

January 27, 2014

Dr. Piero Genovesi  
Chair  
Invasive Species Specialist Group  
Species Survival Commission  
International Union for Conservation of Nature

### Seeking Your Expert Guidance and Advice

Dear Dr. Genovesi,

We are writing to you and other IUCN Invasive Species Specialist Group members with extreme concern regarding the possibility of introduction and spread of invasive alien species to Okinawa, the southern most prefecture of Japan. We would like to direct your attention to this urgent situation and seek your guidance and advise.

On December 27<sup>th</sup> 2013, Okinawa Prefectural Governor Hirokazu Nakaima, under pressure from the Japanese government, gave permission to the Okinawa Defense Bureau to reclaim 160 ha of land in the area of Henoko and Oura Bay in northern Okinawa Island (Figure 1 to 3). The reclamation is a part of the US and Japanese governments' plan to build a US military airbase in the area (Futenma Replacement Facilities Construction Project) (Figure 4 and Figure 6). The area is considered as one of the most biodiversity rich environments in Japan (Figure 7).<sup>1</sup> 21 million m<sup>3</sup> of soil and rock is to be used in the reclamation (that's over 300 million 10-ton truck loads of soil and rock) (Figure 4) and 17 million m<sup>3</sup> of it will be transported from several different sites in mainland Japan (Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> Drilling surveys for reclamation could start as early as in March 2014.

The Okinawa Governor at a press conference stated that he gave the permission because “[the Bureau’s application for land reclamation] conforms to the standards” stipulated in the *Act on Reclamation of Publicly-owned Water Surface*.<sup>3</sup> We are concerned however that the permission was given based upon the Governor’s political judgment rather than scientific understanding of the effects of the reclamation on the environment. The Act stipulates that the Governor cannot issue a permit unless the project takes sufficient consideration for environmental conservation and disaster prevention (Article 4-1-2) or if the purpose of the project is in violation of plans based upon national or municipal (including port authorities) laws regarding environmental conservation (Article 4-1-3). In our view, his decision to give the permission is in no way in accordance with the Act.

As you can see in Figure 1, Okinawa Island is one of some 160 islands comprising of the Prefecture of Okinawa. Okinawa as a whole is located in a sub-tropical zone and is geographically separated by water from mainland Japan which mostly falls in a temperate zone. The transportation of such a large quantity of soil and rock across

different climate and geographical zones would certainly lead to the introduction and spread of alien species to Okinawa and this would have far reaching effects. Specific concern has been raised over the possible impact of *Aspergillus* species and *Serratia marcescens* on coral species found in Okinawa as well as of other land based species on the marine species.<sup>4</sup> Another concern has been the possible introduction of the Argentine ant, *Linepithema humile*, to the island. The Argentine ant has been observed and has become a serious problem in the areas of some of the proposed sites on mainland Japan from which soil and rock is to be transported to Okinawa (Table 1 and Figure 8). The blatant disregard for Okinawa's native species and ecosystem is disturbing.

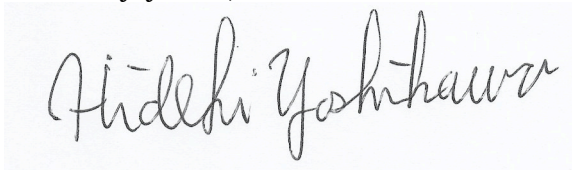
So far, the Okinawa Defense Bureau has not provided sufficient information with regard to how it intends to prevent the introduction of alien species to Okinawa Island.<sup>5</sup> The Bureau only indicated in its reclamation application that the contractors who provide soil and rock will take appropriate measures to prevent the introduction of alien species to Okinawa while the Bureau will take on the responsibility of overseeing the contractors' actions. The Okinawa Governor himself has not presented any plausible reasons as to why he suddenly has given permission to allow the reclamation and the construction of the airbase after years of staunchly opposing it. In his February 2012 "Governor's Comments" to the Defense Bureau's Environmental Impact Statement, he clearly stated that the construction "should cause tremendous problems in terms of environmental conservation" and that "even with the conservation measures provided in the EIA, the conservation of the livelihood of the local people and of the environment in the area affected is *impossible*."<sup>6</sup> The lack of information and of explanation by both the Bureau and the Governor is troubling.

It should be emphasized that since the construction plan was first proposed in 1997, it has generated strong local and international opposition. Protests over the last decade have focused on the inevitable detrimental effects of an additional base on the valuable natural environment of Henoko and Oura Bay and the life of the local people. In fact, as you must be aware, in light of the military base construction plan, the IUCN has adopted three recommendations/resolutions calling for the conservation of the dugong, an endangered marine mammal inhabiting in the area.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the area of Henoko and Oura Bay is less than 20 km away from the northern part (Yanbaru area) of Okinawa Island (Figure 2), which the Japanese Ministry of the Environment in December 2013 designated as one of its candidate sites for the UNSECO's World Natural Heritage.<sup>8</sup> The Okinawa Governor's granting of permission for reclamation is an affront to the IUCN's recommendations/resolutions regarding the dugongs and it sends a contradictory message to the IUCN, which will engage in the evaluation of those candidate sites for World Natural Heritage.

While greatly discouraged by this recent development, we are also renewing our efforts to protect the environment of Henoko and Oura Bay, the life of the local people, and Okinawa's environment as a whole. We are now trying to request that the Okinawa Governor reconsider his decision and take an appropriate action in order to avoid the introduction of any alien species to Okinawa, based upon scientific understanding of the effects of the reclamation on the environment. However, we realize that we cannot

do this alone. We need to draw upon the scientific knowledge of experts who are outside of the immediate situation. We understand that the IUCN's Invasive Species Specialist Group recognizes the vulnerability of island ecosystems to alien species. We also understand that the IUCN has various mechanisms including expert groups, guidelines and databases on the issue of invasive alien species. Thus, we would like to seek your guidance and advice on this issue of invasive alien species in light of the imminent reclamation process. We await your response. Should you need further information, we would be happy to provide it for you.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hideki Yoshikawa". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Hideki Yoshikawa

Citizens' Network for Biodiversity in Okinawa  
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The organizations listed below endorse this letter.

Association to Promote Ryukyu Islands as World Natural Heritage (Okinawa, Japan)  
Association to Protect Northernmost Dugong (Japan)  
Association to Save Shallow Water and Tidal Flat in Asia (Japan)  
Catholic Human Rights Committee (South Korea)  
Catholic Solidarity for Peace on Jeju Island (South Korea)  
Center for Biological Diversity (U.S.)  
Citizens' Network for Biodiversity in Okinawa (Okinawa, Japan)  
Dugong Network Okinawa (Okinawa, Japan)  
Ecological Society of the Philippines (The Philippines)  
Gangjeong Village Association (South Korea)  
Gangjeong Village International Team (South Korea)  
Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space (U.S.)  
Hawai'i Peace and Justice (U.S.)  
Heri kichi iranai jyukkuno kai (No Heliport Base Association of 10 Districts North of Futamai) (Okinawa, Japan)  
IUCN, WCEL, Ethic Specialist Group  
International Forum on Globalization (U.S.)  
Japan Civil Network for the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity (Japan)  
Japan-U.S. Citizens for Okinawa Network (Japan and U.S.)  
Jeju Pan-Island Committee for Stop of Military Base and for Realization of Peace

Island (South Korea)  
Korea Catholic Federation for Justice (South Korea)  
Kumejima-Hotarunokai (Okinawa, Japan)  
Minshuku Yaponesia (Okinawa, Japan)  
Moana Nui Alliance (U.S. and Pacific Islands)  
National Network of Korean Civil Society for Opposing to the Naval Base in Jeju Island (South Korea)  
No Helipads Takae Residents Society (Okinawa, Japan)  
Okinawa Environmental Network (Okinawa, Japan)  
Okinawa Reef Check and Research Group (Okinawa, Japan)  
Okuma River Protection Fund (Okinawa, Japan)  
Pan Seto Inland Sea Congress (Japan)  
Peace Philosophy Center (Canada)  
Save the Dugong Campaign Center (IUCN member) (Japan)  
Save the Dugong Foundation (Okinawa, Japan)  
The Australian Rainforest Conservation Society (Australia)  
The Conference Opposing Heliport Construction (Okinawa, Japan)  
The Nature Conservation Society of Japan (IUCN member) (Japan)  
The Save Awase Higata Association (Okinawa, Japan)  
World Can't Wait-Hawai'i Chapter (U.S.)

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References:

<sup>1</sup> The coastal area of Henoko and Oura Bay is designated as Assessment Rank I in the Okinawa Prefectural Government's *Guidelines on the Conservation of the Natural Environment*. "Assessment Rank I" is the highest ranking designation for coastal areas and strict protection and conservation of the natural environment is required for the designated areas. The land area of Henoko and Oura Bay is designated as Assessment Rank III in the Okinawa Prefectural Government's *Guidelines on the Conservation of the Natural Environment*. "Assessment Rank III" is the third highest ranking designation for land areas and conservation of the natural environment is promoted for the designated areas.

<sup>2</sup> "The Documents regarding the sites and the amount of soil and rock collected for land reclamation" in the Okinawa Defense Bureau's *Revised Application for Land Reclamation for the Futenma Replacement Facilities Construction Project* (in Japanese) (May 31, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> See the Ryukyu Shimpo article at <http://english.ryukyushimpo.jp/2013/12/28/12672/>. Also see the Okinawa Times article (in Japanese) at <http://www.okinawatimes.co.jp/article.php?id=60335>.

<sup>4</sup> The *Department Head's Comments* (in Japanese) submitted by the Okinawa Prefectural Government Department of Environment and Community Affairs to the Department of Civil Engineering and Construction (November 29, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> The *Governor's Comments* (in Japanese) on the Okinawa Defense Bureau's *Environmental Impact Statement regarding Futenma Replacement Facilities*

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*Construction Project* (February 20, 2012).

<http://www.pref.okinawa.lg.jp/site/kankyo/seisaku/hyoka/tetsuzuki/documents/iken-68.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> IUCN Recommendation 2.72, IUCN Recommendation 3.114, and IUCN Resolution 4.022.

<sup>8</sup> See the Japanese Ministry of the Environment's press release (in Japanese) on the listing of Amami and Ryukyu (Okinawa) islands on its Tentative List for UNESCO World Natural Heritage at <http://www.env.go.jp/press/press.php?serial=16268>. See the article "Okinawa Island" in the IUCN CEM EcosystemNews at [http://iucn.org/about/union/commissions/cem/cem\\_resources/ecosystem\\_news\\_4\\_2013/](http://iucn.org/about/union/commissions/cem/cem_resources/ecosystem_news_4_2013/). See also the Ryukyu Shimpo article on the designation of the northern area of Okinawa Island as a candidate site for World Natural Heritage at <http://english.ryukyushimpo.jp/2014/01/07/12739/>.