



PRESS RELEASE

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UOG Center for Island Sustainability director testifies on climate action bill before U.S. Congress

Guam was represented before the U.S. Congress on March 5 as University of Guam Center for Island Sustainability and Sea Grant Director Austin Shelton provided testimony in support of the Insular Area Climate Change Act in a virtual hearing.

The Insular Area Climate Change Act was introduced by Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva, a democrat from Arizona serving as chairman of the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources. It aims to reduce climate crisis impacts on U.S. territories and freely associated states by creating greater access to federal climate change–related programs and by creating multiple grant programs through which insular areas could invest in renewable energy and sustainable infrastructure.

The act would also raise the non-federal cost share, or match, waiver to \$750,000 for territories, which would increase the ability of islands to leverage funding to implement climate action projects.

Shelton was invited by the committee to provide testimony for Guam alongside representatives from the Marshall Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. He is a marine and environmental scientist who oversees a portfolio of programs related to reviving island ecosystems through the UOG Center for Island Sustainability and UOG Sea Grant. The Center for Island Sustainability, in partnership with the Office of the Governor of Guam, is also leading the facilitation of the Guam Green Growth initiative, the island's most comprehensive public-private partnership to date toward achieving a sustainable future.

“Climate change impacts 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,” Shelton said in his testimony.

Shelton commended the legislation’s provision of millions of dollars of federal funding to insular areas related to climate change and coral reefs, rebates for energy-efficient products, and sustainable infrastructure and renewable energy expansion.

“In addition to climate change planning and research, islands urgently need assistance with the build-out of infrastructure to make a swift transition into the new green industrial revolution,” Shelton said. “The proposed provisions for renewable energy and sustainable infrastructure grants will support new green jobs, increase climate resilience, and lower fossil-fuel emissions.”

Shelton highlighted how Guam is ready to implement the new climate change programs if the legislation is enacted, as it recently took the following steps toward achieving a sustainable future:

- mandated 100% renewable energy production by 2045;
- established the Guam Green Growth initiative, a public-private partnership that aims to advance the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals;
- adopted the Guam Coral Reef Resilience Strategy; and
- formed the Guam Climate Change Resiliency Commission.

Shelton also pointed out in his testimony that, counterintuitive to the perception of islands being helpless in the face of climate change, they are leading the way.

“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,” he said. “Under the weight of climate change impacts – biodiversity loss, debilitating storms, and swallowing seas – islands are not sinking. Strong and resilient, islands are rising.”

The complete hearing is available to view on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XsGCFtEiWkM>.

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DISCUSSION ON THE INSULAR AREA CLIMATE CHANGE ACT



Panelists

Gerald M. Zackles
Ambassador to the
U.S. Republic of the Marshall Islands

Ada Monzón
President, EcoExploratorio
Puerto Rico Science Museum

Jean-Pierre L. Oriol
Commissioner
USVI Department of Planning
and Natural Resources

Rafael A. Machargo Maldonado
Secretary
Puerto Rico Department of Natural Resources

Zena Grecni
Sustained Climate Assessment Specialist
East-West Center

Austin Shelton
Director
University of Guam
Center for Island Sustainability

Follow @NRDems @RepRaulGrijalva

Photo Caption 1:

UOG Center for Island Sustainability and Sea Grant Director Austin Shelton testifies virtually before the U.S. Congress on March 5 in support of the Insular Area Climate Change Act, which aims to reduce climate change impacts on U.S. territories and freely associated states. Shelton represented Guam in the hearing, joined by panelists from the Marshall Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.



Photo Caption 2:

The U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources held a hearing on March 5 for the Insular Area Climate Change Act, which was introduced by Congressman Raúl M. Grijalva, a democrat from Arizona. The legislation proposes to assist insular areas in climate change adaptation efforts.

Photos courtesy of the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources