AN ACT TO PROVIDE FOR THE CREATION OF A CHANNEL MAINTENANCE PROGRAM; TO EXPRESS THE FINDINGS OF THE LEGISLATURE; TO REQUIRE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CHANNEL MAINTENANCE PLAN BY THE DEPARTMENT OF MARINE RESOURCES; TO REQUIRE THE DEPARTMENT OF MARINE RESOURCES TO IDENTIFY AND PURSUE FEDERAL FUNDING ALTERNATIVES; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

SECTION 1. This act shall be known and may be cited as the "Channel Maintenance Act."

SECTION 2. The Legislature finds that channel maintenance is necessary to preserve and enhance the economic stability and recreational potential of the coastal region. The Legislature declares it to be a governmental responsibility to provide for proper channel maintenance. The Legislature further declares that channel maintenance projects are in the public interest. Those projects should be funded to promote the use of cost-efficient strategies, encourage coordination among federal, state and local governments and the private sector, provide for long-term solutions and minimize the impact of the environment to the extent possible.

SECTION 3. (1) The Department of Marine Resources, referred to in this act as "department," shall serve as the primary state agency with regard to coordinating channel maintenance activities along the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

(2) The department shall develop a comprehensive long-range management plan for channel maintenance activities. The plan shall at a minimum:

(a) Identify areas in which channels are in need of
maintenance;

(b) Assess the short-term and long-term economic costs and benefits of the state's channels;

(c) Promote channel sand bypassing to replicate the natural flow of sand; and

(d) Recommend channel maintenance projects to the Legislature for funding which ensures the geographic coordination and sequencing of prioritized projects.

SECTION 4. The department shall identify federal funding mechanisms which could be used to fund projects regarding channel maintenance. The department shall coordinate with local governments and other interest groups to maximize the eligibility of projects for funding and to assist in the preparation of appropriate financial assistance documentation.

SECTION 5. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after July 1, 2001.