

**Biscayne Bay Commission Minutes**  
**Sept. 7, 2023, at 9:00 am EST**  
**Florida International University's Biscayne Bay Campus and GoToWebinar**

**General subject matter overview:** The Biscayne Bay Commission meets to review and discuss plans to address water quality impairments as well as the priority projects and financial resources that could address these plans.

<b>Attendee Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Status</b>
Noah Valenstein	Chair	Present
Adam Blalock	Vice Chair	Present
Danielle Cohen Higgins	Commission Member	Not Present
Kevin Cabrera	Commission Member	Present (Online)
Micky Steinberg	Commission Member	Present
Tim Meerbott	Commission Member	Present
Scott Wagner	Commission Member	Not Present
Dr. Thomas Reinert	Commission Member	Present
Spencer Crowley III	Commission Member	Present

**Welcome and Introduction**

Jon Moore from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Southeast Regulatory District welcomes the room and asks all to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. He informs the audience that the meeting is being recorded, a copy of the agenda is available for in-person and virtual attendees and that public comments are due by Sept. 14, 2023. Public comments may be emailed to [BBCommission@FloridaDEP.gov](mailto:BBCommission@FloridaDEP.gov). Mr. Moore thanks Florida International University for hosting.

**Commission Procedural Items**

Chair Valenstein takes roll call and requests a motion to approve minutes from the April 26, 2023, commission meeting. Commissioner Crowley makes this motion and Commissioner Meerbott seconds; all are in favor.

**Florida's Coral Reef Water Quality Data Compilation, Analysis and Decision Support**

Dr. Luke McEachron of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission presents about a DEP-funded initiative to analyze water quality data and compare trends on the offshore coral reef. The goal of the project is to assess all nutrient monitoring programs for like comparisons and to create a unified South Florida monitoring framework. Key points and recommendations from the presentation include considerations for geographic sampling locations, effective data comparison through trend analysis, improving consistency of naming conventions and additional long term and active sampling programs. While this presentation focuses on Florida's Coral Reef, Dr. McEachron notes that there are ongoing complimentary efforts from the Biscayne Bay and Reef Observation, Interpretation and Prediction System (B-BROIPS).

The commission asks for clarification on how long this project has been active, how it relates to Biscayne Bay and if monitoring will be extended in the future. They discuss issues with data collection and processing by certified labs. It is recommended to have a set of parameters for non-profits and other organizations to use that ensures their data is consistent with state datasets, including using water sampling facilities with data collection for at least 5 years. Dr. McEachron emphasizes that both DEP and FWC have been working closely on this project for a long time.

### **Overview of Miami-Dade County's Biscayne Bay Watershed Management Advisory Board Annual Report-2022**

Irela Bague, the Chief Bay Officer for Miami-Dade County, presents on accomplishments detailed in the recent Biscayne Bay Watershed Management Advisory Board Annual Report (2022). Highlights include: 80% of Biscayne Bay Task Force Recommendations have been either started or completed, over \$20 million dollars were awarded with match from the county and development began for the Reasonable Assurance Plan (RAP). Biscayne Bay Task Force legislative highlights include a fertilizer ordinance, plastic free marine debris reduction initiatives, an upcoming Biscayne Bay Economic Study and a Biscayne Bay Friendly Education Campaign. Miami-Dade County also submitted 2023 funding applications under the Biscayne Bay Water Quality Grants, Resilient Florida Planning Grants and Florida Wastewater Grants. Ms. Bague laid out a call to action to the commissioners, asking to turn the Biscayne Water Quality Grant into a recurring funding source to support the future of their work.

The commission asks questions regarding the projects that have been completed and if there are any impediments. Commissioner Crowley expresses he would like to see more effective spending on activities within stormwater retrofitting and septic to sewer conversions. He suggests the commission focus on ensuring funds are being spent on appropriate projects that will make a difference. Commissioner Crowley states that the time for conducting studies and creating new plans is over. There have been improvements over the past decades, but there is more funding now, so it's time to take action. Commissioner Crowley also stresses the importance of public engagement and educational outreach. Vice Chair Blalock offered his thoughts on this issue. There has been more discussion on implementing solutions rather than just monitoring and sampling. A Reasonable Assurance Plan will give critical data on load allocations, uncovering the high-priority projects that reduce nutrients in the most impactful way. Chair Valenstein also agreed with Commissioner Crowley's wishes and offered that having increased funding backed by the certainty of consistent funding can catalyze people to think bigger and make a larger impact. Ms. Bague responds that recurring funding has allowed Miami-Dade County to address some of the larger issues and that planning tools help track projects and focus effectiveness but that additional funding is still required to complete unmet needs. The commission also discusses the status and distinctions between Miami-Dade County's RAP and the watershed plan and how it will prioritize the larger issue of implementing projects.

Vice Chair Blalock states that the DEP Biscayne Bay grant deadlines have been extended by two weeks, until Sept. 14, 2023. This allows applicants extra time to submit their proposals after the recent hurricane impacts in Florida.

### **Biscayne Bay Commission Strategic Plan Development**

Mollie Sinnott, of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, presents an overview of the draft Biscayne Bay Commission Strategic Plan. The presentation reviews sections in the draft plan, including existing plans and programs, status of the Biscayne Bay RAP, water quality project

implementation/tracking and strategic goals. In developing these elements, the department sought not to duplicate or overlap what is already being tracked and documented by Miami-Dade. The presentation focuses on strategic goals parameters, which fall into three primary topics: water quality monitoring, improved communication and public outreach and addressing sources of nutrients and restoration needs. Ms. Sinnott presents information on each primary topic that correlates with these parameters. Additionally, Ms. Sinnott solicits feedback from the commission members both during and after the presentation. Their comments will be incorporated into the draft plan.

The commission discusses the main goals presented, including adding source identification and being sure not to duplicate efforts already being conducted by other agencies. The purpose of the strategic plan is reiterated, that it is meant to synthesize what the commission has learned, consolidate existing efforts, identify funding sources and relay information from the local level up to the legislature. The commission suggests additions and streamlining of certain topics like data collection, monitoring and public engagement to include public use/public access. There's a priority mentioned to add in a habitat restoration goal into the strategic plan for the health of the bay and where that can fit into another section of the strategic plan. Feedback will be incorporated into the strategic plan, shared with the member entities and their representatives for further review, then presented as a final draft during the next meeting.

### **Public Comments**

Public comments are opened and led by Jon Moore. Each commenter is limited to three minutes.

- In-person commenter: Dave Doebler, Co-Founder of Volunteercleanup.org.
  - Discusses concerns with the spoil island maintenance in Biscayne Bay, especially relating to litter and limited trash pickups.
- Virtual commenter: Rachel Silverstein.
  - Discusses impacts from the Port of Miami dredging project and how it affected Florida's Coral Reef.
- Virtual commenter: Laura Reynolds.
  - Discusses the Biscayne Bay and Reef Observation, Interpretation and Prediction System (B-BROIPS) project, currently being funded by DEP and conducted by several persons at the Florida International University. Announces there is a workshop coming up on Sept. 20, 2023.
- Virtual commenter: Aliza Karim.
  - Discusses the lack of water quality standards and numeric nutrient criteria, as well as the importance of data comparability.

### **Commission Discussion**

Chair Valenstein starts by recognizing there has been a lot of discussion throughout this meeting. Commissioner Meerbott highlights two main topics that came up during the meeting: a need for increased and recurring funding and the need for the legislature to understand the critical role of funding to support current work and future goals in the bay. Vice Chair Blalock thanks everyone for their presentations and attendance today and expresses interest in hearing a presentation about the FIU

project mentioned earlier. Commissioner Meerbott offers to hold the next meeting in Cutler Bay. Commissioner Crowley requests a presentation by the Department of Transportation to discuss stormwater in Miami-Dade County and the intersection with water quality.

Chair Valenstein summarizes the meeting, addresses Dave Doebler's public comment and suggests coordination with federal entities to ensure the commission is meeting its statutory goals. Reminder to continue homework and project tracker updates. Announcement that the next meeting will be held in Cutler Bay.

### **Closing Remarks and Adjournment**

Chair Valenstein makes closing remarks and reminds attendees that comments are due by Sept. 14, 2023. The meeting is adjourned.