



UNIVERSITY OF GUAM
CENTER FOR ISLAND SUSTAINABILITY

March 2, 2021

Honorable Raúl M. Grijalva
U.S. House of Representatives
1511 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Testimony for Insular Area Climate Change Act

Dear Chairman Grijalva:

Hafa Adai. My name is Austin Shelton, and I am a marine and environmental scientist serving as the director of the University of Guam Center for Island Sustainability and Guam Sea Grant.

I would like to start off with some counterintuitive thoughts about islands.

Islands Are Rising

Under the weight of climate change impacts— biodiversity loss, debilitating storms, and swallowing seas— islands are not sinking. Strong and resilient, islands are rising.

Traditional celestial navigators remind the world that islands were never isolated. Oceans connected us for millennia. Now, a vast network of undersea fiberoptic cables make islands some of the most digitally connected places in the world. While the pandemic dictates that we plant our feet one place on the ground, we connect across the planet here on screens to share glimpses of what a brighter tomorrow could look like. Islands Are Rising.

Since the start of non-indigenous colonial periods, islands suffered high rates of chronic conditions and communicable diseases. During the most challenging global health pandemic, islands are among the safest places in the world. Islands Are Rising.

I would like to thank Chairman Grijalva for introducing this legislation and thank the members for considering the critical support it would provide for climate change planning, mitigation, and adaptation in U.S. island territories and Freely Associated States. The University of Guam Center for Island Sustainability was established in 2009 to lead and support the transition of our island region toward a sustainable future. Our center fully supports the legislation and is pleased to offer comments.

Climate change impacts to our nation are disproportionate. Islands contribute the least to the causes of climate change, yet we experience the brunt of its impacts in the form of frequent and severe storm events, droughts, flooding, and coral bleaching. Islands are victims and we're suffering, but we also have lots of knowledge and innovations to share as bright spots for the nation in the fight against climate change.

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That is why I say to you that Islands Are Rising. It's the theme of our upcoming University of Guam Conference on Island Sustainability April 5-9, 2021, which last year, brought together thousands of islanders from around the globe virtually (over 16,000 on Zoom and social media from 80 countries, states, and territories).

One island innovation example learned through the conference network was solar schools in Puerto Rico. Following Hurricanes Irma and Maria, Blue Planet Energy equipped over 100 schools with solar energy and battery storage. The project can serve as a roadmap to resiliency for other island communities that we would love to follow in Guam with the resources to be provided through this legislation. After disasters, schools become community shelters and command centers. Right now, schools are COVID-19 testing, vaccination, and food distribution sites. Upgrading school infrastructure with solar photovoltaics and battery storage will greatly improve resilience as electricity is often wiped out for weeks or months following a disaster.

Energy and Sustainability Policies and Initiatives

Guam recently took a few big steps toward achieving a sustainable future, and we would be ready to take advantage of new opportunities provided through this legislation. In November 2019, Guam Public Law 35-46 was signed, mandating 50% renewable energy production for the island by 2035 and 100% by 2045.

The Guam Green Growth (G3) Initiative is the most comprehensive public-private partnership ever created to achieve a sustainable future for our island. Executive Order 2019-23 brought together 97 working group members representing all sectors of society to create the Guam Green Growth Action Framework. The executive order assigned our Center for Island Sustainability to facilitate G3. Formally adopted by Governor Lourdes A. Leon Guerrero and Lt. Governor Joshua F. Tenorio in September 2020, the G3 Action Framework guides implementation of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in locally and culturally effective ways. UN SDG 13 Climate Action is a common thread through the whole framework. While G3 drives local action, it also places Guam at the global forefront of leadership in island sustainability. Guam is a founding member of the Local2030 Islands Network, through which islanders scale innovative, values-based, and resilient sustainability solutions worldwide. The G3 Action Framework is focused on five categories of action—1) Healthy and Prosperous Communities; 2) Educated, Capable, and Compassionate Island; 3) Sustainable Homes, Utilities, and Transportation; 4) Thriving Natural Resources; and 5) Sustainable Alliances. Cross-cutting elements are incorporated into all categories—climate action, resilience, public engagement, policy, and the core CHamoru values of respect, cooperation and treating others with kindness, generosity, and dignity.

The Guam Coral Reef Resilience Strategy (GRRS) was adopted in 2018. The goal of the GRRS is to enhance the resilience of Guam's coral reef ecosystems and human communities to the impacts of climate change by 2025. The GRRS is a tool for adaptive, strategic management; an opportunity to engage and inform key stakeholders; a mechanism to increase effectiveness of coral reef management; and a guide for funding projects designed to reach a common goal. The Guam Climate Change Resiliency Commission was formed in 2019. It is the objective of the commission to develop an integrated strategy to build resiliency against the adverse effects of climate change and to reduce contributing factors such as greenhouse emissions. Goals from both the GRRS and the Guam Climate Change Resiliency Commission are integrated into the G3 Action Framework.

Funding Considerations

With our initiatives in place and priorities identified, Guam is ready to hit the ground running with technical assistance and infrastructure development upon passage of this legislation. However, non-federal cost sharing should not be a barrier to action on climate change. The Sec.102 Non-Federal Cost Share Waiver provision to increase the waiver to \$750,000 for territories would greatly increase the ability of islands to implement climate action projects. Though we have the scientific and institutional capacity to make significant impacts with additional federal funds, we often need to scale back grant proposal plans because local funds are limited and often tied up for other federal matching requirements. An increased match waiver would greatly expand our capabilities and allow islands to leverage and maximize other federal investments.

The legislation's appropriations to NOAA for increased climate change, coastal management, and ocean and coastal mapping are most welcome. Please also consider additional appropriations to NOAA for the National Sea Grant College Program to achieve equity for insular areas. The National Sea Grant College Program enhances the practical use and conservation of coastal, marine and Great Lakes resources in order to create a sustainable economy and environment. Puerto Rico is currently the only U.S. territory with a full-status Sea Grant College Program. I serve as the director of the Guam Sea Grant Coherent Area Program, and we will soon undergo a review for Institutional Status to increase our base funding. CNMI, American Samoa, USVI, and the Freely Associated States do not have their own Sea Grant Programs.

The world is at the cusp of a green industrial revolution with the unfolding of new technological advances in 5G Internet, renewable energy, and emission-free transportation. In addition to climate change planning and research, U.S. island territories and the FAS urgently need assistance with the build-out of infrastructure to make a swift transition into the new green industrial revolution. The proposed provisions for renewable energy and sustainable infrastructure grant will support new green jobs, increase climate resilience, and lower fossil-fuel emissions.

Island Partners

The University of Guam Center for Island Sustainability implements climate actions and serves as a convener of local, regional, and global partners. In solidarity, islands are uniting in common purpose through the Local2030 Islands Network, U.S. Climate Strong Islands Network, and other organizations to act on climate. I suggest adding representatives of these networks in a member or advisory capacity to the Insular Area Climate Change Interagency Task Force in Sec. 101.

Islands are distant, but they are not alone. Together, **Islands Are Rising**.

Si Yu'os Ma'ase and thank you for introducing this legislation and providing me the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,



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