



Senator Murkowski introduces legislation blocking Obama declaration of vast Pacific closed area

SEAFOODNEWS.COM [SCOM] -- July 21, 2014 -- Senator Lisa Murkowski has introduced legislation requiring congressional approval of any new national monument designation considered by the President.

The bill, the Improved National Monument Designation Process Act (S. 2608), would block the Obama Administration from unilaterally using the Antiquities Act to lock up millions of acres of public lands and waters.

“Alaskans know what happens when the President unilaterally closes millions of acres of public lands – it means a loss of jobs and a hit to the economy,” said Senator Murkowski, Ranking Member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and Co-Chair of the Senate Oceans Caucus.

President Obama has repeatedly expressed interest in using the Antiquities Act to unilaterally establish new national monuments or expand the boundaries of existing monuments. His most recent action – expanding the boundaries of the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument from 77,020 to more than 782,000 square miles – is “a stark reminder of the sweeping, unilateral actions that the executive branch can take,” Murkowski said.

“My legislation is designed to ensure that our oceans are not locked away with a stroke of the President’s pen,” Murkowski said. “The continued foreclosure of our lands and waters threatens economic activities from fishing to exploration for oil and natural gas.”

Murkowski’s legislation would amend the Antiquities Act to require:

- Congressional approval prior to any national monument designation; and
- Application of the National Environmental Policy Act.

The bill would also require any national monument proposed within an exclusive economic zone meet the following requirements:

- Specific authorization by an Act of Congress;
- Approval by each state legislature within 100 miles of the proposed monument; and
- A stakeholder review process prior to the implementation of any restrictions on public uses within the designated area.

Comments praising this initiative:

"Federal fisheries management in waters off Alaska is successful because it is science-based and because conservation measures are developed through a transparent public process that encourages stakeholder engagement," says Stephanie Madsen of the At-Sea Processors Association. "Management actions, including area closures designed to meet different conservation objectives, are not issued by fiat. We applaud Senator Murkowski for updating the 100-year old Antiquities Act to reflect current best practices for open, participatory government."

"We applaud Senator Murkowski's leadership in introducing legislation that places reasonable limits on the President's power to make far reaching conservation land withdrawals in all 50 states, both onshore and off," said Rick Rogers, Executive Director of the Resource Development Council for Alaska.

"United Fishermen of Alaska is pleased to hear of Senator Murkowski's legislation to require Congressional approval of any National Monument designation. Decisions regarding closing our oceans should be made carefully, and UFA applauds Senator Murkowski's efforts to ensure that the impacts to stakeholders are thoroughly considered in a public process," said Julianne Curry, Executive Director, United Fishermen of Alaska.

"The fisheries off Alaska's coast are highly complex, involving multiple species, vast fishing grounds, and different fishing gear. The Magnuson-Stevens Act provides an open, public process for stakeholders to help in the development of conservation measures that protect our fishery resources and the marine environment. On the other hand, decisions under the Antiquities Act are made behind closed doors. Closing off areas of Alaska's fisheries could devastate Alaska's fishing communities, so we believe Congress needs to be part of the decision-making process," said Joe Plesha, General Counsel, Trident Seafoods.

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