



**24th U.S. CORAL REEF TASK FORCE MEETING
Report of the U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Committee
Saipan, CNMI, September 15, 2010**

Hafa adai, Talofa, Aloha, Hola and Good Day,

It is again my great pleasure, on behalf of the U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Committee (AIC) to present this report on our activities and accomplishments since we last met in Washington D.C. in February 2010.

OUTSTANDING ISSUES

1. Natural Disasters Response

We need to develop a solution to restore coral reef areas when natural disasters strike. With natural disasters such as the earthquake and tsunami in the Samoan Islands, we need to develop initiatives to address mitigation of coral reef damage and clean up marine debris caused by natural disasters.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Olaf in American Samoa, an aid request was rejected for non-compliance with the Stafford Act. In the aftermath of the recent Tsunami in American Samoa, again disaster assistance was disapproved. Recovery from these natural disasters depends upon healthy, safe coastal areas and the present system does not address this need. Studies certainly show that public health depends on healthy coastal systems. We need to revisit this issue for coral reef areas and develop a solution. AIC requests the Task Force to provide a formal U.S. position that coral reef health is indeed a public health issue for the people of American Samoa and the other insular jurisdictions.

This could enable the Stafford Act to provide FEMA funding for coral reef restoration activities to address damage caused by natural disasters. Our reefs provide food for our populations, and may be among the only available food resources following natural disasters, when electricity is out, agricultural crops are ruined and airport runways are closed. If this position does not result in FEMA funding being available for coral reef restoration, then we request that the Task force define and implement an approach to amend the Stafford Act to correct this shortcoming. We request an action item on this by the next meeting in February 2011.

The FEMA response requirement differs for our jurisdictions outside of the continental U.S., requiring a natural disaster declaration, while there is an automatic response initiation for natural disasters occurring within the continental US.

It is critical that we find ways to improve rapid response to natural disasters and restore natural systems, as island communities are dependent on these resources.

2. Roadways Resolution Working Group

We request an update on the status of this working group.

We have requested that DOT ensure that their activities respond to the EO. While BMPS have been provided, how will these be implemented to address the AIC's request?

3. Compensatory Mitigation Working Group

We all recognize the need for continued efforts to implement the coral mitigation regulations as they apply to lost coral reef ecosystem functions which resulted from the Reauthorization of the Clean Water Act (CWA).

The environmental risks are great and there is a pressing need to define the process and practices in working through compensatory mitigation on coral reefs. We again request our Task Force partners in the federal resource regulatory agencies to form a working group to address coral reef mitigation. We need to define a vehicle to include the local expertise available in the jurisdictions to develop interim guidance and long-term standards for compensatory mitigation.

There are a number of large national projects that represent unprecedented impacts to coral reefs. Existing tools to define appropriate replacement of lost ecosystem functions need to be refined to ensure unavoidable impacts are appropriately mitigated for. In developing these tools, it is also critical that expertise from the jurisdictions is involved. We want to be involved in developing policy, and a functional assessment methodology.

AIC Updates

- The AIC adopted the updated Strategic Action Plan this week.
- This week, AIC members have re-elected Vangie Lujan of Guahan as Chair, and Aida Rosario of Puerto Rico as Vice Chair.
- The Role of FAS in the AIC – AIC held discussions with affiliate members from the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) and Palau who asked for an update on the status of the FAS. A request was made by Albon Ishoda (from RMI) to the Task Force at the Puerto Rico meeting last year on the role of the Freely Associated States (FAS). We request that the Task Force undertake a review on full Task Force membership for the FAS and report back to the next meeting in February 2011.

Updates from Coral Jurisdictions

American Samoa

- Planning for Climate Change in the Coastal and Marine Environment: A 6-day training course for hazard and emergency response decision makers and natural resource managers.
- Building Climate Change Resilient Communities: Detailed coastal mapping of model sea-level-rise scenarios for Amouli, Vatia, and Faga'alu to develop village-level planning for climate resilience.

CNMI

- Draft Conservation Action Plan (CAP) for Talakhaya, Rota
- Social Marketing Campaign in Laolao Bay –SeaWeb
- Partnering with NOAA-PIRO on L50 project.

Florida

- **Climate Change Action Plan** Completed for the Florida Reef System: 2010-2015.

The Plan addresses climate change through enhanced communication and awareness, targeted research, integrating climate change into development planning, and working with fishing, boating and diving industries to promote minimum-impact reef activities.

- **Coral Reef Resilience & Climate Change Training of Trainers Workshop**
Teaching Atlantic/Caribbean coral reef managers how to better design and implement Marine Spatial Planning for the protection of coral reef resources, with a specific focus on the use of resilience principles to address the effects of climate change.
- **New LAS project completed: *Guidelines and Management Practices for Artificial Reef Siting, Usage, Construction and Anchoring in Southeast FL.***
A first document of its kind in Florida, it offers a benchmark for developing future science-based guidance for the placement of artificial reefs in waters where coral reefs are found.
- **Development of *Acropora* restoration nurseries:**
Utilizing \$3.3 million in Recovery Act funds, project partners are using coral propagation techniques to restore 34 degraded reefs at 8 distinct areas in Florida & USVI.
NOAA Administrator Dr. Jane Lubchenco and Acting NOS Assistant Administrator David Kennedy celebrated Earth Week by seeing firsthand the success of coral restoration activities in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

Project partners include: The Nature Conservancy, Coral Restoration Foundation, Mote Marine Laboratory, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, University of Miami and Nova Southeastern University.

- **Development of numeric nutrient criteria:**
New LAS project completed: Development of numeric nutrient criteria underway for Florida Bay, Florida Keys, Biscayne Bay, and the Southeast Florida Reef Tract.

Workshops were held to gather information to support statewide criteria development and provide a foundation to establish nutrient criteria appropriate for each specific area.

Initial effort consisted of identifying currently available data and soliciting local area expertise. Draft criteria have been compiled and are currently under review by participants and agencies.

- **Deepwater Horizon Oil Event**
 - No known impacts to Florida Reef Tract.
 - FDEP lead FL's Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) effort.
 - Response efforts included water & sediment baseline sampling, HAZWOPER & Shoreline Cleanup Assessment trainings, NRDA technical working groups, and U.S. Coast Guard Sector Miami & Key West Area Committees.
- **Florida Reef Resilience Program**
 - Divers throughout the Florida Reef Tract participated in the Florida Reef Resilience Program's Disturbance Response Monitoring for the cold water events in late February/ early March.
 - Some areas of the Florida Keys experienced significant mortality of coral, while the northern extension of the Florida Reef Tract showed no abnormal signs of stress.
- **Ongoing Challenges in Florida**
 - Increasing reports of invasive lionfish (*Pterois* spp.).
 - Lack of capacity to support fisheries independent monitoring for northern Florida Reef Tract.
 - Need to ID funding to sustain the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Water Quality Monitoring Program.

Guahan

- Working with various agencies, community groups, federal agencies, on the response to the DEIS and the Final EIS
- Working on achieving goals related to the Micronesian Challenge

Hawai'i

Papahānaumokuākea is cooperatively managed to ensure ecological integrity and achieve strong, long-term protection and perpetuation of Northwestern Hawaiian Island ecosystems, Native Hawaiian culture, and heritage resources for current and future generations. Recent developments include the inscription of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is the first mixed (natural and cultural) World Heritage Site in the U.S. and covers an area of nearly 140,000 square miles.

Puerto Rico

- EPA held a workshop on sediment control and erosion for the construction industry on May 25-26, 2010 at DNER, including representatives from DNER, EQB, EPA & CWP.
- Workshop sponsored by EPA at La Parguera on the Guánica projects on April 27-28, 2010. Participants included NGO's (TNC, CWP), local communities representatives, USDA-NRCS, EPA, CCRI, NOAA (ESA), DNER, and MSD.
- EPA created a project named Coral Reefs Puerto Rico at their site <http://portal.epa.gov/ESC> . All documents pertaining to projects in the Guánica watershed are posted at this site.

Sincerely
 Evangeline Lujan, Chair