

Testimony of Ed Ebisui
Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council

To the

US Coral Reef Task Force

US Department of Commerce, 1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington D.C. 20230

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Aloha and good morning members of the US Coral Reef Task Force,

Since the implementation of the National Action Plan for Coral Reef Conservation in 2000, strategies and initiatives throughout the Western Pacific Region have focused primarily on protecting coral reef ecosystem resources from fishing.

The Council has implemented several marine protected areas and restricted fishing across the region through various fishery management plans. The US Fish and Wildlife Service has created several National Wildlife Refuges in the US Pacific Remote Island which are off limits to fishing, and our state and local partners have also implemented marine reserves, gear restrictions and size restrictions for coral reef fishery resources under their jurisdiction. In 2001, the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands became the largest marine protected area in the US and are now being considered as a candidate site for the nation's 14th national marine sanctuary.

As a result of these initiatives, more than 65% of the potential shallow water coral ecosystems in our region are now protected (See Table 1). However, in spite of these efforts, our marine resources continue to decline due to the cumulative effects of pollution and runoff, recreational overuse, coastal development and bad land-use practices.

Dredging of essential fish habitats and reef fish nursery grounds are occurring in nearly every island area. Pristine natural coastlines in Hawaii are being destroyed to make room for resorts and multi-million dollar beachfront homes. The fresh water streams, an important life history component for many valuable reef fish are being diverted resulting in 100% mortality to fish eggs and devastating fish recruitment and replenishment. Most recently, we suffered the worst sewage disaster in the Nation's history when nearly 50 million gallons of raw sewage was pumped into our coastal water ways over a two week period.

Despite our intuitive belief that these activities are having profound effects on our marine resources there is no data to quantify these impacts on fish populations and ecosystem productivity. Therefore, many continue to simply believe that no-fishing marine protected areas are the panacea to protecting our coral reef ecosystems.

As island communities, we cannot simply close more and more of our areas to fishing and rely solely on fish imports as some advocate. By doing so would be irresponsible and would contribute to the international decline of fish populations. As we begin the journey towards an ecosystem-based approach to management, we urge the US Coral Reef Task Force to make closer examinations of non-fishing activities and encourage research to help us quantify the impacts of these activities on fish habitats, fish populations, and their reproductive potential.

Table 1: The area of potential coral ecosystems within the 12 mile US territorial sea and 200 mile exclusive economic zone in the Western Pacific Region

Location	Calculated total area inside 100-fathom depth curve (in km²)¹	Coral Ecosystem Areas Protected from Fishing
Main Hawaiian Islands	6,666	11 Marine Life Conservation Districts
Northwestern Hawaiian Islands*	13,771	100% of coral ecosystem protected from fishing
American Samoa	464	Nearly a dozen village-based marine protected areas
Guam	276	20% of area set aside as marine reserves
Northern Mariana Islands	476	11 marine protected areas
US Pacific Remote Islands and Atolls*	436	100% of area protected from fishing
TOTAL	22,089	Not calculated

¹ Source: Rohman, SO, JJ Hayes, RC Newhall, ME Monaco and RW Grigg. 2005. The area of potential shallow water tropical and subtropical coral ecosystems in the United States. In *Coral Reefs* (2005) 24: 370-383.

*100% of the calculated total area inside the 100 fathom depth curve in Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and the US Pacific Remote Islands and Atolls are protected from fishing and account for 65% of the total area of potential coral ecosystems in the Western Pacific Region. Including the coral ecosystem areas protected in the Main Hawaiian Islands, American Samoa, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands would increase this percentage significantly.

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