Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 19, 2012

The Honorable Jane Lubchenco
Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere, and
Administrator, National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20230

Samuel D. Rauch
Acting Assistant Administrator for Fisheries
NOAA Fisheries Service
1315 East West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Dr. Lubchenco and Mr. Rauch,

We write in response to NOAA's recent proposal to list 54 species of coral as threatened, 12 as endangered, and reclassify two species as endangered under the Endangered Species Act. The waters surrounding the tropical islands we represent in Congress are home to the vast majority of these corals, and we understand the value of healthy coral reefs to supporting the fishing and tourism economies, providing a barrier from storms, and protecting biodiversity. This understanding has prompted the enactment of some of the strongest coral conservation laws in the world at the state and local levels. Unfortunately, our small populations have no control over the main factors that have led you to seek Federal protection for these species: the linked problems of rising sea temperatures and ocean acidification. This fact has placed us in the unenviable position of having to employ inadequate tools to solve a problem our communities did not cause and have little ability to address.

While we know that this proposal is not a final determination, and that an Endangered Species Act listing of some or all of these species would not necessarily preclude any ongoing or future economic activities that take place in the ocean along our coasts, it is important that you give our constituents ample opportunity to review materials designed to enhance their understanding of the proposal and to comment on the proposed action. We understand the public comment period for the proposed listing is currently scheduled to close on March 7, 2013, even though NOAA has not made available public maps depicting the range and locations of the corals and affected areas. We find this situation unacceptable, because without maps, there is little on which to base public comment. To be useful, these maps must indicate latitude and longitude of the range of the listed species and be accompanied by public outreach documents to help our constituents understand the information presented. NOAA has indicated to our offices that such maps will be provided to the public, but to date they have not.

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Therefore we respectfully request the following:

1) That detailed maps of the distribution of these corals and the location of potentially affected areas be provided to Congress and to the public as soon as possible, but no later than January 14, 2013, the date of the first public hearing on the listing proposal.

2) That the public comment period be extended for 90 days after the maps are made publicly available. This extension will allow constituents more time to understand the possible impacts of the listings, will give stakeholders sufficient time to shape relevant and useful comments to inform the rulemaking process, and will help NOAA expand its education and outreach efforts.

3) That NOAA update our offices weekly on its outreach efforts to marine resource stakeholders we represent, and on progress in developing maps and other materials related to the proposed listings.

More time is needed to review and provide proper comments on a proposed change that could impact many people and their livelihoods. We would appreciate a prompt response to this request so that we may assure our constituents that they will have sufficient time to analyze and respond to the proposed listings and potential impacts. If there are questions, please have your staff contact Matt Strickler (202) 225-6065 on the Natural Resources Committee Staff.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,

Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs

Madeleine Z. Bordallo

Donna M. Christensen

Colleen Hanabusa

Eni Faleomavaega

Pedro R. Pierluisi