

Opening Statement
The Honorable Madeleine Z. Bordallo
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife
February 25, 2009

Hearing on H.R. 860, *The Coral Reef Conservation Act Reauthorization and Enhancement Amendments of 2000*; and H.R. 934, To convey certain submerged lands to the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

Since its enactment in the year 2000, The Coral Reef Conservation Act has stimulated a greater commitment to protect, conserve and restore coral reef resources within the jurisdictional waters of the United States. As a result we now have a much better grasp of the condition of our coral reefs, and a more focused management capability than at any time in our nation's history.

Nevertheless, our work is far from over. Many serious threats resulting from climate change, such as ocean warming and ocean acidification, sea level rise, and the spread of disease challenge the continued existence of these vital marine ecosystems.

Clearly, if we wish to have coral reefs in the future and benefit from the many services they provide, we cannot retreat from our efforts to protect them in the present. This point was made abundantly clear in the 2008 release of the Monaco Declaration which focused directly on the threat to coral reefs caused by ocean acidification.

The Monaco Declaration was signed by 155 scientists from 26 nations. It emphasizes that our best hope to conserve healthy and resilient coral reefs from global threats is for us to take action now where we can, so that we can reduce and eliminate pressures.

And that is what we intend to do with the legislation that my colleagues and I have reintroduced to reauthorize the Coral Reef Conservation Act. Based on non-controversial legislation that passed the House during the 110th Congress, H.R. 860 would enhance the scope of the Act.

It would add new provisions that codify the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force and that authorize new funding to support local action strategies to conserve coral reefs, such as those developed in Guam.

Also of importance, this legislation would enhance the Federal Government's ability to respond to emergency situations, to protect coral reefs from damages caused by vessel groundings, and to better engage the international community in cooperative coral reef conservation.

Yet, like any legislation, I recognize that this bill could be refined. To that end, I am committed to working with the members of this subcommittee to craft the best possible legislation to strengthen the Coral Reef Conservation Act and to heed the overarching recommendation of the Monaco Declaration to take action now to protect our “Rainforests of the Sea.”

As I had mentioned previously, the Subcommittee is also receiving testimony today on H.R. 934; legislation which would provide parity to the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands with her sister territories and other coastal states by conveying federally controlled submerged lands to the Northern Marianas government.

This legislation is the first bill introduced by our colleague from the CNMI, Congressman “Kilili” Sablan.

As many here may know, the CNMI seat in the House of Representatives was a product of this Subcommittee, under the leadership of its former Chairwoman, our colleague Donna Christensen from the Virgin Islands. The CNMI was the last U.S. territory without representation in this body. We welcome Mr. Sablan to our Subcommittee and look forward to receiving testimony on legislation he has introduced for the benefit of the Northern Marianas and her people.