

Testimony of
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To the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife
House Natural Resources Committee
U.S. House of Representatives

Hearing on H.R. 860, *Coral Reef Conservation Act Reauthorization and Enhancement
Amendments of 2009*

To Reauthorize the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000

February 23, 2009

Hafa Adai and good afternoon.

Chairwoman Bordallo, Ranking Member Henry Brown, and Distinguished members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the people of Guam in support of the reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000. I would like to personally thank you for your efforts to move this process forward, even as the nation and the world are faced with so many pressing issues.

Guam's coral reefs have provided food and cultural resources for thousands of years. We may not always have been aware of the need to protect these resources but in recent years our people have taken huge steps forward in understanding and appreciating these precious natural gifts. Yet we also know we cannot hope to preserve these resources without the help of such partners as the federal government, our friends in the region, and experts from around the world.

While there is an increasing awareness of the urgent need to protect our environment, there is also ever-increasing demand for the natural resources that build and drive our communities. Whether these needs will ever be reconciled remains unclear, but I commend the sponsors of this legislation for leading us in the right direction and taking steps to ensure that we safeguard the resources that we all rely on.

I would like to make a few key points on some of the specific language in this bill:

- This legislation proposes to codify the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, which was created by executive order to help U.S. jurisdictions manage and conserve coral reef resources. For Guam, the task force has been a great ally in the struggle to preserve our reefs, and this relationship has become even more important as our island works to accommodate the military buildup expected to hugely increase our population and drive significant development around Guam.

- The task force is not the only significant factor for Guam. The bill provides additional funding for coral conservation programs and will help provide Guam and other jurisdictions much needed resources to continue important coral management and research. I would ask the committee to consider making some adjustments to the language of the bill to reflect the major role of the Department of the Interior in coral programs, and to create a mechanism allowing the individual jurisdictions to receive more direct funding.
- I strongly support NOAA efforts to move toward more on the ground projects within the jurisdictions, providing more resources to managers of coral reefs. NOAA is working on a new roadmap to achieve this goal, with significant participation from the jurisdictions.
- The bill contains a provision to provide assistance internationally, a measure I believe appropriately supports global efforts to protect coral reef resources. However, given the nation's close relationships with many Pacific island nations, I believe there should be some priority given to the Republic of Palau, the Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia, reflecting both the immense value of these reef systems as well as the current role of the U.S. in these areas.
- While language expanding NOAA's authority to handle emergency situations is greatly needed, some ability to fund these mandate would be greatly appreciated. Additional funding to state and local jurisdictions to cover these costs would improve our ability to respond to situations in a timely manner.

In closing, I would like to remind the committee of the significance of Guam coral reefs to our small island, but also to the global community. Our reefs are the backbone of the tourism industry that drives our economy, and offer significant storm protection to the island that is home to major Department of Defense assets. Our reefs provide food for our people, and a home to unique species that still remain a mystery to even the world's most talented scientists. We must take care to protect these invaluable resources. If we destroy these spectacular ecosystems, we are not just harming our visitor industry or depriving families of favorite foods – we may be ruining the world's chances to find a powerful new antibiotic or a cure for cancer.

For these reasons and many others, I ask you to continue to support our coral reefs and to pass this legislation quickly.

Thank you and Si Yu'os Ma ase.