefs and threats to their sustainability.

*Reefs for the Future* is the theme of this Symposium, highlighting the importance of the world's coral reefs, as well as the urgent need for heightened awareness and action to protect them. Degradation and destruction of coral reefs from pollution, overfishing, coastal development and climate change threatens these ecosystems on a global scale. Scientists, policymakers, conservationists, and managers are developing knowledge and implementing science-based strategies to improve and increase coral reef protection. The Symposium will focus on current science addressing concepts such as reef structure and function, ecological processes, ecosystem-based management, and human interactions. Field trips and workshops will provide hands-on experience and participation with leaders in the marine science field.

An extensive, beautiful coral reef ecosystem stretches more than 100 miles along the southeast Florida coast, from Miami-Dade to Martin County. These reefs are part of the third longest reef system in the world and are one of the greatest natural resources in Florida and the United States.

The State of Florida, in partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association, also manages the world-renowned coral reefs in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary in partnership. This partnership has helped monitor and protect this fragile coral ecosystem for 30 years.

For more information, visit [www.dep.state.fl.us](http://www.dep.state.fl.us). For more information on the 11<sup>th</sup> International Coral Reef Symposium, visit <http://www.nova.edu/ncri/11icrs/>.

