

PROTECT SAFE REEF ACCESS

A Safety Briefing for Hollywood City Commissioners

Prepared by Hollywood Beach Residents & Reef Safety Advocates

WHY HOLLYWOOD'S SITUATION IS UNIQUE

- The Florida Coral Reef Tract is the **5th largest coral reef ecosystem in the world** — the only one accessible from shore in the continental U.S. — and its habitat comes **closer to Hollywood than nearly anywhere else in Florida**.
- Hollywood's own **Mermaid Reefs sit 160–185 yards from shore**, installed specifically to promote shore snorkeling, eco-tourism, and reef conservation. **Perry Rocks reef begins at 218 yards** and extends to 330 yards — right where the proposed buoy line would sit.
- Hollywood's unparalleled public beach parking and close reef access make it **one of the most popular shore-to-reef entry points in the region** — drawing more shore snorkelers and divers than any neighboring city.
- Hollywood Beach is ranked **#4 Best Beach in the U.S.** (Tripadvisor 2024) — above Fort Lauderdale at #15 — and holds the national **Blue Wave Beach Award** recognizing excellence in water quality, safety, habitat conservation, and environmental stewardship. These distinctions reflect a city that leads rather than follows.

3 SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS WE RESPECTFULLY ASK YOU TO WEIGH

1. THE PROPOSED BOUNDARY AND THE DIVE FLAG LAW

- Florida law (**Fla. Stat. § 327.331**) requires boats to stay **100 yards from any dive-down flag**.
- With Mermaid Reefs at 185 yards from shore, dive flag law requires boats to remain at least **285 yards from shore** when snorkelers are present — yet the proposed boundary is 218 yards.
- This places boats **inside the legally required buffer zone** before anchor drift is even considered.
- With a standard 5:1 anchor scope in 15 ft of water and prevailing east winds, a vessel anchored at 218 yards can swing **directly over Mermaid Reef snorkelers** — confirmed by basic seamanship math.

2. A BOUNDARY AT 218 YARDS MAY INTRODUCE NEW BOAT TRAFFIC INTO ACTIVE SNORKELING AREAS

- Hollywood's current boundary sits at **300 yards** — boats are not currently permitted at 218 yards over these reef areas. A new boundary at 218 yards would officially invite boat traffic into zones they are not currently allowed to operate in.
- Perry Rocks, one of Hollywood's most popular snorkeling destinations, **begins right at 218 yards** and extends to 330 yards. Boats do not currently travel through this area — a boundary at 218 yards would change that, positioning boat traffic directly over active snorkelers.
- We respectfully suggest that buoys placed at the correct distance would achieve the same goal of clear demarcation — while keeping boats and snorkelers safely separated.

3. AN OPPORTUNITY TO SET A STANDARD NO OTHER CITY HAS SET

- Hollywood holds the **Blue Wave Beach Award** — a national certification recognizing excellence in water quality, **safety, habitat conservation**, and environmental stewardship

- Hollywood invested in **Mermaid Reefs at 160–185 yards** — closer to shore than any comparable installation in the region — with natural reefs just beyond. No other city has promoted shore snorkeling access quite like this.
- Because of this unique combination of nearshore artificial and natural reefs, Hollywood has an opportunity to set a **safety standard specifically designed to protect shore snorkelers and divers** — something no other city has done.
- **Most boundaries in our region were designed to protect beach swimmers.** Because Hollywood has actively created and promoted shore-to-reef snorkeling access, we have a unique responsibility to extend that same protection to the snorkelers and divers we are drawing to our waters.
- Boats over reef areas can disturb natural wildlife — scaring away sea turtles, fish, and marine life that snorkelers and boaters alike come to experience. A boundary past the reef ledge would protect that experience for everyone.
- Hollywood has a **wide sandy bottom beyond 430 yards** — a boundary past the nearshore reef ledge would naturally encourage boats to anchor in sand rather than over reef habitat, benefiting boaters, snorkelers, and the reef alike.

A NOTE ON THE CURRENT BOUNDARY

Maintaining the existing **300-yard boundary** would be a safer outcome than moving it inward to **218 yards**. Moving further out would be better still — but moving closer in is what concerns us most.

If we get the distance right, Hollywood can protect swimmers, protect our reefs,
and set the standard for safe shore-to-reef access in our region.

OUR RESPECTFUL ASK

- Please take a little more time to review the reef maps, speak to active shore snorkelers and divers, and consider whether 218 yards truly provides the protection our reef visitors deserve.
- We remain committed to working collaboratively toward a solution that keeps everyone safe — swimmers, snorkelers, divers, and boaters alike.
- Thank you for your continued dedication to Hollywood's residents, visitors, and the extraordinary natural resource we are all working to protect.

A COLLABORATIVE REVIEW OF KEY SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

— additional data points for your consideration —

CITY'S POSITION

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

"218 yards creates a clear safety line that doesn't exist today."

- No buoys exist now — boaters and swimmers don't know where the safe zone is.
- A marked line at 218 yards gives everyone a clear boundary.

We share the goal of clear demarcation — placement is the key question.

- Hollywood's most popular snorkeling destinations — **Mermaid Reefs (160–185 yards) and Perry Rocks (218–330 yards)** — fall at or inside the proposed 218-yard line.
- A boundary placed over active snorkeling areas may create a **false sense of security** — boaters may believe they are clear of swimmers while snorkelers are actively using that same water.
- We respectfully suggest the goal of clear demarcation is best achieved by placing the boundary **where boats and swimmers are separated**, not where they overlap.
- Hollywood's current boundary is **300 yards** — boat traffic is not currently permitted at 218 yards. A new boundary would officially invite boats into areas they are not allowed to operate in today.

"Inexperienced swimmers will try to swim to farther buoys."

- Lifeguards in Miami Beach see tourists trying to swim to buoys every day.
- Farther buoys encourage dangerous long-distance swims by inexperienced people.

Hollywood's lifeguards already manage this effectively.

- Hollywood lifeguards enforce a **strict 150-foot threshold** — anyone attempting to swim further without a dive flag is called back immediately.
- A buoy farther offshore **signals greater distance**, which may actually discourage inexperienced swimmers rather than encourage them.
- **Thousands of experienced snorkelers** already swim to the first reef every year. A safety boundary should prioritize protecting where people are actually swimming — while of course remaining mindful of all water users.

"We need to match Hallandale at 218 yards for regional consistency."

- Boaters traveling north from Hallandale might unknowingly cross into Hollywood's zone if our boundary is farther out.
- No nearby municipalities have buoys beyond 300 yards.

Hollywood's unique reef profile may warrant a different approach.

- Hallandale has **0.8 miles** of shoreline — Hollywood has **7+ miles**, the longest stretch between inlets in the region.
- Hallandale has **4 non-permitted buoys** and no nearshore reef installations.
- **Dania Beach already operates with a 300-yard boundary and no buoys** — a boundary

beyond 218 yards is not unprecedented in our region.

- Hollywood has **Mermaid and natural reefs from 160 to 320 yards offshore** that no neighboring city has. Safety policy that reflects local conditions is both reasonable and appropriate.
- Boaters already adjust to pier setbacks, no-wake zones, and channel markers. A fixed boundary line is **predictable and easy to learn**.

"218 yards is safer than most cities with boundaries at 100–150 yards."

- Fort Lauderdale's boundary is only 150 yards — Hollywood at 218 is already farther out.
- Regional boundaries closer to shore suggest 218 is reasonable.

Hollywood's nearshore reef installations create a unique set of conditions.

- Most cities with boundaries at 100–150 yards are primarily protecting **beach swimmers**. While Fort Lauderdale also has shore snorkelers, Hollywood's unparalleled public beach parking draws significantly more shore snorkelers and divers to our nearshore reefs than any neighboring city.
- Fort Lauderdale's boundary of **150 yards would place boats directly over Hollywood's Mermaid Reefs at 160 yards** — illustrating why distance alone is not the measure of safety and why Hollywood cannot simply follow neighboring cities.
- By installing and marketing the **Mermaid Reefs at 160–185 yards**, Hollywood has created something no other city has — and an opportunity to set a **new safety standard specifically for shore snorkelers and divers**.
- Hollywood's own website proudly promotes **'over 20 artificial and natural reef sites'** for divers and snorkelers. A thoughtful boundary would protect safe access to all of them — **setting the standard that dive flags alone cannot**.
- Hollywood is already recognized as a national leader — **#4 Best Beach in the U.S.** vs Fort Lauderdale at #15. This is an opportunity to lead on safety too.

"Boats are already attracted to the reefs anyway."

- Reefs already draw boats closer to shore regardless of boundary distance.
- A buoy line simply formalizes what is already happening.

The placement of the formalized boundary is therefore critical.

- It is true that boats occasionally come close to reefs today — and **lifeguards already actively redirect them when they get too close**.
- A buoy line at 218 yards would **officially sanction boat presence** in active snorkeling areas, potentially making redirection more difficult.
- We respectfully suggest that if boat gathering near reefs is unavoidable, the boundary should be placed **where that gathering does not overlap with active snorkeling areas**.

"Going past the inner reef ledge takes too much ocean from boaters."

- Boaters have rights to reef access too.
- A boundary past the inner reef may be seen as too restrictive.

Boaters would retain excellent access — with improved conditions.

- With a boundary at 400 yards, a boater would swim only **70–182 yards** to reach Perry Rocks — compared to a shore snorkeler's **218–330 yards**. Boaters would still swim a fraction of the distance.
- Boaters also enjoy **calmer water, better visibility, and no shore break** — conditions far easier than those shore swimmers face.
- Hollywood has a **wide sandy bottom beyond 430 yards** — a boundary past the nearshore reef ledge would encourage boats to anchor in sand rather than over reef habitat, benefiting boaters, snorkelers, and the reef alike.
- Boaters already enjoy significant natural advantages in accessing our reefs. A boundary past the reef ledge ensures that **shore snorkelers and divers receive the same protection** — clear, unambiguous separation from motorized vessels while they are in the water.

We appreciate your time, your service, and your commitment to Hollywood's safety.
We look forward to continuing this conversation together.