

Statement of Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett (VI)

House Committee on Natural Resources

Hearing: “Ocean-Based Climate Action: Legislative Hearing on H.R. 3764, H.R. 660, H.R. 1415, H.R. 1689, H.R. 2750, H.R. 3160, H.R. 3228, H.R. 3692, H.R. 3748, H.R. 3817, H.R. 3864, H.R. 3892, H.R. 3906”

June 22, 2021, 3:00pm, via WebEx

Good afternoon, Chairman Grijalva and Ranking Member Westerman. Thank you for holding this legislative hearing on “Ocean-Based Climate Action” and for providing me with the opportunity to lend support for my legislation, H.R. 660, the *Shovel-Ready Restoration Grants for Coastlines and Fisheries Act*.

I am pleased that the Committee is holding today’s hearing on the important issue of improving our coastlines and oceans. Healthy coastal ecosystems provide critical social and environmental benefits, in addition to playing important roles to the fishing industries and broader economies of coastal communities across country. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), our coastal economy supports 2.3 million jobs and contributes approximately \$373 billion to the nation’s gross domestic product.

Sadly, we’re losing these habitats at a rapid rate, and we’re seeing losses across habitat types—from coral reefs to wetlands to kelp. Coral reefs and mangroves are extremely important to places like my home of the Virgin Islands and other coastal communities. They protect our shorelines by reducing 90% of the wave energy during storm surges; they feed our families by providing habitat for our fisheries; and the quiet beaches and bays that they create support our economy by attracting millions of tourists each year. They also provide adaptation to climate change by

reducing damage due to storm surge caused by more frequent and intense storms. Our response to this loss needs to address the causes of decline and accelerate recovery through the restoration and resilience projects that my bill, H.R. 660, would authorize.

During the last major recession, Congress provided \$167 million through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to support coastal resilience projects that created jobs. This program was highly successful in advancing coastal and marine restoration while also spurring economic recovery. In fact, the program created an estimated 17 jobs for every million dollars spent, and it generated \$15 dollars in net economic benefits for every dollar invested. However, the program was so popular that it received about \$3 billion in proposed projects from communities across the country—far more applications than were initially anticipated.

As we work to recover from the coronavirus pandemic and the related economic recession, I believe it is very important that we support projects that can both stimulate the economy and make strides in advancing coastal restoration. Economies in coastal communities—like my home of the Virgin Islands—tend to be highly reliant on tourism, and have consequently been some of the hardest hit communities during the coronavirus pandemic.

That's why Congressman Don Young, Dean of the House, and I reintroduced the *Shovel-Ready Restoration Grants for Coastlines and Fisheries Act*. This bipartisan legislation is modeled after and expands on the temporary program originally established by ARRA. Our bill will meet the need for coastal restoration and economic recovery projects by creating a \$3 billion NOAA grant program to fund

shovel-ready projects that restore or improve coastal habitats, coastal resiliency, and the economy of coastal communities. Under the program, priority projects are those that would stimulate the economy and could begin within 90 days of the grant award. Additionally, these priority projects would also provide compensation to fishermen for either their labor or use of a fishing vessel. It is also important to note that the bill would not only support remote coastal communities neighboring the ocean, it would also support those coastal communities that border the Great Lakes.

This bill would go far to provide the resources and labor needed to protect our shorelines, improve our fisheries, and attract more tourism. These projects are reinvestments in our communities.

In addition to being included in Chairman Grijalva's *Ocean-Based Climate Solutions Act of 2021* (H.R. 3764), with the funding raised to \$10 billion, the *Shovel-Ready Restoration Grants for Coastlines and Fisheries Act* was also passed by the House of Representatives last year as part of H.R. 2, *the Moving Forward Act*. I would like to thank Dean Young for working with me on this initiative, and I invite the other members of this Committee to cosponsor this bill.

Investing in coastal restoration is good policy. It's not just the right thing to do for the environment; it's the right thing to do for coastal communities, vulnerable coastal populations, and the U.S. economy. I urge that the Committee move this legislation through the House to final passage by the Senate, to strengthen our coastal resiliency and help countless Virgin Islanders—and other coastal community residents—who are out of work through no fault of their own.

Thank you for your consideration.