

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

November 5, 2018

The Honorable Ryan Zinke  
Secretary, Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke,

We were deeply troubled to learn that ZooTampa and head veterinarian Dr. Ray Ball may have improperly cared for manatees, resulting in at least two deaths. We are further concerned by reporting from the *Tampa Bay Times* that former employees of the zoo claim information regarding Dr. Ball's questionable medical care had been presented to zoo management on multiple occasions – yet the behavior was allegedly allowed to continue.<sup>i</sup> If true, this behavior is shocking and unacceptable.

The manatee is iconic to Florida. It was designated the state's marine mammal in 1975 and contributes to Florida's \$5 billion wildlife viewing industry.<sup>ii</sup> Unfortunately, the manatee faces a number of threats to its existence, including water craft collisions, loss of habitat, and changing water temperatures. This year's red tide outbreak has placed further stress on the manatee. According to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, red tide has resulted in an estimated 188 manatee deaths this year alone.<sup>iii</sup> As Floridians and Americans, we have a responsibility to protect this Florida Treasure to the best of our ability.

It is our understanding that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) sent a letter to ZooTampa on October 22<sup>nd</sup> raising these concerns and prohibiting Dr. Ball from treating or handling manatees. We applaud FWS for taking this first step. However, given the severity of these claims, we are requesting that FWS share with us the actions being taken to prevent another incident of this magnitude from occurring. And, if the Service has not already done so, we ask that FWS open a full investigation into the conduct of Dr. Ball and ZooTampa.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Charlie Crist  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Kathy Castor  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

---

<sup>i</sup> [https://www.tampabay.com/news/environment/wildlife/Vet-for-Tampa-zoo-accused-of-killing-manatees-through-malpractice\\_173120069](https://www.tampabay.com/news/environment/wildlife/Vet-for-Tampa-zoo-accused-of-killing-manatees-through-malpractice_173120069)

<sup>ii</sup> <http://myfwc.com/about/overview/economics/>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://myfwc.com/media/4363682/2018preliminaryredtide.pdf>