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**REMARKS OF  
THE HONORABLE MADELEINE Z. BORDALLO  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS  
BEFORE THE OCEAN STUDIES BOARD OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES  
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*“Opportunities and Challenges for Ocean Research in the U.S. Island Territories”*

Good afternoon and Hafa Adai. Thank you for extending to me the invitation to participate this afternoon in this discussion. It is both an honor and a privilege to be among this group of distinguished scholars and to be seated on this panel with Dr. Frank Muller-Karger, whose work as a member of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy we deeply appreciate, and Kacky Andrews, whose advocacy work on behalf of the Coastal states and territories is well known among this community and highly regarded among many here in Washington, D.C.

I bring greetings to you from my distinguished colleagues who represent the other territories in the United States Congress. Congressman Eni Faleomavaega of American Samoa, Congresswoman Donna Christensen of the Virgin Islands, and Congressman Luis Fortuño of Puerto Rico, join with me and Resident Representative Pete A. Tenorio of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, in applauding your work and service on behalf of our country. Each of us has risen to assume new leadership roles in the 110th Congress and each of us stand ready and willing to work with you in support of your mission.

As the Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans, I am committed to fostering sound and responsible stewardship of our ocean resources at every level of government; to securing federal support for advanced scientific research of the oceans and the coastal ecosystems; and to increasing public awareness in our territories and across our country of the importance of the oceans.

I want to especially thank Susan Roberts, your Board Director, and Susan Park, one of your Program Officers, for reaching out to me and to my colleagues who represent the territories in Congress. When I learned that both Dr. Muller-Karger and Kacky were lined up for this panel discussion, I knew that I had better accept Susan’s invitation to participate. With two Floridians on the agenda, I quickly recognized that my role today would be to bring a little “Pacific” perspective to this discussion, not least a “Congressional” one as well. I note that they have a two-to-one advantage today, so I will try to hold my own throughout this discussion.

We know, however, that there are no boundaries to the research opportunities that await us and that lie beyond either coast of the continental United States. Both the Caribbean and the Pacific territories offer vast and varied opportunities for research that would enrich our national understanding – and global appreciation – of the earth’s oceans. The Ocean Studies Board would do well to document and help marshal the resources together to pursue these research opportunities. The Board should also document the ways in which federal-territorial cooperation and interaction can be improved in support of protection of our ocean resources.

I hope that today’s discussion will mark the beginning of a long-term and continuing dialogue on ocean research interests, needs and opportunities in the U.S. territories. I also hope that we will soon witness the launching of coordinated and collaborative Board-initiated research in the territories based upon the free exchange of ideas and interests that this discussion is aimed at engendering.

Ocean research is in fact one of the relatively few areas where our brothers and sisters who reside on the coasts of the mainland can easily and readily identify with those of us who reside in the offshore territories. All too often our differences as States and territories are highlighted in the public policy making process, but when it comes to the oceans and the marine ecosystems, the U.S. territories are front and center of this process. We recognize that our islands are among the preeminent gateways for pioneering research in the field of oceanography, and we welcome this opportunity to contribute substantially to national policy.

Although each of our territories has its own unique story of integration into the American family, and each of our peoples have their own culture, language, customs, and traditions, among our points of universal commonality, is that all of us have grown and adapted to the ocean through the centuries. Our homelands are insular by their very nature, and our lives are inevitably connected with the rhythms and patterns of the sea.

This is an important, intriguing, and most relevant dialogue for the people of the territories. It is important because ocean research can further unlock the answers for us that we long for in order to better understand and to come to grips with our own dependency upon and interaction with the resources of the sea. It is intriguing because of the many and varied possibilities that ocean research holds for us and our future. And it is most relevant because the oceans define for us, perhaps more visibly so than for any other group of Americans, our own way of life. It is also relevant for us today because our communities in the islands are actively engaged in a process to grow and diversify our economies at a rate and to a degree just as fast and strong, if not faster and stronger, than at any other point in time in our history.

We want to better understand and protect our ocean resources as we undertake this economic growth and diversification. We want to grow and diversify our economies in ways that responsibly showcase – not exploit or unintentionally jeopardize – our ocean resources. Put simply, increased national and scientific interest and research in the oceans and marine resources in the territories is both needed and encouraged.

I come here today to urge you to invest your academic capital, your professional and collective interests, knowledge, skills, and capabilities, in the territories. Your investment would yield important findings for the benefit of not only the people of the territories, but for all of us in the United States and for our friends throughout the world.

I want to emphasize three key reasons why I believe this Board should pursue, unwaveringly and emphatically, research of the oceans in the U.S. territories.

First, the oceans complement the way of life in the islands and because our people understand and believe in the need for ocean research.

Second, and as has been well documented over the years, some of the world's most biologically rich and diverse marine ecosystems exist in the waters adjacent to the U.S. territories. The abundance of life and activity off the shores of the territories is too important and too costly for researchers to resist and ignore.

Third, because without renewed and increased ocean research in the territories, the precious resources inherent in the oceans will remain at risk from both natural and human hazards and as future economic and military activities take root. The work already begun in the territories to preserve and protect our ocean resources needs and deserves federal backing. We are limited in the tools available to us locally and we are bounded by other legal and budgetary constraints in our pursuit to explore and understand the oceans. The work that this Board could and should undertake in the territories can yield results important from a national perspective.

Allow me to briefly expand upon each of these three reasons.

#### 1. Cultural Importance of the Ocean

As stated earlier, the oceans are an integral part of our way of life in the islands. The oceans are a part of our identity as a people. Our people have adapted to the oceans over centuries. Indeed, the Chamorro culture is rich in customs and symbolism that reminds us of our inseparableness from the sea. From the traditional practice of spear fishing, to the sights of outrigger canoes and the flying proa – the fast and agile seagoing craft that the Chamorros built to navigate the waters and to trade on the high seas – we are reminded of life on, near, and with the water. The field of blue on our own Guam Flag represents our unity with the sea and the sky and is indicative of the fact that our island is surrounded by the ocean.

Many of our legends are stories handed down through the generations that involve or are centered on the ocean. Whether it is the story of Guam's legendary mermaid, Sirena, or the Legend of the Turtle and the Shark in American Samoa, each of our peoples' history is rooted in the oceans and tied to its rich, marine life.

Today, a significant portion of the workforce in the islands is employed in industries related to the sea. The interdependency upon the oceans and our economies is strong and alive. There is a desire to grow and develop sustainable, community-based, prosperous and indigenous fisheries in the islands. There is likewise a desire to further develop our eco-tourism based ventures.

The protection and the preservation of the marine environment recognizably serves the vital economic and cultural interests of the territories. I urge you to undertake ocean research in the territories, and to do so in ways consistent with and complementary of cultural and traditional practices of the indigenous peoples of the territories.

## 2. An Abundance of Resources

The second reason for your investment in ocean research in and for the territories relates to the many and varied opportunities it presents. The world's most biologically rich and diverse marine ecosystems can be found in the waters off the shorelines of the U.S. territories. This abundance of life and activity is far too great for the Board to ignore. The potential for ocean research that these ecosystems offer is significant and substantial.

Collectively, the U.S. territories today encompass sixteen populated islands in addition to roughly eighteen uninhabited islands and atolls that all together comprise nearly thirteen hundred nautical miles of shoreline. Apart from Alaska and the Aleutian Islands, the territories provide to the United States a significant portion of its exclusive economic zone, the largest such zone in the world.

A majority of the shallow-water coral reefs in the United States are found in the waters near the territories. Indeed, the mere fact that the territories of Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, are seated as members of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, along with just two States, Hawaii and Florida, is indicative of the role our territorial governments are called upon to fulfill toward the conservation of our coral reefs. The value of these coral reefs to the integrity of the shorelines, to the vibrancy of commercial and recreational fishing, and to the success of the tourism sector in the territories cannot be understated. Local management of coral reef resources and mitigation efforts against natural harm to them can be improved with greater and more scientifically sophisticated ocean research.

Coral reefs are just one of the several natural reasons for increased pursuit of ocean research in the territories. Submarine volcanoes and the depth of the waters themselves are others.

## 3. Economic and Environmental Importance of the Ocean

The third reason to emphasize with respect to ocean research in the territories relates to the need for such research in planning for and protecting the island environments. In expanding upon the first reason I noted the cultural importance of and

familiarity with ocean research. It is at this point, that I will again underscore the desirability of ocean research for our people, but this time from an economic and environmental standpoint.

Our territories are exposed to intense weather and climate-to-logical systems. Typhoons and hurricanes have historically landed on our shores, if not, outright passed directly through our islands. In the process, these storms have damaged our reefs, diluted our waters, altered our streams, and left other indelible imprints on our lands.

Tropical cyclones, climate change, and coral bleaching are threats to our marine resources and environment. These are challenges for us in terms of ocean research. Our governments and our people desire to learn how best to cope with and counter these phenomenon.

Additionally, our resources are at risk from continued development in our islands. Our economies are growing and diversifying in order to keep pace with and to find a wedge in the global marketplace. In the process, we strive to be cognizant of our ocean and coastal resources. Much development is occurring in the islands, particularly, on Guam.

The United States Navy is currently executing upwards of a fifty million dollar contract to upgrade and extend two wharves in Apra Harbor, Guam. And the Department of Defense is actively planning to relocate eight to nine thousand Marines and their families from Okinawa to Guam beginning as early as 2010.

Each of the economic and military projects being undertaken in the territories point to a growing need to catalog, map, and study our ocean resources.

In closing, let me state that I take my responsibilities as Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans seriously. I have much more to learn about these issues and I am committed to working with you. Partnerships are the key to success. Again, it is my hope that the Board will choose to partner with stakeholders and leaders in the territories to document ocean research opportunities and to scientifically invest in these opportunities in the near future. Today, I hope that I have left you with three reasons to pursue these opportunities: one, because the livelihood of the people of the territories rests upon the oceans; two, because the territories are home to some of most biologically rich and diverse marine ecosystems in the world; and three, because ocean research is desperately needed if federal responsibilities to protect the fragile ecosystems in the islands are to be effectively planned and fulfilled. We welcome the interaction, the continued dialogue, and your focus on our ocean resources. I look forward to working with you toward these ends. Thank you for allowing me to share these observations and thoughts with you today.