

SUMMARY OF THE SIXTH MEETING OF THE U.S. CRTF FEBRUARY 28TH, 2001 DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

The sixth meeting of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force took place on February 28th, 2001, at the Department of the Interior in Washington D.C. Governors of four insular areas attended the meeting: the Honorable Carl Gutierrez of Guam, Tauese Sunia of American Samoa, Pedro P. Tenorio of the Northern Mariana Islands, and Charles Turnbull of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Representatives from Hawaii, Florida, Puerto Rico, U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Agency for International Development, Department of State, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Department of Defense, U.S. Department of Justice, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the National Science Foundation also attended.

The Task Force heard welcoming remarks from the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the co-chairs of the Task Force, as well as from members of Congress. Representatives Neil Abercrombie (Hawaii), Donna Christensen (US Virgin Islands), and Eni Faleomavaega (American Samoa) spoke in support of the Task Force. They encouraged the Task Force to continue to provide leadership on the national strategy to protect coral reefs. The Representatives also requested that the Task Force continue to provide information to Congress and work with all of the federal, state, and territorial partners to implement Task Force recommendations.

The Governors of American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands provided welcoming remarks for new individuals on the Task Force and updates on their local coral reef activities:

- Governor Sunia of American Samoa highlighted the need for continuity of the Task Force and the benefits of the Task Force's inter-governmental partnerships. He thanked the Task Force again for its role in removing long-liners from the reefs in Pago Pago harbor. He also reported that he has banned the export of live rock from American Samoa, seen sea cucumber populations rebound after a one-year ban on harvest. Gov. Sunia also spoke of the cultural importance of coral reefs in American Samoa, as well as the reefs' link to tourism.
- Governor Gutierrez of Guam emphasized the value of coral reefs to the tourism industry in Guam, stating that the over 1.5 million tourists travel to the island each year, bringing in \$3.5 billion of revenue. Gov. Gutierrez also highlighted Guam's leadership in coral reef marine protected areas: Guam has set aside over 20% of its coral reefs in no-take marine reserves.
- Governor Turnbull of the U.S.V.I. spoke about local partnerships with various government and non-governmental stakeholder groups that are working towards establishing a new marine protected area in the U.S.V.I. The USVI has developed a user guide and public education program and plans to select a MPA site by March 7th, 2001.
- Governor Tenorio reiterated the islands' strong leadership in coral reef issues, and announced that the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands recently established the Managaha marine protected area.

After the Governor's remarks, the Task Force heard an update on the state of U.S. coral reefs and Task Force conservation activities:

1. Dr. Steve Miller of the University of North Carolina spoke about the status of U.S. reefs. He highlighted that most reefs are in crisis and that no-take marine protected areas are an important tool for protecting reefs. He also called for continued and improved monitoring and assessment of coral reefs in marine protected areas in order to document the effectiveness of these reserves.
2. Roger Griffis spoke on behalf of the Coral Reef Task Force Steering Committee, presenting the history of the Task Force, recent accomplishments, and future opportunities. He cited completion of current action items and continued implementation of recommendations in the National Action Plan as next steps for the Task Force.

The Task Force also heard from a small panel of stakeholders on the value of coral reefs to their sector, actions needed to help protect and sustain coral reefs, and recommendations for future Task Force actions. The panelists were:

- Robert Mahood, Executive Director, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
- Kristin Vallette, Director, PADI Project Aware Foundation
- George Neugent, Mayor and County Commissioner, Monroe County, Florida
- Jack Sobel, Ecosystem Program, Center for Marine Conservation (filling in for Roger Rufe, President, Center for Marine Conservation)
- Andy Hooten, Consultant, World Bank
- Dr. Robert Richmond, Professor, University of Guam

Following the panel, Lelei Peau, Chair of the U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Initiative Committee, spoke about the islands' involvement in the Task Force. He proposed several action items for the Task Force to consider, including emphasis on local programs for new coral reef funding and continued and increased involvement of the island representatives in the completion of the Task Force Charter and other outstanding Task Force issues.

Other Task Force members also provided updates:

- Robert G. Ballard (State of Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Deputy Secretary for Land and Recreational Services) spoke about Florida's work to develop a state policy for fiber optic cable installations in their waters, at the direction of the Governor and Cabinet last July. Florida wants to meet the needs of industry without causing unnecessary impacts to Florida's submerged natural resources. Current efforts focus on establishing cable corridors in areas without structured reef habitat, with reduced permit application fees and easement fees for those who locate within the corridors. Mr. Ballard indicated that the Fiber Optic Cable Task Force plans to provide to the Governor and Cabinet a status report on findings thus far, and seek their approval to continue pursuing this concept, moving towards the establishment of other corridors around the state.
- Tom Egeland (Department of Defense) reported on the Department of Defense's (DOD) Coral Reef Protection Implementation Plan and Annual Report and noted that the plan and report were available at DOD's exhibit. He also highlighted the

Department of the Navy's recent transfer of Kingman Reef to DOI where it is now being managed as a National Wildlife Refuge, and the Air Force's installation of permanent mooring buoys at popular dive sites around Johnston Atoll to prevent "dive boat" damage to coral.

- Gil Colman-Agaran (State of Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources) spoke about the importance of reefs to Hawaii's economy. Hawaii has seven million visitors each year and 80% of those participate in ocean activities. The State of Hawaii is examining these activities and developing management plans to limit negative impacts of those activities. The State also plans to continue coral reef ecosystem assessment and monitoring in the NWHI, specifically at Kure Atoll.
- Franklin Moore (US Agency for International Development) commented that all of the threats to coral reefs that were discussed in relation to domestic reefs are also found at the international level. He invited all stakeholders and working groups to join in the discussions on international activities.

The Task Force heard public comment on various coral reef conservation concerns, and approved three resolutions on future Task Force activities:

1. That the Steering Committee and Task Force working groups continue their work on outstanding action items, including the Task Force Charter and implementation of the National Action Plan.
2. That the Steering Committee review the recommendations put forth by the U.S. All Islands group and report back to the Task Force with recommendations on how to proceed with these issues.
3. That the Department of Commerce work with the Task Force to develop the "National Strategy" called for in the Coral Conservation Act of 2000