

Governor Togiola T.A. Tulafono's Testimony  
US House of Representatives  
Committee on Resources  
Subcommittee on Fisheries and Oceans  
Room H2-188 Ford House Office Building,  
Washington D.C, 20515

Good afternoon and Talofa Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, I wish to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you. My name is Togiola T.A. Tulafono and I come before you this morning as the Governor of American Samoa, and as an Island Leader speaking in support of the Islands and Jurisdictions who have worked together with our Federal Partners on the Coral Reef Task Force to insure that we do everything possible to protect fragile and beautiful coral reef ecosystems as a legacy for our children and the future generations to come. During my testimony, I wish to specifically address three areas of concern:

- 1) Legislation as it deals with the regulatory framework that manages human activities affecting coral reefs, with the understanding that it is not coral reefs that can be managed, but rather, the activities of people.
- 2) Appropriations as a tool to support gaining critical scientific knowledge about coral reefs, translating this knowledge into appropriate policies and providing managers and stakeholders with the tools and support to implement and evaluate these actions and activities.
- 3) Mechanisms for supporting capacity development for the jurisdictions to address their stewardship responsibilities in an effective and culturally appropriate manner.

On the topic of legislation, the vast majority of the coral reefs under U.S. jurisdiction or association reside within the statutory control of the States, Commonwealths and Territories as well as the Freely Associated States of the Pacific. As such, consideration has to be made of the partnership and respect for local authority. However, federal legislation could be of considerable assistance in supporting the goals and objectives of coral reef stewardship. At present, existing legislation does not effectively protect coral reef resources from a variety of human-induced stressors and does not fully incorporate the best available knowledge including both recent scientific advances as well as traditional, island-based knowledge. I am requesting as well as recommending your committee staff to work closely with the All Islands Committee and Federal Points-of-Contact, managers and researchers to consider ways of amending existing legislation or developing a new regulatory framework for the sustainable use and protection of coral reef resources. Additionally, I would also like to acknowledge and request your committee to include the Department of Interior in the Coral Reef Conservation Act as they have a congressional mandate of technical assistance and thus have supported the islands coral reef activities since the inception of the US Coral Reef Task Force.

On appropriations, I would like to testify in support of reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act (CRCA) of 2000, which funds a number of coral reef conservation-directed programs. I would like to respectfully request that the appropriate individuals from the Jurisdictions be actively involved in determining priorities and contributing to discussions on allocation. Continued and enhanced budgets for coral reef conservation will further efforts in the islands to implement local action strategies to deal with stresses such as over fishing, land based sources of pollution, coral disease and climate change and population pressures to name a few.

On the issue of local capacity development, single year budgets do not provide the continuity needed to identify, train and employ islanders in an effective manner. Year-to-year budgets often result in inadequate opportunities to engage future island-based coral reef managers, policy makers and researchers as they enter college and would consider these positions as professional opportunities due to the uncertainty faced by agencies and institutions. As such, I am asking that mechanisms be identified that could provide the jurisdictions with the ability to perform long-term planning processes. This could be accomplished through internal administrative support within agencies, or through the appropriations process.

The committee asked two questions – Is the USCRTF & CRCA beneficial to our coral reef management efforts? I say affirmative on both cases and use the removal of 9 Long line vessels from our reefs in 2000 as a testament of success of both these mechanisms which assisted American Samoa in restoring a fragile coral ecosystem.

In the absence of the USCRTF, following the hurricane in 1990 there were no federal agencies that wanted to take responsibility for the removal of these nine long line fishing vessels. Thankfully, when the USCRTF was formed in 1998 it provided a mechanism for addressing this issue for us. When my predecessor, the late Governor Sunia raised the issue with the task force, the co-chairs took their duties seriously and promised resolution to the removal of nine fishing vessels. Less than a year later, funding was allotted for the removal of the fishing vessels.

In conclusion, I and my predecessor, Governor Sunia, along with our counterparts in the Pacific and Caribbean Jurisdictions, have witnessed the positive results of CRCA identified funds which enabled us to fund complex issues such

as building local capacity, economic valuation studies, coral reef monitoring, educational and awareness campaigns. I strongly endorse continuing this fruitful effort as an example of how cooperation can solve problems in an effective manner.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today.