

Heimong, Sebastian Marino
Hatohobei State, Republic of Palau
US Coral Reef Task Force
November 5, 2005

I address you today as the traditional leader of the southern most state of the Republic of Palau. I would like to begin by thanking you all for coming to visit our pristine and beautiful Republic and for giving us the opportunity to share our points of view with you today.

As the traditional leader of Hatohobei, and thus a traditionally recognized steward of Helen Reef, I want to share with you my concerns.

We all know that Helen Reef is remote. This remoteness is both a blessing and a **challenge**. It is blessed with an abundance of coral and fish species. Moreover, we are just beginning to understand its importance as a coral spawning area and the crucial role this plays for the overall health and resiliency of the area widely known as the coral triangle. However, this remote location makes Helen Reef, and the entire southern border of the Republic **vulnerable on two separate, but connected, fronts**.

As we speak, poachers who have been known to use dynamite and cyanide, threaten Helen Reef and our entire southern boarder. In addition, Helen Reef's proximity to Islamic South East Asia should not go unnoticed.

As a young Republic, Palau is challenged in its ability to consistently secure its vast ocean boarders. This challenge is magnified in a place as remote as Helen Reef. Therefore, I would ask you to support our efforts in patrolling this southern ocean border, both from a critical environmental perspective as well as from a security perspective. Finally, I would ask that as you consider assisting us in meeting this challenge, that this assistance comes in a strategic and sustainable fashion – one that assists our young states and young National Government in truly building the capacity of our young nation, our young men and women – rather than assist us in a manner that builds the budgets of off-island NGO's.

Thank you!