

# Local Cozumel Groups Challenge Proposed Cruise Terminal Expansion Over Environmental Concerns

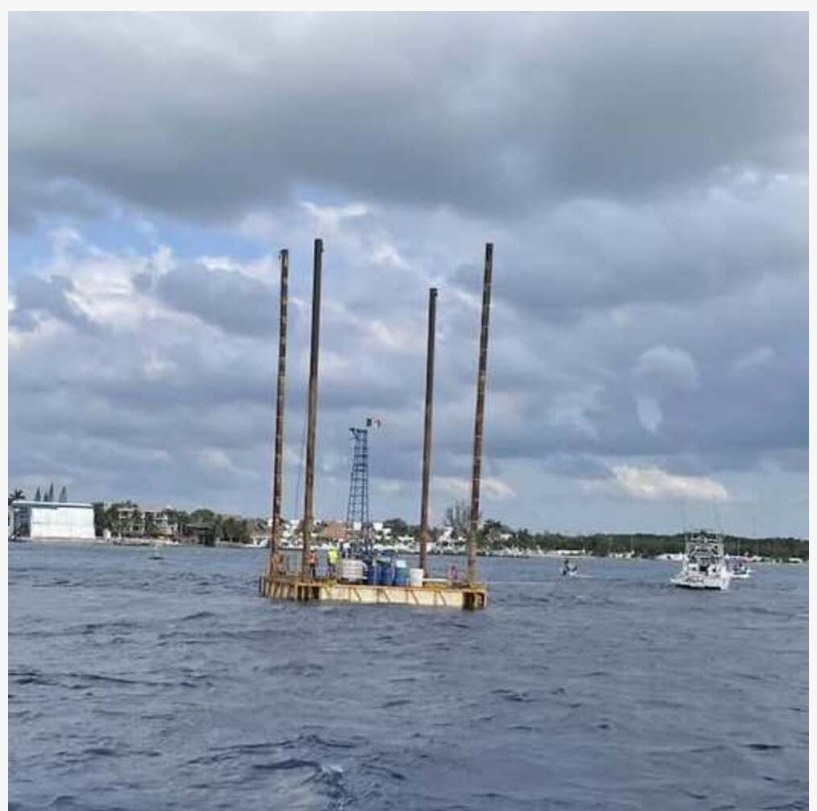
*Stingray Villa joins forces with Cozumel Coral Restoration and others to oppose development near protected marine areas*

COZUMEL, QUINTANA ROO, MEXICO, May 20, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A coalition of local businesses, environmental groups, and residents in Cozumel, including [Stingray Villa](#) and the [Cozumel Coral Restoration Project](#) (CCRRP), has come together to voice concerns over a proposed new cruise ship pier slated for construction along the island's southwest coastline.

The project, backed by MSC Cruises and the Molina family, would add a fourth cruise terminal to the island of Cozumel. Plans for the \$25 million pier include an 800-yard structure built close to the edge of the island's Marine Park—a UNESCO-recognized area known for its biodiversity and coral reef systems. It would sit directly on the site where CCRRP has been working for years to restore damaged coral ecosystems.

If approved, the new terminal could handle up to 11 cruise ships daily, adding an estimated 40,000 visitors to the island each day. Opponents argue that such a large-scale development could overwhelm the local environment and strain the marine resources that many islanders depend on.

"This is more than just a pier," said one member of the coalition. "It's a decision that affects our reefs, our water quality, our tourism model, and our future."



extending current piers in Cozumel

## Legal Efforts and Latest Developments

The community effort to stop the project has included legal action. A court order had temporarily suspended construction, giving local organizations time to present their case. However, that suspension was recently overturned. Now, early-stage construction activity has begun, including geotechnical studies in waters just offshore.

This turn of events has increased urgency among those advocating for the protection of Cozumel's marine areas.



The different corals that are growing to replant on Villa Blanca Reef

## Expansion at Existing Cruise Terminals

Separately, SSA Mexico has submitted a proposal to expand the existing Cozumel International Cruise Ship Pier. The plan would extend the pier from its current 460 meters to 872 meters—essentially doubling its length. SSA Mexico, which operates under a sub-concession from the state-run port authority Apiqroo, argues that the expansion is necessary to meet growing demand from cruise lines.

According to their Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), the upgraded dock would support larger vessels and accommodate more arrivals per day. In 2024 alone, Cozumel received over 4.6 million cruise passengers across 1,281 ships, making it one of the busiest cruise ports globally, based on passenger volume.

The expanded structure would not only increase capacity but, according to SSA Mexico, also improve logistics and align the island with current trends in cruise tourism.

The company states that its investment of 800 million pesos would help maintain Cozumel's standing in the cruise industry and fulfill agreements with federal authorities on passenger fee structures. These fees, known as DNR charges, have been part of ongoing negotiations between the Mexican government and cruise operators.

## Environmental Review Underway

Currently, the proposed fourth pier is undergoing an environmental evaluation by Mexico's Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT). A decision is expected within the next 60 days. The agency will review submitted data to determine whether the project meets federal environmental standards or should be denied due to potential ecological risks.

Local advocates are urging Semarnat to consider the long-term impact of placing large-scale infrastructure within or near a protected marine area. Their focus is on preserving the coral reefs and marine life that are critical to both the island's ecology and its tourism economy.

#### What's at Stake

Coral reefs serve as natural barriers that protect coastal areas from erosion and storm surges. They also provide habitat for countless marine species, many of which support Cozumel's diving and fishing industries. Restoration projects, such as those led by CCRRP, have made progress in repairing damage caused by storms, bleaching, and overuse; however, such efforts require time and depend on relatively undisturbed conditions.

For residents and local businesses, the conversation is less about growth and more about balance—how to welcome tourism while safeguarding the island's natural foundation.

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