

EXPAND PAPAHĀNAUMOKUĀKEA

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

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More than 1,500 Scientists Call on Obama to Create World's Largest Marine Reserve

Honolulu, Hawaii – Scientists attending the International Coral Reef Symposium (ICRS) in Honolulu, Hawaii released a joint letter to President Barack Obama on June 24 emphasizing the international marine science community's unified support for expanding the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

“The decision is scientifically supported and provides substantial hope of leaving a legacy of ocean resources and benefits for future generations,” said Dr. Robert Richmond, director of the Kewalo Marine Laboratory at the University of Hawaii and the convener of the ICRS. “The international marine conservation science community is unified in our support to expand the monument.”

The reserve boasts a bipartisan legacy in which six U.S. presidents have used executive action to protect the area's fragile resources and covers 140,000 square miles of ocean, coral reefs, and small islands. U.S. Senator Brian Schatz (D-HI) recently asked President Obama to expand the monument to include an additional 442,000 square miles, which would make it the world's largest marine protected area.

The scientists' letter, with more than 1,500 signatures, coincides with the release of a new scientific report, *Pu'uhonua: A Place of Sanctuary*, which details the significant biological and cultural evidence for the expansion of Papahānaumokuākea.

The report was authored by 12 leading scientists, including: National Geographic Explorer in Residence Dr. Sylvia Earle; Dr. Callum Roberts, a marine conservation biologist at the University of York, England; Dr. U. Rashid Sumalia, a global fisheries expert at the University of British Columbia Fisheries Centre, Canada; Dr. Doug McCauley, a marine biology professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara; and Dr. Richmond.

Papahānaumokuākea harbors rich biodiversity and is regarded in Hawaiian culture as a place of honor, the root of native ancestral connections to the gods, and where spirits return after death. Hawaiians feel a deep spiritual connection to the area's flora and fauna, including sharks, seabirds and whales.

“The expansion zone being proposed right now includes the oldest animal—a black coral that is more than 4000 years old, said Dr. McCauley, describing the ecological riches that can be safeguarded by expanded monument protection. “This is an animal that was alive before even the pyramids were

built. If ever there was an appropriate use of the Antiquities Act by the President of the United States it would be to protect the oldest animal on our planet."

According to the science report, the proposed expansion – a fivefold increase in size - would protect 110 seamounts (underwater mountains) that are likely home to undiscovered species, as well as guyots (flat-topped seamounts), coral reefs, and pelagic areas, which are key migration, spawning, nurturing, and foraging areas for 22 species of whales and dolphins, 4 economically important species of tuna, dozens of species of sharks, 22 species of seabirds, and 5 species of sea turtles.

The scientific report includes a section on the economics of marine protected areas and the effect on the Hawaii-based longline fishery. The researchers found that there are very high economic and social benefits to expanding the monument, and very limited costs.

"A key obstacle in establishing new reserves is the fact that in most cases the fisheries costs of establishment are realized in the short term, while the fisheries benefits come later," said Dr. Sumalia. "The good news in this situation is that the fishery is limited by a quota, so the likely response is for fishermen to shift their effort beyond the newly closed area."

"Hawaiian fishermen will still catch the same amount of fish," added Dr. Sumalia. "The expansion will be a win-win for fisheries and conservation."

The additional protections would eliminate or reduce the impacts of present and future extractive activities, increase the protected area's resiliency to climate change, boost ecosystem health, and protect historically and culturally important areas for Hawaiians, the United States, and the world.