

Pacific Practitioner support for expanding Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument

August 15, 2014

Dear President Obama:

We, the undersigned peoples of the Pacific, strongly support the proposal to expand the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument, known to us as Moananui among many ancestral names. Greater protections of our beloved ocean are long overdue; we welcome these acts that protect our sea from misuse and abuse while honoring and protecting the subsistence and cultural traditions that have been a part of our livelihoods and seafaring traditions since the beginning of time.

While there are many conservation-based reasons for protecting this resource, we are confident others have fully articulated them and so we offer to you these ancestral and cultural justifications based on the indigenous sciences of the Pacific in addition to the justifications based on the sciences of the west.

These atolls, the great oceans that surround them and the many creatures that inhabit them are part of our greater ocean family in the Pacific. For too long, these resources have been over-exploited. We support the expansion of the Monument to the full 200-nautical-mile United States Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in order to preserve the ecological and cultural integrity of one of the last remaining pristine ecosystems on earth. We believe that this region of the ocean has substantial conservation and cultural value and unique heritage qualities that require strong protection.

These areas are part of the ancestral pathways that bind the Pacific and its many peoples to each other. It is a longstanding heritage and one regenerating and reemerging into a beautiful, powerful Pacific region. And as a Pacific family, it is our ancestral honor to protect the endangered, threatened and over-exploited species currently insufficiently protected by the current boundaries. We call on you to protect the migratory birds and other species that call this area home.

We also strongly support an end to over-fishing and destructive fishing practices that harm the delicate balance of healthy ocean ecosystems. We urge any activities that would allow pelagic fish stocks to replenish and regain balance in our seas. We are also strongly opposed to any mining activities on or near the approximately 250 seamounts, or undersea mountains, which are hotspots of biodiversity, and likely home to thousands of ancient or undiscovered species.

We urge practices consistent with ancestral knowledges, practices and sciences of the Pacific that ensure ecological connectivity from the tropical rainforests and coral reefs surrounding these islands and atolls to the rich pelagic environments and seamounts that extend out to the full US EEZ. These linkages are critical to sustaining the biodiversity and ecological function of this unique region.

We understand the importance of preserving our ocean heritage for the benefit of future generations across the Pacific, and beyond. Expansion of the Monument provides the opportunity to double the area of ocean that is fully protected globally from 1% to 2% and as the blessed ancestors of the Pacific, we are honored to make this gift to the world.

As Epeli Hau'ofa once wrote: "... the sea is as real as you and I, ... it shapes the character of this planet, ... it is a major source of our sustenance, ...it is something we all share in common wherever we are in Oceania.... the sea is our pathway to each other and to everyone else, the sea is our endless saga, the sea is our most powerful metaphor, the ocean is in us."

We urge you to act now.

Respectfully submitted,

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Kihei de Silva, Hawai'i

Honorable Gilbert Kahele, Hawai'i

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