STOP THE SKYWAY CRUISE PORT TALKING POINTS

We oppose the proposed multi-berth cruise terminal at the Knott-Cowen Tract because it is incompatible with the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve's legal protections, economic importance to Tampa Bay, ecological significance, and long-term public benefit.

LEGAL PROTECTIONS:

- Although the Knott-Cowen Tract is privately owned, it lies within the geographic boundaries of one of the state's coveted Aquatic Preserves and is part of a high-quality, interconnected ecosystem.
- The Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve (TCAP) was created to be conserved forever in its highest state; rezoning the private landholdings to heavy industrial is incompatible with that protection.
- The waters within the geographic boundary of the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve are designated as Outstanding Florida Waters and are therefore afforded the highest protection under state law. Any activity that could degrade water quality is prohibited unless clearly in the public interest and no reasonable alternative location exists.
- The Knott-Cowen Tract is located within 3 overlay districts (Coastal High Hazard Area, Coastal Evacuation Area, and Coastal Planning Area) designated by Manatee County Government as special areas requiring stricter oversight due to flood risk and the potential harm to life and property for nearby communities.
- Heavy industrial zoning is inconsistent with the intent of Florida laws to protect this sensitive environment that provides enormous public benefit.

ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE AND PUBLIC BENEFITS:

- One in ten regional jobs depends on a healthy bay.
- Tampa Bay's natural systems generate more than $32 billion annually, and the area proposed for the cruise port represents the last remaining intact, undeveloped stretch of the bay.
- In 2025, an estimated 364,140 anglers spent approximately $767 million on fishing-related purchases in the Tampa Bay region, a fishery supported by the wetlands and habitats of TCAP.
- Over the past five years, an average of 12% of all the food and baitfish caught in Florida have come from Tampa Bay, much of it supported by Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve, the bay's last large natural, undeveloped area.

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ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

- The proposed cruise port is sandwiched within the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve, which encompasses 21,736 acres of largely unaltered seagrass meadows, mangroves, salt marshes, tidal flats, live hardbottom, oyster bars, and clam beds.
- Nearly 700 benthic species and 200 unique fish species have been documented in the area.
- The project footprint includes:
  - 113 acres (85 football fields) of **seagrass beds** that filter water and provide a nursery for recreationally and commercially important fish species.
  - 122.6 acres (more than 85 football fields) of **mangrove forests and salt marshes** that provide shoreline stabilization, storm buffering, habitat, and nutrient cycling.
  - 4.5 acres (over 3 football fields) of **live hardbottom and shellfish resources** that support biological diversity and serve as an important migratory corridor and spawning habitat for fish species.
- All the ecosystems described are interconnected, highly productive, and protect significant numbers of endangered and threatened species, including but not limited to Florida manatee, roseate spoonbill (*Platalea ajaja*), little blue heron (*Egretta caerulea*), tricolored heron (*Egretta tricolor*), least tern (*Sternula antillarum*), snowy egret (*Egretta thula*), reddish egret (*Egretta rufescens*), and American oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliates*).

DOCUMENTED RISKS WITH CRUISE PORT DEVELOPMENT:

- Dredging and increased ship traffic would destroy sensitive seagrass and hardbottom habitats, negatively impacting commercial and recreational fisheries.
- Dredging deep channels for cruise ships in TCAP's shallow waters increases the risk to life and property by increasing high tides and storm surges.
- Dredging for the project would significantly degrade water quality by resuspending toxic heavy metals and other contaminants, posing risks to shellfish, fish, and human health.
- Following dredging associated with the Port of Miami expansion (2013–2015), researchers documented impacts to corals up to one-half mile from the dredged channel due to dredging-induced sedimentation, with impacts likely extending between 3 and 6 miles from the dredge area.

References

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