

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

Statement

STATEMENT BY THE HONORABLE JIM SAXTON, CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS, AT THE MARKUP OF H.R. 3919, CORAL REEF CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP ACT OF 2000: MARCH 23, 2000.

Today we are considering H.R. 3919, the Coral Reef Conservation and Restoration Partnership Act of 2000. Along with my friend, Mr. Faleomavaega, I introduced this bill on March 14, 2000. This bill provides "CPR for coral reefs" - "C" for conservation, "P" for partnership, and "R" for restoration. Not only will H.R. 3919 establish new Federal-State partnerships, it represents a successful partnership between Republicans and Democrats. I have worked closely with Mr. Faleomavaega and 11 other Members of Congress, including some of you on this Subcommittee, to craft a responsible, bipartisan approach to addressing the conservation and restoration needs of this Nation's coral reefs.

Coral reefs support the economies of many local communities throughout the Atlantic Ocean, Carribean Sea, and Pacific Ocean. Coral reefs provide important areas for tourism, diving, fishing, scientific research, and offers potential lifesaving advances to treat human diseases. Unfortunately, many of our coral reef areas are threatened by a variety of natural impacts and human activities including coral disease, hurricanes, destructive fishing practices, overfishing, pollution, and changing ocean conditions.

H.R. 3919 provides a framework for addressing coral reef threats and establishing partnerships to conserve and restore these invaluable resources. The Coral Reef Conservation and Restoration Partnership Act greatly assists ongoing efforts to understand, map, and conserve U.S. coral reefs. H.R. 3919 authorizes \$15 million per year for coral reef conservation, for a total of \$60 million over four years. This level of funding is consistent with the FY 2001 budget request of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The bill establishes a grant program to provide funding for coral reef projects carried out in local communities, States and U.S. Insular Areas that have limited sources of funding. Eligible grantees include local and State governments, certain nonprofit groups, and educational institutions. A grant partner can receive up to 50 percent Federal matching funds for a variety of projects, such as mapping, monitoring, assessment, restoration, and law enforcement. The Secretary of Commerce is given flexibility in the match requirements for small projects carried out in the Insular Areas.

The bill also provides statutory authority for the Coral Reef Task Force, which was established by Presidential Executive Order 13089. The Departments of the Interior and Commerce are designated as Task Force co-chairs. The co-chairs can jointly designate the governors of the States and Territories to serve on the Task Force. The Task Force is charged with coordinating Federal agency activities, establishing a national coral reef action strategy, developing a comprehensive mapping, monitoring and assessment program for U.S. coral reefs, and providing regular reports to Congress on activities to conserve coral reefs.

Finally, our bill authorizes the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to carry out a variety of coral reef-related conservation activities, including restoration, mapping, and monitoring. The proposed legislation recognizes NOAA's important role in managing coral reef resources, and authorizes ongoing activities consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, the Coastal Zone Management Act, and the National Marine Sanctuaries Act.

Coral reefs are the marine equivalent of the rain forest, and this bill provides a framework to ensure their long-term

conservation. I urge my colleagues to vote "AYE" on this measure.

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