

COMMENTARY

South Florida Should Urge Passage of Water Resources Bill to Help Port Everglades

Commentary by
Brendan Aloysius Barry

In 1997, Port Everglades started the process of planning for its future — a future that includes post-Panamax and Aframax vessels. In June 2015 with the issuance of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers chief's report, the project took a leap forward, clearing the way for an expansion plan to deepen and widen the Port.

The next step is federal government authorization as set forth in the Water Resources Development Act of 2016, or WRDA. Its passage will authorize the corps to pursue the port expansion, the restoration of the Florida Everglades

and other national environmental restoration projects.

On a recent trip to Washington, I visited with members of Congress to discuss why deepening and widening Port Everglades as proposed in the WRDA bill is vital to South Florida's business community as well as the global supply chain.

Port Everglades is Florida's No. 1 port by revenue (\$27 billion in 2014, importing \$13.52 billion and exporting \$13.62 billion), No. 11 in the U.S. for containers



Barry Brendan, Shutts & Bowen and board member of the Port Everglades Association

by volume, one of the top three cruise ports in the world and the supplier of approximately 90 percent of South Florida's fuel with direct

pipelines for aviation fuel to Miami International and Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International, and a constant truck supply route to Palm Beach International.

Timing for the project is essential as post-Panamax and Aframax vessels are currently docking in Port Everglades. According to Sam Stephenson, president of the Florida Harbor Pilots Association, these larger ships will reduce the overall number of passages through the Port's narrow channels, thereby creating larger safety margins and reducing the overall carbon footprint.

However, with Port Everglades' current depth of 42 feet, the larger vessels must first stop in Freeport, Bahamas, and offload sufficient cargo to lighten the vessel to 41 feet before they can berth in Port Everglades. This requires a second, smaller vessel to pick up the offloaded

cargo and bring it to port. This, of course, will no longer be necessary with the expansion.

The port project can be accomplished without environmental damage. Port Everglades and Broward County are at the forefront of oceanography, marine science, environmental conservation and habitat protection.

As Broward County Commissioner Chip LaMarca has correctly pointed out, Broward has some of the world's premier resources available to it in terms of reef research and monitoring. According to Richard E. Dodge, dean of the college and executive director of Nova Southeastern University's National Coral Reef Institute, where they have propagated living corals, the university is available to assist in design, oversight, monitoring and mitigation of any project that could impact the marine environment.

The deepening and widening of Port Everglades, as set forth in the WRDA bill, will reduce the local carbon footprint left by these ships, will create a larger safety margin in which the harbor pilots can operate and is projected to create 7,000 new jobs regionally and support 135,000 new jobs statewide. The project will be completed and monitored in an environmentally sensitive manner and is poised to become the model for future projects.

It is important that the business community and local officials continue to speak with a unified voice in support of WRDA to ensure congressional approval in the near future.

***Brendan Aloysius Barry** is a partner with Shutts & Bowen in Fort Lauderdale and a Port Everglades Association board member.*