

Opening Statement
The Honorable Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans, and Insular Affairs
Oversight Hearing on Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge and
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 1171 and S. 363
December 15, 2011

Thank you, Chairman Fleming. I look forward to hearing the testimony about the issues and bills before us today.

Today, we will hear testimony from witnesses regarding the history of Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge. I look forward to learning more about this important issue.

We will also examine S.363, introduced by Senator Wicker. This bill will simply authorize a land exchange between the City of Pascagoula [PASS-KA-GOO-LA] and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NOAA [No-ah], which has been agreed upon by both parties.

Finally, I want to also welcome my colleague and good friend, the distinguished gentleman representing California's 17th Congressional District, Congressman Farr, who will testify on his bill, H.R. 1171, the Marine Debris Act Reauthorization

Amendments of 2011. As someone who is passionate about the well-being of our oceans, I find marine debris to be a particularly concerning issue.

Marine debris is any discarded or abandoned man-made object that enters the coastal or marine environment or the Great Lakes. The majority of this trash, from plastic bottles to derelict fishing gear, breaks down very slowly and can float thousands of miles on ocean currents. We now know that trash is not only accumulating on the world's beaches, but is also gathering in the most remote parts of the ocean. This litter is more than an eyesore -- marine debris poses a serious threat to fishery resources, wildlife, and habitat, as well as human health and navigational safety.

The spiraling whirlpool of trash between California and Hawaii, which is popularly known as the Pacific Garbage Patch, is one of several areas of highly-concentrated marine debris in the Pacific Ocean. By skimming the water with fine nets, scientists have discovered that in some parts of this vast Pacific Garbage Patch, **the plastic outweighs tiny marine creatures**

six to one. In March of this year, the tsunami in Japan created scattered patches of marine debris in the Pacific Ocean that are visible by satellite. This debris has the potential to litter our shores, from the islands to the West Coast, over the next 5 years.

Last year, in just one day, over one thousand volunteers cleared more than 6,000 pounds of marine debris from our beaches on the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands and in a similar effort this year, almost 5,000 pounds were collected. The national and international efforts on the part of NOAA, working with the United States Coast Guard and other agencies, have been highly successful at identifying, removing, and preventing marine debris.

Marine debris is hazardous to humans and wildlife, clogs our beautiful oceans and beaches, and has devastating economic impacts. It is for these reasons and many more that I strongly support H.R. 1171, and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today.