

Queen Quet Chieftess of the Gullah/Geechee Nation

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Peace Chairman Huffman and Members of the United States Congressional Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife!

On behalf of the citizens of the Gullah/Geechee Nation that exist from Jacksonville, NC to Jacksonville, FL and encompasses all of the Sea Islands and thirty miles inland to the St. John's River, I say to you in my native language-Gullah, "Tenki Tenki fa disya." Thank you very much for this opportunity! We greatly appreciate your work on behalf of America's great outdoors which we treasure due to the fact that since the 1600s our people have lived from the land and the sea in the southeast along the Intercoastal Waterway. I personally reside in the Atlantic Ocean on a historic Gullah/Geechee island called "St. Helena."

My families roots not only stem from St. Helena Island, but also Polowana and Dataw Islands. I am a native Gullah/Geechee that grew up on and has dedicated my life to the Sea Islands where my mother, father, grandparents on both sides, and great grand parents on both sides all passed down our cultural traditions. Amongst these traditions are not only agriculture, musical and spiritual practices, but also sea work traditions. We find the latter in jeopardy due to the state of the global environment and this is of great concern to us because there is a Gullah/Geechee proverb that we truly believe in- "*De wata bring we and de wata gwine tek we bak.*" We got here via the water and the water taking us back has numerous spiritual and cultural context for us because our cultural heritage and continued existence is inextricably tied to Sea Island land and the waters that surround and nurture us.

For Gullah/Geechees, water is sacred. It is not only the place to which we are taken to literally learn how to feed our families by harvesting the fish, shrimps, clams, oysters, and crabs that so many visitors come to eat when they vacation in our area by the hundreds of thousands of people per year. It is also the place where we baptize as a spiritual ritual and the place upon whose shorelines we bury those that pass away into the ancestral realm. We gather sweetgrass for our traditional baskets here and used to gather the rush or as we call it "sedge" of the marsh to bring back to higher ground to nourish our fields once again.

Over time, we have felt the pain of the waters as pilings have been driven into the shoreline to proliferate private docks and buildings that then get damaged and brought down into

the water when the hurricanes arrive during their season. We have watched the closures of oyster beds, the loss of some fish species in certain areas, the changes in the types and quantities of shrimp all taking place as pollutants ended up in our waterways and flow into the ocean due to overbuilding, changes in the climate, and what our scientists now call the “acidification” of our oceans. We have also stood up to stop this pain and prevent its increase by also opposing seismic gun use and offshore drilling in our oceans.

The ***Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition***, the ***Gullah/Geechee Fishing Association***, and the ***Gullah/Geechee Sustainability Think Tank*** have been consistently working together to combat these issues and do what we can to mitigate any further harm to this body which has done so much to nurture and feed us and our family members for generations. We have replanted oyster shells in an effort to increase our viable oyster beds. We educate native Gullah/Geechees on how to keep alive our traditions and pass them on the future generations given that our traditional fishing methods have minimal impacts on the environment. We take what is necessary and not more in order to allow the natural balance to take place so that there will be more sustenance for the next generation. As established in “*Da Land da We: Gullah/Geechee Sustainability Report*,” we believe **sustainability is "meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs."**

I work with youths as we look toward methods to combat climate change by looking back to the work that my ancestors and elders did in order to sustain themselves, our culture, and a healthy environment. I reflect on these things whenever I go to the ocean to do environmental work or to simply pay homage to my ancestors, many of whose bones rest at the bottom of the ocean since they did not make it across during the Middle Passage journey that many took to get to North America from Africa. I am rejuvenated by the power and beauty of the waters which I can still see clearly from shorelines around my beloved St. Helena and Hunting Islands in South Carolina. As I stand along the Atlantic shore with the salty Sea Island breeze embracing me, I see an

Organism that feeds into other bodies of water including human bodies.

Climate and

Environment are acclimating to what is ultimately ending up in this water and

Affecting the economy and the continuation of coastal cultural heritage and traditions.

Neutralizing the acidification of the oceans so that these bodies will continue to nurture us physical and spiritually needs to be a national priority.

The flow of the ocean is energizing and the flow of work that it takes for us to get to where we need to be in regard to healing the waters has to be done by

**Opening
Culturally**

Enriched
Avenues of
Navigation

So, I appreciate the opportunity to not only provide you with my testimony as a person that was raised on an island in the ocean and to provide background on my native Gullah/Geechee culture, but to also work directly with you to open these new avenues of navigation so that we can travel together via open channels of communication and along pristine waters from the oceans to our rivers and streams. As we do so, we will have the opportunity to celebrate the rich cultural heritage and the wonderful environment that we have been able to sustain along the shore together.

I thank you for taking the time to not only hear and read my testimony, but for including it in the record of the work that your committee is doing on behalf of us, our waters and wildlife. I look forward to hearing more from you and to engaging in work with you.

Peace,

Queen Quet

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Chieftess of the Gullah/Geechee Nation

Founder, ***Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition***

Visionary of the ***Gullah/Geechee Sustainability Think Tank***

Founding Member/Secretary ***Gullah/Geechee Fishing Association***