

Letter Urging the Continued Protection of Five Marine National Monuments

From 37 Representatives of Conservation Organizations and Businesses

June 8, 2017

Dear Secretary of the Interior Zinke,

We are writing to ask you to protect America's current national marine monuments by not recommending any elimination or reduction in any of the five marine monuments currently under review by Executive Order.¹ We strongly oppose the illegitimate Executive Order and believe that the intent of the Executive Order is to set in place a process to undo existing environmental protections, an action that will ultimately harm marine wildlife and the people who enjoy and depend on our oceans.

President Trump's Executive Order calls for a review of all national monuments created or expanded in the past two decades. This includes a number of important marine monuments. These monuments protect more than 215 million acres and provide great benefit to marine wildlife, such as endangered and threatened sea turtles, whales, and sharks. These monuments protect unique coral and geographic features, and they provide habitat that allows for the rebuilding of fish stocks.

Protecting areas in the ocean, such as through designation as a monument, is one of the principal tools used to preserve and maintain biodiversity and ecosystem services, and to mitigate negative effects of human activities. The Monuments being reviewed were created to protect diverse wildlife populations, to facilitate exploration and scientific research, and to promote public education regarding the value of these national treasures.² The establishment of the Monuments provides the opportunity to protect areas of outstanding scientific, cultural, conservation and aesthetic value, and provide for the long-term persistence of these natural and cultural legacies.³

Studies show that protecting large areas of ocean from human influence is good for conservation and also good for fishermen and other stakeholders for whom the oceans are important.⁴ Scientists suggest protecting at least 30% of oceans worldwide.⁵ Protection of current Marine Monuments is supported by science and necessary for successful management of a healthy ocean ecosystem. The Executive Order threatens to unravel necessary protections for our oceans and marine life.

¹ Presidential Executive Order on the Review of Designations Under the Antiquities Act. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/04/26/presidential-executive-order-review-designations-under-antiquities-act>

² NOAA Fisheries, Marine National Monument Program. Available at: http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/MNM/mnm_faq.html

³ *Id.*

⁴ Conservation Letters, *Effective Coverage Targets for Ocean Protection*. Available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/conl.12247/epdf>

⁵ *Id.*

The Monuments we are asking you to protect include Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument, Northeast Canyons & Seamounts Marine National Monument, and the Rose Atoll Marine National Monument in American Samoa. Below is a brief description of the environmental treasures that make up each of the Monuments at risk.

- **Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument** in the Pacific Ocean (89.6 million acres). Home to over 7,000 marine species, one quarter of which are found only in the Hawaiian Archipelago. Species protected include the threatened green turtle, the endangered Hawaiian monk seal, and the world's most endangered duck, the Laysan duck.
- **Marianas Trench Marine National Monument** in the Pacific Ocean (60.9 million acres). The Marianas Trench is the deepest place on Earth, deeper than the height of Mount Everest.
- **Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument** in the Pacific Ocean (55.6 million acres). Some corals at the monument are up to 5,000 years old. Home to sea turtles, dolphins, whales, pearl oysters, giant clams, coconut crabs, large groupers, sharks, humphead wrasses, and bumphead parrotfishes.
- **Northeast Canyons & Seamounts Marine National Monument** in the Atlantic Ocean (3.1 million acres). The canyons and seamounts provide habitat for protected species such as endangered sperm, fin, and sei whales and Kemp's ridley turtles.
- **Rose Atoll Marine National Monument** in American Samoa (8.6 million acres). Important nesting sites for the threatened green and endangered hawksbill turtles in American Samoa.

When you provide an interim report in June and a final report to the President in August, please remember the treasures that these Monuments hold.

In conclusion, we strongly oppose any efforts to reduce the size of or eliminate any marine monuments. These areas protect wildlife, improve fish populations, and have important cultural values. When you provide an interim report in June and a final report to the President in August, please emphasize the value of these Monuments and do not support the effort to dismantle protections for our nation's wild heritage.

Sincerely,

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Marjorie Ziegler, Executive Director
Conservation Council for Hawai'i

Greg Dyson, Wild Places Program Director
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