

<英語版>

STATEMENT

Statement on the Protection of the Precious Natural Environment of Henoko-Oura Bay

Even against global comparisons, the area of Henoko-Oura Bay in Okinawa Prefecture has a wide variety of habitats and enormous biodiversity. The 5,334 species recorded there include 262 endangered species such as the dugong and several marine turtles. The marine area around Okinawa contains extensive seagrass beds and coral reefs, a colony of genetically distinctive blue coral communities (*Heliopora coerulea*) at Chiribishi, and numerous invaluable natural features such as rare limestone caves formed by the growth of corals.

Because of these features, the Okinawa Prefectural Government has placed Henoko-Oura Bay in its highest class of Areas for Stringent Conservation of the Natural Environment, while the Ministry of the Environment considers that it satisfies the conditions for a potential candidate for the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and has selected it as one of Japan's Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSA). In addition, in 2019 the US NGO Mission Blue designated the area as its first Hope Spot in Japan.

This bountiful environment, formed over the ages, has long supported the livelihoods of the local people and provided a foundation for local culture. We hope to re-assess the enormous value of the natural environment of Henoko-Oura Bay as a heritage for generations to come.

However, in April 2017, despite the opposition of many Okinawans, work started on landfilling the bay to build a new military base at Henoko. After work began, it was discovered that the site included an area of unstable seabed which would require a ground improvement project on a scale never before attempted in Japan. In Henoko-Oura Bay and the neighboring area, Kayo, there have been no recorded sightings of dugongs (*Dugong dugon*) or even their feeding trails since 2018. If the landfill project continues, it is

possible that the irreplaceable richness and diversity of the coral ecosystem in this area will be lost forever.

The Okinawa prefectural government has created its own dugong conservation committee to protect this marine area. The committee has drawn up guidelines for nature conservation, established agreements on environmental conservation and usage of the natural environment for licensing of eco-tour operators, and is establishing ordinance to prevent the introduction of invasive species. In addition, the prefectural government has repeatedly asked the Japanese and United States' governments to abandon the construction project, while the governor of Okinawa has carried out a speaking tour designed to create opportunities for a nationwide discussion to raise awareness and to resolve the problems of constructing a new base.

For those of us who share responsibility for preserving the precious wildlife and natural environment of this marine area, it is our sincere wish to pass on the beauty of the marine area of Henoko-Oura Bay to future generations.

We hereby request that the Japanese and U.S. governments take the following actions:

1. To halt the current construction work associated with the new military base at Henoko, and engage in dialogues with Okinawa Prefecture government.
2. To carry out proper surveys in order to properly understand and prevent the environmental impact of the project on the natural environment of Henoko-Oura Bay.

September 11th, 2021

The Okinawa Prefectural Government

All speakers at the Henoko-Oura Bay Symposium 2021