

United States Senate

November 19, 2019

General David Berger
Commandant
U.S. Marine Corps
3000 Marine Corps Pentagon
Washington, DC 20350-30000

Dear General Berger,

I write with concerns about the Marine Corps' planned Pu'uloa Range Training Facility coastal erosion project.

As the former Marine Corps Forces, Pacific commander, you understand that the Department of Defense (DoD) takes seriously its need to ensure the viability of its training ranges while remaining a good steward of the cultural, historical, and environmental needs of the people of Hawaii. To that end, I am concerned that the Marine Corps' planned 1,500 foot steel wall project may not be representative of the best design practices for mitigating coastal erosion risk and that it could impose unnecessary environmental impacts on Hawaii's beaches and the residents of Ewa Beach on the island of Oahu.

Climate change threatens communities across Hawaii and these anticipated effects on our military installations impose risks on the training ranges that are necessary to maintain readiness. I recognize the Marine Corps' need to protect the small arms training range from the threat of coastal erosion which could be exacerbated by the effects of climate change. However, shoreline hardening projects such as the planned Pu'uloa Range Training Facility coastal erosion project can have unintended consequences on the marine ecosystem and erosion on downstream beaches, and there may be better ways to promote long-term resiliency by integrating natural principles into the design and siting of climate mitigation and adaptation projects.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' "Engineering with Nature" Initiative, for example, offers instructive lessons for drawing on natural and nature-based features to mitigate coastal erosion and flooding while protecting ecosystem services. These features, for example, may include developing artificial reefs to reduce the effect that waves have on beach erosion and flood damage or engineering coastal landscapes with wetlands, maritime forests, and levees to reduce long-term erosion and flood risks while protecting wildlife habitats for the benefits of the local community. These types of engineering best practices are exemplary of the approach DoD should take to resiliency whenever feasible, as they promote the resilience and environmental goals that it shares with the people of Hawaii.

It is incumbent that the Marine Corps explore long-term resilience benefits for the Pu'uloa Range Training Facility that avoid unnecessary environmental impacts on Hawaii's beaches and the residents of Ewa Beach on the island of Oahu. To that end, I ask for responses to the following questions:

1. Why did the Marine Corps choose not to consider a natural or nature-based project as part of an analysis of alternatives?
2. What engineering best practices did that the Marine Corps rely on to inform its development of the Pu'uloa Range Training Facility coastal erosion project?

Finally, I ask that the Marine Corps revisit the alternatives for the planned Pu'uloa Range Training Facility coastal erosion project to ensure that it has assessed the feasibility of designing a project that draws on natural and nature-based features, consistent with existing engineering best practices for coastal zone management and beach erosion.

I would appreciate a response to this letter with an explanation of the way forward on this project no later than December 6, 2019. Thank you for your continued leadership of our Marines and stewardship of the cultural, historical, and environmental needs of the people of Hawaii.

Sincerely,



BRIAN SCHATZ
U.S. Senator