

EXPAND PAPAHĀNAUMOKUĀKEA

He Pu'uhonua no Hawai'i  A Sanctuary for our Ocean Heritage

For Immediate Release

May 5, 2016

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Support for Native Hawaiian Proposal to Expand Papahānaumokuākea Monument Grows

Thousands Join Call to President Obama to Preserve Ocean and Cultural Heritage

HONOLULU – One month ago today the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Native Hawaiian Cultural Working Group wrote the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) proposing expansion of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument and inviting the Obama administration to travel to Hawai'i to discuss the proposal. This week the Administration sent a delegation to meet with stakeholders including Native Hawaiian, scientists, local fishermen and the conservation community, who presented cultural and scientific evidence to support expanding the monument to fully protect the cultural, historical, and biological significance of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

"As Native Hawaiians, our core identity and survival is tied to the ocean. The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands is where we believe life originated," said Kekuewa Kikilo, Chair, Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Native Hawaiian Cultural Working Group. "All resources in nature – from corals to sharks – have cultural significance for Native Hawaiians and are an embodiment of our ancestors. By expanding Papahānaumokuākea we can help protect our cultural ocean-scapes and show future generations that preservation of the environment is preservation of our cultural traditions."

The Native Hawaiian proposal calls for expanding Papahānaumokuākea from 50 nautical miles to the 200 nautical mile limit of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands exclusive economic zone (EEZ) with exception for the waters surrounding the islands of Ni'ihau and Kaua'i, which should remain outside of the monument boundaries, as well as two important fishing buoys for local pono Kaua'i fishermen. To ensure proper care for Native Hawaiian cultural resources in the monument, the President is also being asked to designate the Office of Hawaiian Affairs as a co-trustee on the management committee.

Local pono recreational fishermen, scientists, and local and national environmentalists have joined traditional Hawaiians in this effort. In the month since the Cultural Working Group sent their letter to the Obama administration there has been a tremendous outpouring of support in Hawai'i as well as online.

“We have seen the decline in tuna populations that long-line fishing in Hawai‘i has caused, subjecting Hawaiians and Hawai‘i residents to import ‘ahi poke from other countries. Our local pono fishermen across the Hawaiian Islands are now standing up to this mostly foreign fishing industry,” said Jay Carpio, a local fishermen from Maui who has been leading education and support efforts with local fishermen. “Fishermen like the late Uncle Buzzy Agard led the effort to establish Papahānaumokuākea, and local fishermen are again leading the call to President Obama to expand the monument.”

Rashid Sumaila, a world-renowned fisheries economist at the University of British Columbia stated, “This tuna long line fishery is a quota based fishery. Meaning that after the proposed expansion the tuna long line fishermen will still be able to catch the same amount of fish and therefore there will be no or very little impact to the long-line fishermen.”

At the Hawai‘i State Legislature in a joint statement from the two representatives who districts include Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, State Representative Chris Lee and State Senator Laura Thielen expressed support for the expansion. “As a representative of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, this is an area that deserves meaningful protection that will ensure the survival of this amazing habitat for generations to come,” said Representative Lee.

There are significant resources of scientific value that would benefit from expanded protections. Highly migratory or far-ranging species such as sea turtles, whales, dolphins, seabirds, sharks, and tuna forage outside of the area of the existing monument and are threatened by longline fishing vessels when they range outside the area of protection. Additionally, in the 10 years since the original monument designation, scientific expeditions outside of the current monument boundaries and within the proposed expansion area have discovered high density communities in which most of the animals seen are completely unknown to science, making a compelling case for expansion. This includes black corals which are estimated at 4,500 years old, and described as the old growth redwood forests of the ocean.

“Large, strongly protected marine reserves have emerged as important policy solutions,” said Dr. Richard Pyle, Associate Zoologist in Ichthyology, Department of Natural Sciences, Bishop Museum. “They carry the dual benefit of being both marine climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.”

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Still photos available here: <http://bit.ly/ExpandPMNMphotos>

Videos available here: <http://bit.ly/ExpandPMNMvids>

All photos and videos taken in areas outside the current boundaries of PMNM and within the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone, in the area that is being considered for possible Monument expansion.

All videos should be credited as follows: *Video courtesy of the NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration and Research, Hohonu Moana.*