DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
JOINT REGION MARIANAS
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Speaker Benjamin J.F. Cruz

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Received By

The Honorable Senator Benjamin J.F. Cruz
Speaker
34th Guam Legislature
Guam Congress Building
163 Chalan Santo Papa
Hagatña, Guam 96910

Dear Mr. Speaker:

SUBJECT: NAVY'S ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AND OUTREACH FOR UNDERWATER DETONATIONS ON GUAM

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I trust all is well with you and the 34th Guam Legislature as we commemorate Liberation Day and its associated ceremonies.

Although there have been some recent media reported concerns for our routine underwater detonation training conducted by the U.S. Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Mobile Unit 5 in outer Apra Harbor on June 27, I feel assured that our open dialog on this topic that started on May 3, 2017, the detonation field trip that permitted first hand observation of ongoing detonation training and continued follow-on correspondence and sharing of requested reports with Senators Biscoe-Lee and Castro addressed the matter sufficiently.

At our May 3rd meeting, we met to hear public concerns and explain the process of how this vital training is conducted. Our EOD Mobile Unit 5 and its Marianas detachment is the same unit that responded to Emergency Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) requests 152 times in 2016 and 165 times in 2017 in Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). Their routine trainings take place with small amounts of explosives (from 1-5 pounds), and they only occur in designated, approved locations on the sandy sea floor at outer Apra Harbor or one mile north of Cabras Island. During these trainings, small charges are placed next to a fake mine to simulate a real-world operation, ensuring the critical and necessary qualifications and proficiency of our technicians.

I want to make it clear that this type of training is regularly conducted and takes place wherever EOD units are stationed, including Hawaii, San Diego and throughout the continental United States. We've done this type of training here 29 times in the last four years, and it has been conducted for well

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over two decades with no adverse impacts. As seen during the recent detonation field trip, there is barely a ripple on the surface of the water when a detonation occurs. However, safety of human life, marine life and environmental concerns continue to remain at the forefront of our minds when we train.

For those reasons, prior to the Navy undertaking a training event, the Coast Guard issues a broadcast Notice to Mariners and activates a safety zone surrounding the activity. In accordance with our National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) permit, we also employ many protective measures to safeguard marine resources during this type of training. Examples of the protective measures include the area being visually cleared by divers below and lookouts on the surface before, during, and after the training. In addition, all training activity ceases if a person or marine life is seen in the area.

I want to stress that we do our best to be responsible environmental stewards. This type of training, our standards and mitigations employed were evaluated by both NMFS during development and review of the Marianas Islands training and testing final environmental impact statement and its associated biological opinion and adopted in the resulting August 31, 2016, letter of authorization.

I want to thank the Senators who took the time to speak with me last year about this important training. This training is what allows our EOD techs to continue to build and reinforce their skills. They are positioned here in Guam so they can quickly deploy to areas in the Indo-Pacific where their skills might be needed. One team always remains here to respond to the many UXOs here on the island.

The ongoing training these EOD technicians receive is essential to maintaining their proficiency in adeptly responding to and conducting UXO render-safe operations and, as we describe above, we conduct this training in a manner reflecting strong adherence to our responsibility to be stewards of the environment.

Sincerely,

S. S. CHATFIELD
Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy
Commander

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