

U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Committee

Members: American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Florida, Guam, Hawai'i, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Virgin Islands
Affiliates: Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Republic of Palau

Contact

Carey Morishige or Fran Castro
#808-954-0694 #808-483-0974

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 12, 2013

U.S. ALL ISLANDS CORAL REEF COMMITTEE ADVOCATES CORAL REEF MANAGEMENT CONCERNS AT TASK FORCE

ESA-listing of coral species and Coral Reef Conservation Act Reauthorization highlighted

On November 15 at the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF) meeting in St. Croix, the U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Committee (AIC) will issue a call to action on their two top priorities. The AIC's priorities are 1) supporting the reauthorization of the nation's Coral Reef Conservation Act and 2) expressing the concerns over the NOAA-proposed listing of 66 coral species under the Endangered Species Act.

The AIC jurisdictions—American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Florida, Guam, Hawai'i, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands—are home to a large percentage of the nation's ecologically, economically, and culturally important coral reef ecosystems.

Reauthorizing the Coral Reef Conservation Act (2000) would put into place vital measures to protect and manage ecosystems in the U.S. In the AIC jurisdictions, reauthorization would expand and clarify support for conservation and management of coral reefs by leveraging resources and management compliance as well as clarifying the responsibilities of federal agencies to respond to catastrophic events.

"It's been 13 years since the (Coral Reef Conservation) Act was first passed and our coral reefs need this reauthorization now, more than ever before. It is important that the Task Force support the reauthorization effort," said AIC Chair, Fran Castro.

The Coral Reef Conservation Act is a strong tool for the protection and management of coral reefs, while the proposed coral listing under the Endangered Species Act will create a great administrative burden with little benefit to improving coral reef health and resilience.

Last November, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration proposed to list 66 species of corals under the ESA: 7 in the Caribbean and 59 in the Pacific. ESA is not the right tool to protect these corals, particularly when the primary threat driving the consideration for ESA-listing is global climate change. This listing would put more strain on already limited resources in the jurisdictions, potentially taking away from local conservation, recovery, and management efforts.

U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Committee

Members: American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Florida, Guam, Hawai'i, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Virgin Islands
Affiliates: Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Republic of Palau

Since late 2012 when NOAA held its public hearings, new and significant information on coral species distribution and abundance have been provided as well as a refinement of the certainty of climate change predictions with respect to impacts on corals. This information will greatly improve the data available to evaluate the "risk of extinction," the principle element in deciding the merit of listing. The AIC is requesting, through the USCRTF, that NOAA reevaluate their approach and analysis with this new information and use it to determine next steps.

"We hope that by elevating the reauthorization and listing issues to the Task Force, federal and local governments will collaborate extensively to get the best possible outcomes," said Castro.

The U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Committee (AIC) represents the combined voice of the coral reef jurisdictions of the U.S. and Affiliates and serves as the collected voice for local governments in the federal process to conserve coral reefs.

###

For more information:

U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Committee: <http://allislandscommittee.org/>

U.S. Coral Reef Task Force: <http://www.coralreef.gov/>

Corals Proposed Listing Under ESA:

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/invertebrates/corals.htm>

Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000:

http://coris.noaa.gov/activities/actionstrategy/08_cons_act.pdf