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Secretary of the Interior Salazar Highlights Administration Plans to Help Protect Coral Reefs

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, co-chair of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, today told task force members that the Obama Administration is committed to quick action on global warming—a key threat to coral reefs—and that the economic stimulus package, clean energy and community service programs and ethic of preserving natural treasures add up to good news for coral reef conservation.

“We will move ahead with a new energy frontier for the United States of America and for the world that will feature clean energy and address climate change,” said Salazar. “Addressing climate change is a critical aspect of protecting coral reefs across the world and I know it will be high on the agenda of this task force,” he told a meeting of officials at Interior Department headquarters.

Nancy Sutley, the new chair of the President’s Council on Environmental Quality, also stressed the Administration’s commitment to addressing global warming and promoting ocean conservation in general and protection of coral reefs in particular.

Secretary Salazar noted that the U.S. Department of the Interior manages 5 million acres of coral reefs. The Department’s ocean responsibilities also include 1.7 billion acres of the Outer Continental Shelf; 177 island and coastal National Wildlife Refuges; 34 million acres in 74 coastal National Parks; more than 35,000 miles of coastline; co-management with NOAA of the 89 million-acre Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in Hawaii; and management, in part with NOAA, of the 70 million acres in the three new Pacific Marine National Monuments.

The Coral Reef Task Force was established in 1998 to lead U.S. efforts to preserve and protect coral reef ecosystems. It includes leaders of 12 Federal agencies, seven U.S. States, Territories, Commonwealths, and three Freely Associated States.

The Secretary expressed support for the service of the task force, which he noted was started by President Clinton and continued to work under President Bush. He extended particular appreciation to the governors of U.S. territories, which

contain world-class coral reefs. Key participants in the meeting today were American Samoa Governor Togiola Tulafono; CNMI Governor Ben Fitial and Guam Governor Felix Camacho.

Nik Pula, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Insular Affairs, co-chaired the meeting along with Mary Glacken, Acting NOAA Administrator. Pula also testified this afternoon for the Department of the Interior on reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act.

The testimony before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife conveyed the Secretary's appreciation for the fact that the bill includes statutory authorization for Department of the Interior coral reef conservation programs, and a damage assessment and compensatory recovery process for all of the coral reefs.

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