



PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Sylvia Spalding (808) 383-1069 or Sylvia.Spalding@noaa.gov
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HONOLULU (WPRFMC) – June 30, 2014 – The voting members of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (WPRFMC) from the State of Hawaii, Territories of American Samoa and Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands have analyzed the Obama Administration’s newly announced plan to expand the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument. They have determined that it would provide no added conservation benefit to marine resources, but will economically harm the area’s fishermen and those reliant on Pacific marine resources. Noting that the President himself has declared that the United States “has largely ended overfishing in federally managed waters,” the Council members are urging the Administration to continue allowing US fishermen into these areas. According to the WPRFMC, the Administration failed to consult the WPRFMC about the true economic and environmental impacts of its plan to expand the Monument. The WPRFMC also recommends modifications to the Antiquities Act to prevent similar such unilateral declarations in the future, which override existing fisheries management statutes, such as the Magnuson-Steven Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

The June 17 announcement, made at the Our Oceans Conference hosted at the State Department, would enlarge the current Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument—established by President Bush in 2009—to encompass the full 200-nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zone of seven US Pacific Island Possessions. However, the Council counters in its report that this expansion will ultimately be ineffective in reaching the Obama Administration’s stated goal of combatting threats to the ocean’s health, like overfishing and ocean acidification caused by greenhouse gas pollution.

US fisheries are already required by the Magnuson-Stevens Act to eliminate overfishing, and the US boasts the strongest, most conservation-minded fisheries management in the world.

Fishermen in the region are already subject to catch limits, vessel monitoring, observer requirements, and gear restrictions to ensure that they do not overfish the species they target nor endanger other species in the process. The President’s plan aims to aid marine species like tuna, seabirds, coral reefs, and sharks, but, according to the WPRFMC, it disregards the effective management plans already in place. Because the region’s fish are highly migratory, the Council views the current, more focused international management approach as the most effective move to achieve the Administration’s stated goals, and that the Marine Monuments are superfluous in stopping overfishing.

The value of consulting regional management and local merchants in fisheries management is emphasized by the same Administration that announced this sweeping Executive plan. John Podesta, described by the *Washington Post* as “the man behind President Obama’s new environmental push” has said, “Responsible fishery management grounded in strong science and reinforced by strong partnerships between the fishing, conservation, and science communities is crucial for the economic health of fishing communities and the country as a whole.”

Weighed against any prospective environmental benefit is the serious economic cost to Western Pacific fisheries and fishing communities. The areas covered by the Marine Monument are important for the region’s longline and purse seine fisheries, which were already pushed out of valuable fishing grounds with the original 2009 Pacific Islands Remote Marine Monument designation. Expanding the monuments will sever local fishermen’s access to these resources and in turn strain the island communities that depend on the Pacific for their livelihoods. For this reason, the Council urges the Administration to continue to allow US fishermen into these areas.