

County of Monroe

The Florida Keys



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Mayor David Rice
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January 19, 2018

RE: Monroe County Marine Pumpout Program

To Whom It May Concern:

Residents and visitors from all over the world are drawn to the Florida Keys by our clear and bountiful waters. In fact, tourism is the County's chief economic driver. The Monroe County Commission has determined that clean water benefits every person, property, and business in the Florida Keys.

Historically, Monroe County has been vitally concerned about the health and vitality of our water resources. We have moved aggressively to eliminate point sources of pollution (such as septic tanks). The Florida Legislature required the County and Florida Keys Aqueduct Authority establish Keys-Wide central sewer collection and treatment. And, Monroe County deployed land-based pumpout facilities throughout the Keys to prevent the unlawful discharge of marine sewage.

Despite these efforts over many years, most of our nearshore waters remained imperiled due to the high concentration of boats. A few years ago, the Monroe County Commission entered into a public/private partnership with the Florida DEP, the Federal Clean Vessel Act, Mote Marine Laboratory and PumpOut USA, Inc., to establish a first-of-its-kind mobile marine pumpout service, which provides FREE pumpouts to the Keys boating community.

Monroe County's mobile marine pumpout program run by PumpOut USA, Inc. (the Program) is working amazingly well. For example, despite Monroe County's investments in land-based (marina) pumpout systems (since 1992), this past year the Program collected and properly disposed of over 10 times the combined amount of marine sewage than all Keys land-based sewage pumpout facilities.

We have recently learned through the data collected through the Program that marine-generated sewage has played a leading role in the decline in Keys water quality. Within three years, the Program had already recovered and properly disposed of more than a Million gallons of marine sewage. The Program is now recovering almost half million gallons of raw marine sewage each year. This is critical to our water quality. According to the FDEP, marine sewage is between 9 and 15 times more concentrated than household sewage, and the chemical additives (which are used to deodorize marine sewage holding tanks) further compound the harmful effects on our marine environment. Monroe County's Program is presently recovering the net equivalent of 4 – 8 million gallons of household sewage each year!

The effect this Program has had on nearshore water quality in the Florida Keys cannot be overstated. Since this Program commenced the water bodies, once imperiled, are now plentiful with wildlife and are again enjoyed by our residents and millions of our visitors.

Most-importantly, the pumpout Program has changed the culture and mindset of the Florida Keys boating community. In the beginning, vessel owners were skeptical about pump-outs in general. Today, most boaters in the Keys not only support the program, but actively advocate on the Program's behalf. Our County has come to appreciate the Program so much that (just like household garbage collection services) it is now consider an "essential quality of life" service. The Monroe County Commission is currently in the process of determining how to implement dedicated funding sources to ensure the benefits of the Program are sustainable for generations to come.

In conclusion, as Mayor of Monroe County, I can personally attest to the fact that the Monroe County Marine Pumpout Program has become a proactive, practical, and comprehensive solution to our marine pollution problems. For all these reasons, I am pleased to recommend the expansion of a similar program in other coastal regions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "D. Rice".

David Rice, Mayor
Monroe County Board of Commissioners