

NON GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS' LETTER ON THE REAUTHORIZATION OF
THE UNITED STATES' CORAL REEF CONSERVATION ACT

July 23, 2007

The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
Chairman
Senate Committee on Commerce,
Science and Transportation

The Honorable Ted Stevens
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Commerce,
Science and Transportation

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Chairwoman
Senate Subcommittee on Oceans,
Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard

The Honorable Olympia J. Snowe
Ranking Member
Senate Subcommittee on Oceans,
Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard

Dear Chairpersons and Ranking Members:

As nongovernmental organizations involved with coral reef conservation, we are profoundly alarmed about the threats coral reefs face in the United States and around the world. We urge your support for a strong reauthorization of the United States Coral Reef Conservation Act.

Often called the "rainforests of the sea", coral reefs are noted for their extraordinary biological diversity and beauty. Even though coral reefs make up only about one tenth of one percent of the ocean floor, they provide habitat for over 9 million marine species. Where they are located, coral reefs are key ecosystems and vital to the economies of coastal communities through tourism and fisheries. Coral reefs also play an important role in the protection of coastlines from storms and may be the source of medicines, chemicals or other resources that have yet to be discovered.

However, coral reefs are declining at an alarming rate. Experts estimate that 60% of coral reefs may disappear before 2050. The major threats to coral reefs are well known, and include coastal runoff, overfishing and overharvesting, vessel impacts, invasive species, and coral bleaching and disease caused by climate change. These valuable and fascinating ecosystems are disappearing within our lifetimes, and their loss will have significant social, economic, and environmental consequences in the United States and worldwide.

Many federal agencies, states and territories and their partners are working to turn the tide and preserve these remarkable places for future generations. We commend NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program and the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force for their many accomplishments. However, together we must redouble our efforts to save our coral reefs. We are pleased to see the proactive steps taken by Congress and the Administration to date to reauthorize the Coral Reef Conservation Act.

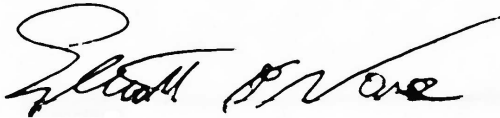
We urge Congress and the Administration to adopt the strongest possible language for the protection and conservation of coral reef ecosystems in the reauthorization of this important legislation. We support provisions to:

- authorize \$52 million annually for NOAA and \$10.5 million for the Department of Interior to protect these extraordinary habitats;
- increase the status of protection for corals in all U.S. waters;
- increase emphasis on adaptive management, which takes action to protect and conserve coral reefs from all threats;
- enable NOAA to effectively respond to vessel grounding incidents;
- provide liability provisions to protect coral reefs from injury; and
- codify the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force and authorize additional government agencies to play a wider role in coral reef conservation.

Please join the effort to conserve our coral reefs by supporting the reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act.

Sincerely,

Elliott Norse, President, Marine Conservation Biology Institute, Bellevue, WA



Katherine Andrews, Executive Director, Coastal States Organization, Washington, DC



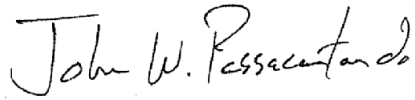
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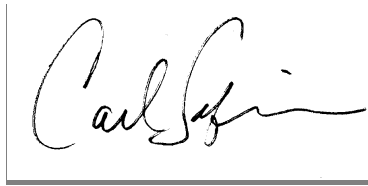
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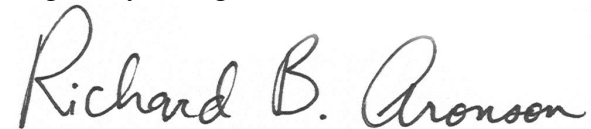
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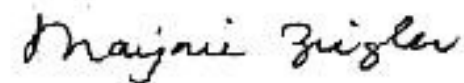
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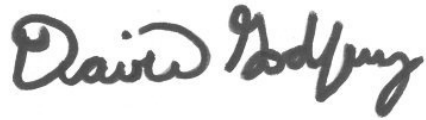


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