

Coral Reef Task Force Meeting
September 15, 2010

Public Comment

Good afternoon members and participants of the Coral Reef Task Force Meeting. First of all, I would like to extend my appreciation to all of you for the continued effort in the protection of our coral reefs.

My name is Richard B. Seman and I was born and raised here on the island of Saipan. I have been involved in resource management for over 20 years and understand fully the importance of resource conservation and sustainability. As a former Director of the Division of Fish & Wildlife and Secretary of the Department of Lands and Natural Resources, I had the opportunity to be directly involved with the initial stage of the Coral Reef Task Force (CRTF) out here in the Mariana Islands and helped developed some of the Local Action Strategies (LAS) that are still being carried out today.

The success of the CRTF is dependent on various factors to which we can measure from. Implementation of Marine Protected Areas (MPA), enactment of protective legislations and effective enforcement programs are just some of the examples. However, one component that we always need to have for such success to really matter is PUBLIC PARTICIPATION, especially stake-holders.

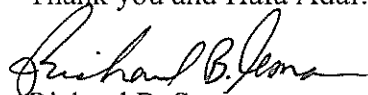
Stake-holders need to have some degree of ownership in order for the CRTF programs to actually succeed. Stake-holders' knowledge of the resources are important and need to be recognized and included in any management measures. We must never forget about them. The development of all LAS must be done through the community level with its primary stake-holders. It must be done through the "Bottom-up" approach.

Our community has tremendous knowledge and experiences with our coral reef and such knowledge and experiences must be respected and incorporated in to any CRTF policies. We simply can not ignore them.

So far, my personal experience in this year's CRTF has been practically a "Top-down" approach. I have not heard of any solicitation to the general public for their input on any proposed LAS. In addition, I was only given an opportunity to make comment of this week's meeting at the tail-end of the schedule. Public comments should be allowed during each session and not toward the end of the meeting schedule like today.

The CRTF must resort back to the formalization of all LAS the way it was done 7 years ago when involved government agencies (such as Division of Fish & Wildlife, Division of Environmental Quality and Coastal Resources Management Office) would solicit stake-holders throughout the community for their participation in the LAS development workshop(s) where knowledgeable navigators and facilitators are present to assist. So far, I haven't heard of any proposed LAS that had undergone direct community input.

Thank you and Hafa Adai!



Richard B. Seman
Publisher, Marianas Fishing Magazine