

**Testimony of
Evangeline Lujan
Administrator of Guam Coastal Management Program
Bureau of Statistics and Plans
and
Point of Contact for Guam on the US Coral Reef Task Force**

**Before the
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans
House Natural Resources Committee
U.S. House of Representatives**

Hearing on H.R. 1205, To Reauthorize the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000

March 6, 2007

Hafa adai

Chairwoman Bordallo, Ranking Member Brown, and Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee: My name is Vangie Lujan and I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the island jurisdictions of the United States and as the Point of Contact from Guam to the United States Coral Reef Task Force in support of the reauthorization of Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000.

The six island jurisdictions include the Pacific Ocean islands of American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and Hawai'i. In the Caribbean, it includes the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. These island jurisdictions include large marine areas in the Pacific and the Caribbean oceans and most of the coral reefs in this country.

The Importance of Coral Reefs

Coral reefs are among the most diverse, biologically complex and valuable ecosystems on Earth. Often called rainforests of the sea, coral reefs provide economic and environmental services to millions of people as valuable areas of natural beauty, sources of food, jobs and revenues, recreation and tourism, cultural activities and shoreline protection.

The United States has a significant national interest in protecting its coral reef ecosystems. The area of coral ecosystems within 10 fathom and 100 fathom depth contours respectively in tropical and subtropical waters of the United States is 36,813 sq km and 143,059 sq km (Rohmann et al, 2005). The vast majority of U.S. coral reefs making up the referenced areas are within State, territorial and commonwealth waters.

However, coral reefs are in peril. The world's coral reefs are seriously threatened by over-exploitation, pollution, habitat destruction, invasive species, disease, bleaching, over population and global climate change. The rapid decline of these ancient, complex and biologically diverse marine ecosystems is well documented and has significant social, economic and ecological impacts in our jurisdictions, nationally and globally.

By 1997, an estimated 11 percent of the world's reefs had been lost to a variety of human activities. The growing number of anthropogenic threats that have been identified include: shoreline development, polluted runoff from agricultural and land-use practices, over-fishing and over-exploitation, destructive fishing practices, dredging and shoreline modification, vessel groundings and anchoring, disease outbreaks, population pressure, aquatic invasive species and global climate change. These threats have been compounded by a lack of awareness and appreciation for coral reefs at local, national and international levels. It is estimated that an additional 32 percent of the world's coral reefs are now seriously threatened.

The island jurisdictions along with Florida, in partnership with NOAA, the Department of Interior, and other federal agencies, have developed and implemented Local Action Strategies (LAS) over the last four year to address threats to our Nation's coral reef ecosystems. In 2002, the jurisdictions identified over 760 projects to address these threats, and since then have implemented over 490 projects designed to reduce damaging human-caused impacts. In this process we have engaged a range of federal, local, nongovernmental and academic organizations and stakeholders, and the states and territories have successfully leveraged volunteer services and in-kind resources by a rate of nearly three dollars for every federal dollar.

However, there is much more to be done. Our biggest challenge is the need for additional funding and resources to complete the proposed projects identified in the LAS's. Approximately \$37 million dollars, over 50 percent of the total cost for implementing these projects is still needed, and we all recognize the need to not only maintain these existing efforts but greatly expand them in the future. Another challenge is the limited capacity of local agencies to manage the wide range of activities that impact our coral reefs, particularly in the territorial and commonwealth jurisdictions. While the LAS's underway are extensive, they do not fully encompass the range of activities needed to address all threats to coral reefs. If our goal is to not only reverse the decline of coral reefs but to rebuild these ecosystems, we must expand our efforts to more fully encompass the management challenges in each jurisdiction.

Given the importance of coral reefs, the growing threats, and the work yet to be done to protect these magnificent ecosystems, it is imperative that Congress reauthorize and strengthen the Coral Reef Conservation Act. We appreciate the quick action taken by Congressman Faleomavaega, Chairwoman Bordallo, Congresswoman Christensen and Congressman Abercrombie to introduce and sponsor H.R. 1205, the "Coral Reef Conservation Amendments Act of 2007." In particular, we thank the Representatives for including appropriations for the Office of Insular Affairs in the Department of the Interior and for authorizing the NOAA Administrator to take action to prevent or minimize

impacts from vessel groundings. While this bill certainly strengthens the current Act, we have recommendations that we believe will improve the Act even more.

The island jurisdictions' three highest priority recommendations for improvements to H.R. 1205 are the following:

- 1) Increase the authorization of appropriations for NOAA to \$50 million annually to provide the resources for the agencies, states, territories and commonwealths to implement the national coral reef action plan developed under the Act and to support implementation for local action strategies to conserve coral reefs. Considering coral reefs are some of the most biologically important and most endangered marine ecosystems, this is an important investment to make to protect our nation's coral reefs. We will provide to the Committee information about some of the activities that we envision will be funded with this increase in appropriations.
- 2) Strengthen the emergency response and vessel groundings provisions by making four amendments:
 - a. ensure the states and territories sovereignty is respected. In H.R. 1205 there is no requirement that the Administrator consult or partner with the appropriate state or territory during an emergency response or vessel grounding. We think it is imperative that, at a minimum, the states and territories have a strong voice on response activities being undertaken within their jurisdictions.
 - b. require that responsible parties be liable for the costs of response and restoration and provide increased funding to put in place aids to navigation, moorings, and other boater awareness efforts to prevent groundings;
 - c. while avoiding duplication or redundancies, authorize the Secretary of the Interior as well as NOAA to take action to prevent or minimize impacts from vessel groundings;
 - d. ensure that monies recovered from a responsible party be directed to restoration, mitigation, monitoring and assessment activities in the jurisdiction where the damage occurred.
- 3) Include in the duties of the federal members of the US Coral Reef Task Force to assist in the implementation of the Local Action Strategies.

Other recommendations include:

- Recognize the significant work being carried out by the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, established by Executive Order 13089 in 1998, and codify and establish by law this body with an annual appropriation to cover operating costs for both the All Islands Coral Reef Committee and the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force secretariats and their continued activities of no less than \$350,000 for the USCRTF secretariat and no less than \$250,000 for the All Islands Coral Reef Committee secretariat.

DRAFT 3-4-07

- As H.R. 1205 does, include in the authorized appropriation amounts an authorization to each of the co-chairs to support the operation of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, facilitate inter-agency coordination at the regional level and, in the case of the Department of the Interior, to fund intra-departmental coordination among the various Interior agencies undertaking activities related to coral reefs. We suggest \$500,000 to the Secretary of the Interior and \$250,000 for NOAA to supplement the coordination expenses currently drawn from the coral reef program funding.
- Amend the Act so the Department of the Interior has a more prominent role in the Act. The Department of Interior's role in the current Act is very minimal and it should be increased. The Department of Interior should be included to the maximum extent practicable and should have an authorization of no less than \$10 million per year, which could be allocated as follows:
 - Office of Insular Affairs (\$4 million)
 - National Park Service to support management of units with coral reef resources (\$1 million), such as Buck Island in the USVI and Biscayne Bay in Florida.
 - U.S. Geological Survey for research and mapping (\$1 million).
 - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to the Coastal program to provide technical and other direct assistance (\$2 million), to the national Wildlife Refuge System to support management of units with coral reef resources (\$1 million) and for CITES and law enforcement (\$1 million).
- Amend the Act to include the definitions of coral, coral reefs coral reef ecosystem, and conservation should be added to the Act because it is difficult to protect what we can't define. The current lack of an adequate definition impedes protection because we can't apply the Act if it is unclear in its scope.
 - Redefine "conservation" to include resilience. Conservation and management of coral reefs is a complex and challenging task that involves responding to immediate threats to the health of corals – such as incompatible fishing practices – to mass bleaching which is caused by changes in ocean temperatures that result from larger scale patterns. One of the tasks facing managers is to not only stop those local threats, but to use strategies to manage coral reef ecosystems for resilience and recovery in the face of threats they cannot always control. The Act should be amended to embrace the concept of resilience as a fundamental principle of coral reef conservation, promoting the return of those conditions that allow natural recovery to occur.
 - Amend the definition of "coral reef ecosystem" for greater accuracy and consider including associated habitats, which may be affected. The health of coral reef ecosystems depends on the quality of marine environment in adjacent areas. Coral reefs are affected by activities that go on all around them and their health is connected to

the health of associated habitats such as mangroves and sea grass beds. Therefore, any coral reef management strategy should be integrated into the overall coastal zone management strategy to minimize impacts from coastal and marine-related activities to coral reefs. The intent is to define balanced natural coral reefs with representative diversity, abundance and overall measurable good health to be maintained by effective directed management of human activities affecting coral reefs and contributing factors associated with adjacent areas.

- The Act should be amended to improve the definitions of coral, coral reef and coral reef ecosystems as follows:
 - I. “coral” is defined as any member of the phylum Cnidaria that produces a stony skeleton or forms sclerites. This includes but is not limited to all stony corals (Order Scleractinia), fire coral (Order Milleporina), hydrocoral (Order Stylasterina), soft coral and sea fans (Subclass alcyonaria; Order Gorgonacea), blue coral (Family Helioporidae), organpipe coral (Family Tubiporidae) and relatives (Stolonifera) and black corals (Antipatharia). Coral as defined, includes any part thereof living or dead.
 - II. “Coral Reefs” are defined as hard or unconsolidated carbonate structures and their associated natural formations and biological communities composed of both living organisms being dominated by zooxanthellate stony corals (Class Anthozoa, Order Scleractinia), or soft corals (Class Anthozoa, Subclass Alcyonaria) or zooanthids (Class Anthozoa, Order Zoanthiaria) or algae (both fleshy and calcareous) or seagrasses, and which often include echinoderms, mollusks, crustaceans, fishes, sponges and annelids. Coral reefs may include associated sand mud rock, seagrass and/or mangrove habitats and the physical, chemical, trophic and/or ecological interactions and integration. For the purposes of this Act, coral reefs are generally restricted to shallow (<300 feet) tropical and subtropical estuarine, coastal and/or oceanic waters.
 - III. “Coral Reef Ecosystems” is defined as coral reefs and their dependent environmental linkages. This includes contributing watersheds, drainage systems, adjacent terrestrial systems, air and sunlight considerations or any other natural system contributing to the health of a coral reef. Coral Reef Ecosystems include the physical, chemical, trophic and ecological interactions with all the surroundings that contribute to maintain the natural optimum functions and organismal representatives.
- In H.R. 1205, do not have the authorized appropriations of \$4 million dollars be limited to the grant program in section 209. Section 204 should be included in the appropriation authorization as well.

DRAFT 3-4-07

- Amend the Act to allow for federal agencies to provide assistance to the states, territories, and commonwealths to address any unforeseen or disaster-related circumstance.
- Amend the Act to provide NOAA and the Department of the Interior the authority to enter into multi-year cooperative agreements with states, territories and local governments, academic institutions and non-governmental organizations to carry out activities to implement the National Coral Reef Action Strategy.
- Amend the Act to authorize \$8 million for the creation of a Community-based Conservation grants program to provide support for local communities and their partners to work through appropriate Federal and State entities to prepare and implement plans for the increased protection of coral reef areas of high priority to the communities. The grants should support planning and other efforts that:
 - Support achievement of the goals and purposes of the CRCA;
 - Are developed at the community-level;
 - Utilize watershed-based approaches;
 - Provide for coordination with Federal and State managers; and
 - Build upon local approaches or models, including traditional customary practices, or island-based resource management concepts.
 - Compliment local action strategies or other regional plans.

In conclusion, I hope this testimony will be useful to assist you with the re-authorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act, and the island jurisdictions appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony on this important bill. We look forward to working with you on H.R. 1205, and we appreciate your support to help us stop the decline of these magnificent resources and to achieve the goal of sustainable coral reef management. Our people, communities, cultures and economies are depending on it.

I would be pleased to answer any questions you or others on the Subcommittee may have.