

HR 4494-To provide a visitor services, fish and wildlife research and marine and coastal resources management on Guam related to the Marine Trench National Monument and for other purposes

Testimony presented to the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife, U.S. House of Representatives

by

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Governor of Guahan

Madam Chairwoman and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to participate in his hearing on the introduction of legislation that seeks to provide a visitor services, fish and wildlife research and marine and coastal resources management on Guahan related to the Marianas Trench National Monument and for other purposes.

I support the treatment of Guahan as a cooperative agency similarly as the government of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). I believe that we should support a more collaborative approach to the protection of any marine resources within Guam's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and I am pleased that the concerns of Guahan's citizens with regard to management of the monument especially related to resource management and fishing access to offshore banks will be considered in the development of a management plan.

The bill recognizes that Guahan plays a role in the management of natural resources in a regional way. This will further strengthen the support for managing marine resources within the Marianas archipelago and its impact to the rest of Micronesia.

Also, I support efforts for a seat on the advisory council with the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) and U.S. Department of Commerce in the development and implementing of the management plan and management regulations. Further, I am in full support of the appointment of the members of the Marianas Monument Advisory Council. As Governor, I request to have at least one member and one alternate to the Council. I think CNMI will have 3 with 3 alternates.

There must be further expansion and enhancement of existing visitor programs at the Guam National Wildlife Refuge. The support should be in the form of public education, research and support of the understanding of the unique ecosystem.

I support the initiation of comprehensive program that includes nature resources exploration and research, and public education and appreciation in consultation with the Government of Guam.

Guam supports more analysis as part of the comprehensive program that includes a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis, and long term management and monitoring strategy.

However, Guahan does not support the construction or leasing of a facility for promotion of the monument. I do recommend that appropriate funds be made available to Guahan to hire local educational specialists within the appropriate federal and local government of Guam agencies such as the Department of Agriculture and the Guam Coastal Management program to educate the community about the valuable fish, wildlife and coral resources of Guahan especially the special natural resources within the Marianas Trench National Monument. I am in full support of funding to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Government of Guahan to partner with the Guam Department of Education, University of Guam and Guam Community College to educate students on natural resources of the monument. Through interagency collaboration, there must be an identifying of funds to the Government of Guahan for the Guam Museum to document, preserve and display artifacts to demonstrate the importance of the marine environment, geology, ecology and living and nonliving resources, indigenous fishing practices of the monument to the people of Guam within the monument.

It is crucial that the interests of the Government of Guahan in the preliminary designs and studies are protected. For example, the southern islands of the Marianas Trench have higher biodiversity and greater habitat diversity as compared to the northern islands. It is imperative that facts such as these are considered in a site selection process. In addition to involvement of the local governments, meaningful stakeholder input from the general public is crucial especially with regard to marine conservation actions. Joint responsibility for management of the proposed area of conservation should be shared by the local jurisdiction and the federal government.

Finally I recommend an operational presence of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Pacific Island Fisheries Science Center, the Sanctuary Programs and NOAA's Pacific Island Regional Office so we have a team of locally hired people to assist with the development of a comprehensive management plan for the area.

I applaud the Chairwoman for her work on this issue, and on behalf of the people of Guahan lend her our full support.