

White House praised for safeguarding seas

The protected Pacific ecosystems will be a baseline for the future

By Craig Gima

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This story has been corrected. [See below.](#)

Environmentalists praised yesterday's announcement by the White House protecting remote island ecosystems in areas from the Northern Marianas to American Samoa.

But a group charged with managing Pacific fisheries warned that closing more than 195,000 square miles of ocean to commercial fishing could have unintended consequences.

On the Net:

www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2009/01/20090106-4.html

"The significant loss of fishing areas available to commercial fishermen in Hawaii and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands can be counterproductive to sustainable fishery goals," said Kitty Simonds, executive director of the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council. "Reduction of available fishing areas often leads to increased fishing pressure in other areas."

Simonds said longline fishing boats from Hawaii currently fish in waters around Palmyra, Kingman and Johnston atolls, which are now part of the new Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument.

In a news conference yesterday, President Bush said creating three new marine national monuments means the areas will "receive our nation's highest level of environmental recognition and conservation."

Waste dumping or removing resources from the islands designated as part of the monument and waters 50 miles around them are now prohibited. But scientific research, ship passage and military training will be allowed. Recreational fishing may also be allowed in the future, the president said.

The islands are sparsely populated by humans. The new protected areas include underwater volcanoes in the Marianas Trench and Rose Atoll in American Samoa, which is named for its rose-colored coral.

Suzanne Case, the executive director of the Nature Conservancy, said preserving the coral reefs and ecosystems is "an important recognition of its value to the world for marine ecology."

The Nature Conservancy manages Palmyra Atoll, which Case said "is one of the most pristine marine environments in the world and it is a natural laboratory."

She said the coral reef environment around Palmyra is a baseline for what the environment is supposed to

look like without interference from man.

"The more we are impacted by climate change in the world, you need these places that are healthy and able to withstand much better the stresses of an altered environment," she said.

Native Hawaiian fisherman William Aila said he is "elated" by the creation of the new monuments.

"It's not as large an area as we had hoped for," Aila said. "But it's a good start."

Both the fisheries council and environmentalists agree that the designation needs to be followed by more funding for the federal agencies charged with protecting and managing the new preservation zones.

New Marine National Monuments

President Bush created three new marine national monuments yesterday, protecting 195,274 square miles of ocean around U.S. territories in the Pacific Ocean:

» **The Marianas Trench Marine National Monument:** Consisting of the three northernmost islands, the Marianas Trench, and undersea volcanoes and thermal vents around it.

» **The Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument:** The coral reef ecosystems in waters up to 50 miles around Kingman Reef, Palmyra Atoll, Howland, Baker and Jarvis Islands, Johnston Atoll and Wake Island.

» **The Rose Atoll Marine National Monument:** Made up of the coral reef ecosystem around a remote part of American Samoa.

CORRECTION

Thursday, January 8, 2009

Kitty Simonds, executive director of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, wants Congress to amend the Antiquities Act to require congressional approval of proposed monuments. This story originally said Simonds wants Congress to review the decision to create three new marine national monuments.

Find this article at:

http://www.starbulletin.com/news/20090107_White_House_praised_for_safeguarding_seas.html