

Editorial Insight

Papahānaumokuākea: Expand this sanctuary for our ocean heritage

AUTHOR OR CUSTOM AUTHOR

By Kekuewa Kikilo'i

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- **COURTESY PHOTO** Kekuewa Kikiloi, Ph.D., chairs the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Native Hawaiian Cultural Working Group (CWG) and is assistant professor at Kamakakuokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies at the University of Hawaii-Manoa. The CWG is made up of about 50 individuals, including Hawaiian kupuna, researchers, educators, community organizers, advocates and cultural practitioners.



- **NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION** Fish could be seen on a deep coral reef at Pearl and Hermes Atoll in the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. The monument encompasses the Northwestern Hawaiian islands, which consist of islands and atolls that stretch 1,200 nautical miles northwest of Kauai and Niihau.



- **STAR-BULLETIN / 2004**The voyaging canoe Hokule‘a arrived at Keehi Lagoon from Kauai after a voyage to the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands called “Navigating Change” in 2004.

The vision for a new Hawaii embraces the expansion of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument (PMNM). It’s a vision that is urgent in the eyes of our generation, regarding a deep concern for Oceania and the growing need to return to a

traditional understanding of our seascapes as a key part of our distinctive identity and heritage.

Papahānaumokuākea is rooted in our creation and origins, as a cosmological place where all life began, and returns after death; surely this is worthy of full protection.

The ocean is not an empty space, but a living entity, a godly deity, imbued with cultural meaning and a home for a host of marine, terrestrial and avian life that are connected to us through genealogy and ecological kinship. Our responsibility lies in protecting these bio-cultural resources, and the places they inhabit and call home. It is in this context, Hawaiians have taken on the role of *kia'i kai*, guardians of the ocean.

Our passion to expand the conservation area is driven by our Hawaiian worldview that man and nature are not separate entities but rather related parts of a unified whole. The health of one is intrinsically related to the health of the other.

Papahānaumokuākea is the only intact cultural voyaging seascape in our islands. This expansive ocean environment was the setting for ancient Hawaiian chiefs to voyage back and forth between the main Hawaiian Islands and the Northwestern Islands over the course of a 400-year period in traditional times.

Today, this region is a critical training ground for the ongoing survival of two major living traditions: Hawaiian voyaging and wayfinding.

This traditional practice of non-instrument navigation, relied upon observations of the natural environment, often missed by modern sailors, such as the sun, star lines, cloud clusters, and more importantly, biological indicators that can expand island targets such as sea marks — distinctive natural occurrences along sea routes such as regions where certain fish species leap above the waters surface — or a zone of plentiful marine or avian life.

The voyaging canoe, Hokule‘a, has been vital in the establishment of the various layers of protection for Papahānaumokuākea.

Under the banner called “Navigating Change,” Hokule‘a became an ambassador for ocean protection advocating for the people of Hawaii to use the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands as an indicator and goal of what our home ocean waters in the main Hawaiian islands could be — if we take care of it.

Today, with Hokule‘a’s Malama Honua Worldwide Voyage, the expansion of Papahānaumokuākea is in line with demonstrating Hawaii’s commitment to establish a pu‘uhonua, a sanctuary for ocean heritage.

Over the past 15 years the Hawaiian community has been the strongest voice in advocating for this sacred place and its protection — and it has been met with unprecedented success — from the establishment of the Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve in 2000, to the State Marine Refuge in 2005, the Marine National

Monument in 2006, and the inscription of this region as World Heritage Site in 2008.

We have more to do. Less than 2 percent of the ocean is fully protected. Scientists are calling for 30 percent in order to responsibly protect biodiversity. Hawaii can, and should, be a leader in marine conservation once again. Protecting the ocean is the greatest legacy we can leave for the Earth. Now is the time to expand Papahānaumokuākea.