



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

Press Release
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Contact: Sylvia Spalding 808.522.5341
sylvia.spalding@noaa.gov

US Pacific Islands Now Account for 50 Percent of Nation's MPAs

HONOLULU (6 January 2009) The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council today voiced appreciation of the Bush Administration for recognizing that the waters in the newly proclaimed US Pacific island marine monuments have been "effectively regulated under the Magnuson-Stevens Act and by WestPac [the Council]." As noted in yesterday's press briefing by Jim Connaughton, chair of the White House's Council on Environmental Quality, these new national monuments "are complementary strategies" to the fisheries management plans developed by the Council.

"The Council looks forward to continuing its work under the Magnuson-Stevens Act and the presidential proclamations to protect everyone's interest in these areas," said Sean Martin, chair of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council.

However, the Council is also concerned that the President's use of the Antiquities Act to create these enormous new marine monuments bypasses the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which mandates an environmental review as well as an appropriate participatory process for the indigenous people and other members of the public.

"The Antiquities Act should be amended to require Congressional approval of proposed monuments as it has been done for Wyoming and Alaska and to require compliance to NEPA," Council Executive Director Kitty Simonds suggested.

With the new marine monuments, nearly a quarter of the US exclusive economic zone (EEZ) waters surrounding the Pacific islands are now designated as marine protected areas (MPAs), and the US Pacific Islands account for half of the MPAs in the entire United States. Indigenous people account for 20 to 90 percent of the US Pacific Island populations.

President Bush's proclamations today provide for recreational, sustenance and traditional indigenous fishing in the new marine monuments. Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council develops and amends fishery management plans for the US Pacific Islands. These plans and amendments are transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and implemented by the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS).

The proclamations ban commercial fishing in many parts of the new marine monuments.

"The significant loss of fishing areas available to commercial fishermen in Hawaii and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) can be counterproductive to sustainable fishery goals," Simonds noted. "Reduction of available fishing areas often leads to increased fishing pressure in other areas."

The Hawaii longline fishery currently fishes around Palmyra, Kingman and Johnston Atolls. The American purse seine fishery also operates within the US Pacific remote island areas, and CNMI fishermen have harvested in the three northern islands of their island chain. Commercial fishing will now be prohibited in all these areas.

--- more ---

US Pacific Islands Now 50 Percent of US MPAs 2-2-2-2-2-2

“US Pacific islanders should be able to eat their own fish,” Simonds added. “It is not only cultural, it is ecological. When local fisheries are closed, the consequence is air-freighting imported fresh fish, which has negative impacts on climate change and ocean acidification by increasing the US carbon footprint.”

US Pacific islanders’ consumption of seafood is three times the national average. According to NOAA, the US currently imports 86 percent of its seafood.

The Council also expressed concern that many non-fishing activities that have or can have an adverse impact on the monument resources will be allowed, while well-regulated domestic commercial fisheries are being restricted even though they have no demonstrated adverse impacts on these resources.

Military activities, which are expected to increase with the relocation of the 8,000 US marines plus their families and 15,000 contract workers from Okinawa to Guam, are not being prohibited. For example, the military has been bombing Farallon de Medinilla in the Northern Mariana Islands, and, under biological opinions issued by the US Fish & Wildlife Service, is allowed to kill all the megapodes (an endangered species of flightless birds that nests near volcanoes) on the island. Hawksbill, green and leatherback sea turtles, fruit bats and other plant and animal species are also affected by the bombing and other military activities in CNMI.

The Bush Administration has compared the new marine monuments to the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) monument Bush established in 2006. Monument designation in the NWHI has led to increased human activity from tourism, visitors and researchers. While traditional indigenous fishing is permitted, the fish must be consumed within the monument and cannot be brought back to family and communities.

President Bush noted in his address today that monk seals are present on Johnston Atoll. NOAA NMFS had relocated aggressive male monk seals from the NWHI to the atoll, but all seals sent there disappeared within a few months.

President Bush said that his administration supports the nomination of the NWHI as a World Heritage Site. The negative ecological and cultural impacts of such a designation in areas such as the Galapagos islands, Machu Pichu and Angkor Wat due to increased tourism have been documented and have led to round-table discussions on the negative as well as positive impacts of this designation.

Simonds hopes the proclamation will be supported with much needed funds to the US Coast Guard and local government agencies to adequately patrol and enforce the US EEZ around all of these faraway and remote Pacific islands. “Enforcement throughout the 200-mile EEZ is the only way to realize the President’s dream,” she said. “The CNMI waters are within 1,500 to 2,000 miles of the Asian mainland and Southeast Asia and could be accessed by every major Asian fishing fleet. Foreign encroachment continues to be a very real threat.”

“We look forward to the promised economic bounty that CNMI and American Samoa communities will receive from the monument designation,” Simonds said, “but hopefully, if it comes, it will not be at the expense of the environment or the indigenous people.”

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council is the policy-making agency for fisheries management in offshore waters around the US Pacific Islands. It is the first regional fishery management council in the nation to prohibit drift gill-net fishing, require the use of vessel monitoring systems (VMS) and to develop an ecosystem-based fishery management plan. For more information, contact the Council at (808) 522-8220, (808) 522-8226 (fax), info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov or www.wpcouncil.org.