

**COMMENTS BY JOHN GOURLEY
TO THE US CORAL REEF TASK FORCE**

15 September 2010

To All Coral Reef Task Force members:

Hafa adai and welcome to the Mariana Islands. I hope your stay here is both relaxing and productive.

My name is John Gourley and I am a 21-year resident of Saipan and principal/owner of an environmental consulting business. As such, I have a professional background in local marine environmental issues and a vested interest in our coral reef resources. My comment concerns my perception on the lack of transparency and community involvement with meetings being conducted by the All Islands Committee or AIC.

According to the AIC, their vision statement includes: **By ensuring coordination and cooperation within and between our jurisdictions and partners**, we are able to manage and protect coral reef ecosystems and biological diversity for present and future generations to perpetuate cultural, environmental and economic values that are vital to our way of life. (Emphasis added) (source: <http://www.allislandscorals.org/>)

The AIC's mission Statement: *To fulfill this vision, we will continue to identify on-going coral reef management needs, establish priorities and seek necessary resources for coral reef management, share information and foster coordination locally, nationally, regionally, and internationally. As official representatives of our Governors for the coral reef initiative, we will strive to elevate awareness of coral reef issues, develop local capacity and partnerships; implement actions in a coordinated regional voice; develop policy and advocate for jurisdictional needs; and **coordinate bottom-up, locally-grown initiatives to ensure long-term sustainable use of coral reefs**.* (Emphasis added)
(source: <http://www.allislandscorals.org/>)

And finally, *"The Committee was established to develop a regional mechanism for improving island communications, strengthening our voices in the federal process to conserve coral reefs, and to share common experiences, successes and failures. **This Committee has continued to serve as the basis for a "bottom-up" initiative and true partnership approach to environmental management at all levels, program funding, and regional cooperation and coordination.**"*
(source: http://www.allislandscorals.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=26&Itemid=37)

I am in full support of the AIC implementing a transparent process that incorporates a bottom-up approach involving affected communities. However, based on my experience earlier this week, there appears to be a disconnect with what is stated on the AIC website and actual practices.

I, along with Richard Seman, attempted to attend the AIC meeting on Monday and was denied access. As editor of the local fishing magazine, *Marianas Fishing*, Richard wanted to write an article about the All Islands Committee and USCRT meeting. I was interested in learning more about how coral reef issues were being addressed in our region, as well as in the Caribbean and Florida areas.

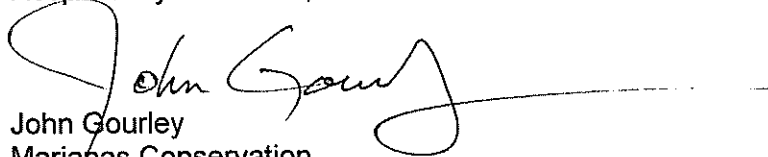
When we showed up for the AIC meeting, we were informed by two different Coral Reef Points-of-Contact that we could not attend because we weren't members. When asked why the meeting was closed, it was repeated that we weren't members. Meanwhile, there was a steady stream of visitors heading toward the conference room from Hawaii, American Samoa, a Guam NGO, and some local CNMI agency persons: all non-AIC members. I believe something is very wrong with the existing process.

The protection of coral reefs for sustainable use is everyone's concern, no more for us in the Marianas than those who live in the Caribbean or Florida. To refuse entry of interested community members to AIC meetings during the course of a Task Force meeting is a travesty.

It is my understanding that the AIC was initially established as a separate body from the Task Force, however over time these two groups appeared to have seamlessly merged into one large organization with the AIC becoming the working arm of the Task Force. What comes with this very close relationship is that the actions of the AIC are a reflection of the Coral Reef Task Force process.

I am hoping that task force members will assist community members throughout the Pacific, Caribbean, and Florida and recommend to the AIC to implement the transparency measures outlined on their website and to open their meetings to all interested persons. It is only appropriate that interested community members be encouraged to attend and, if possible, be given the opportunity to offer comments under controlled conditions, instead of being turned away at the door because they aren't members.

Respectfully submitted,



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cc: CNMI Governor Benigno Fitial
DLNR Secretary Ignacio Dela Cruz