



RHODE ISLAND
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

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March 8, 2021

The Honorable Kathleen A. Fogarty
Chairwoman
House Committee on Special Legislation
82 Smith Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: H 5415 An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government – State Emblems

Dear Chairwoman Fogarty,

Thank you for providing the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) the opportunity to comment on H 5415, which would designate northern star coral (*Astrangia poculata*) as Rhode Island's official state coral. The Department supports this legislation.

Northern star coral is Rhode Island's only native hard coral species and has some unique characteristics that may make it the key to understanding how corals respond to the effects of climate change, especially ocean acidification. Whereas many tropical corals struggle to survive when water temperatures rise too much, northern star coral can survive in the variety of conditions found along the east coast of the United States. Most notably, northern star coral can survive a process referred to as "bleaching," where the algae that live in symbiotic relationship with the coral leave due to excessively warm water temperatures and most corals subsequently starve. However, the effects of ocean acidification on this hardy species is unknown and raising awareness of the species should only help to generate additional interest in understanding how climate change impacts our marine environment. These factors make northern star coral a fine choice to serve as Rhode Island's official state coral.

We appreciate the opportunity to offer comments on this legislation and would be pleased to make ourselves available as needed. Please feel free to contact Jason McNamee, Deputy Director for Natural Resources, at jason.mcnamee@dem.ri.gov should you have any additional questions or wish to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

Janet Coit
Director

CC: Members of the House Committee on Special Legislation
The Honorable Terri Cortvriend