

18th U.S. Coral Reef Task Force
Governor Togiola T.A. Tulafono

Talofa lava and afio mai!

I want to extend our warm welcome to all of you to American Samoa by saying “Talofa!” “E le aumaua aso fa’apenei”, in our mother tongue, the literal translation of what I just said is “days like today are hard to find.”

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to American Samoa for the 18th meeting of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force. Since our last meeting, not so long ago in Washington, D.C., we have made some progress, but we still have a long way to go. Maintaining this dialogue is an important way to ensure persistent forward progress. As you have heard about many of the territory’s accomplishments throughout the past week, I will keep my remarks brief today, focusing on issues of critical concern to American Samoa.

To address the effects of global warming we must reduce the emission of greenhouse gases, and the Government of American Samoa recognizes that it can make a difference by setting an example. In declaring American Samoa’s war on global warming, I have issued an Executive Order which will result in a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions produced by ASG.

My Executive Order covers the following:

- Requiring ASG vehicles have a minimum fuel efficiency rating of 20 MPG.
- Begin purchasing hybrid vehicles rate of 5% increasing to 50% by model year 2017.
- Prohibit the importation of vehicles more than 10 years old.
- Replace incandescent light bulbs with compact florescent bulbs.
- ASG appliance and electronic purchases will have an USEPA Energy Star approval.
- Prohibit the importation of high phosphorous detergents, effective October 1, 2007.

The Government of American Samoa is committed to do its share to address the adverse impacts of global warming and resulting climate change, and challenges the federal government, the public sector and regional jurisdictions to join the fight.

I am pleased to inform you that our territorial MPA Network strategy has been finalized and adopted. The Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network Strategy was developed to link American Samoa's MPA programs and agencies together to be more effective in protecting and managing the marine resources and aims to develop regional partnerships to better protect our coral reef ecosystem. The strategy works through utilizing each program's mandates, resources and funding through enhanced coordination and integration of education, research and monitoring, enforcement, and program administration. The goal of the MPA Network Strategy is to effectively coordinate existing and future MPAs to ensure the long-term health and sustainable use of the Territory's coral reef resources.

Every year, I meet with the Prime Minister to discuss important cross border issues. Starting this year, I intend to put coral reefs on the agenda in order to foster better regional coordination of coral reef conservation. Working together with the government and the people of independent Samoa, I would like to develop a regional coral reef conservation initiative in order to achieve common goals and address shared concerns.

As we proceed with our work conserving and managing coral reefs, we must learn from all of our partners from the Caribbean to the Pacific. As such, I am requesting additional stakeholder representation on the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program review panel to include:

- a. The All Islands Coral Reef Secretariat Chair,
- b. A representative from the Caribbean and Pacific jurisdictions, and
- c. An International stakeholder

From July 20 through August 2 of 2008, American Samoa will be hosting the 10th Festival of Pacific Arts, a celebration every four years of the arts and culture of the Pacific region. Since 1972, delegations from 27 Pacific Island Countries and Territories have come together to share and exchange their cultures with a focus on traditional song and dance. In light of the fact that 2008 is also the International Year of the Reef, I

would like to propose a Pacific-wide traditional song and dance competition focusing on coral reef conservation and traditional uses of coral reefs throughout the Pacific.

I have received the 2002-2006 draft Coral Reef Ecosystem Monitoring Report for American Samoa from the Coral Reef Ecosystem Division Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center. We are grateful to Dr. Rusty Brainard and his team in completing the research and delivering this key resource management tool to us. My Coral Reef Advisory Group is reviewing the report and I believe the report will serve as a valuable tool to assist local management efforts in the conservation and management of our coral reefs.

Coordinating and implementing rapid response to unplanned impacts to coral reefs is an unresolved issue which has been raised by the States and Territories over the years and formally in a resolution adopted in Puerto Rico at the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF) meeting in October of 2002. This concern stems from impacts associated with ship groundings, improper anchoring, natural disasters and unplanned impacts from permitted activities. The mechanisms to facilitate rapid response to such events remain at risk. The State and Territorial coral jurisdictions recognize that proposed language in the reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act empowers DOI and NOAA to have authority to respond to such events. In an effort to ensure a proactive approach to this issue, the AIC proposes the following actions:

1. Address the need to establish a fund within a federal agency that can be activated quickly and effectively at the request of a coral jurisdiction to support the intent of the Act to facilitate rapid response. It would seem appropriate and necessary that this fund would be created by the reauthorization.
2. Define the scope of the planning efforts and actions necessary to be completed to be prepared to activate a well-coordinated, rapid response. This task should include identifying the agencies and individuals needed to build the strategies and a timeline to complete the effort.
3. Define a clear and simple process for rapid response activation in the event of a coral injury event
4. Report these products back to the USCRTF at the Spring 08 meeting.

The Coral Reef Conservation Act works to protect and manage coral reefs. One of the biggest challenges we face is ensuring that all resource agencies support our efforts and work in concert with us. Many of our federal partners have developed implementation plans to address “impacts” to coral reefs. These plans assess the agency’s regulatory frameworks and consider potential changes to statutes to best protect coral reefs. I would like to challenge US EPA and US Army Corps of Engineers to review and assess their mandates and statutes to provide more directed and stronger support to local partners in addressing their mandates to conserve and protect coral reefs.

As we look to the future, the local action strategies that guide our coral reef conservation and management efforts will be further developed and refined to meet the growing needs of our islands. With the assistance of Gerry Davis and Flinn Curren, CRAG has adopted a new organizational structure that will guide us through the process of revising our local action strategies. The key partners in CRAG will lead a local action strategy working group. I am confident that this new structure will invigorate CRAG and empower our local environmental leaders to combat the threats facing our coral reefs.

Thank you very much for your attention and I hope you enjoy the rest of your stay in American Samoa.

Fa’afetai tele lava!