



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

APRIL 19, 2023

Contact: Honey Maltin-Wisot

protectPRI@gmail.com

(808) 445-0696

Process to designate a new national marine sanctuary in the Pacific Remote Islands gets underway *Public invited to submit comments*

Pacific Island leaders are applauding NOAA's (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) announcement that it will begin the process to potentially designate a new national marine sanctuary in the Pacific Remote Islands (PRI) area. The announcement signals an opportunity for the public to weigh in on the proposed designation in-person, virtually, online, or by mail.

[President Joseph Biden, Jr. announced his support for increased protections for the PRI and surrounding waters and directed the Department of Commerce to consider the national marine sanctuary process for the area on March 24, 2023.](#) The proposed sanctuary would encompass the existing Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument and extend to the full limit of the Exclusive Economic Zone (200 nautical miles) around Howland and Baker Islands and Kingman Reef and Palmyra Atoll. The designation would conserve about 770,000 square miles—creating the world's largest highly protected marine protected area. In addition to the critical added protection protections, the coalition is also requesting honoring the service, sacrifice, and significance of the Hui Panalā'au from 1935-1942 and co-management to ensure that Indigenous Pacific Islanders are part of the decision-making process.

The Pacific Remote Islands Coalition, which submitted [the nomination](#), has spent a decade advocating for protection of PRI. In addition to critical added protections, the coalition is also requesting renaming the area through a culturally appropriate process that honors the cultural, historic, and ancestral significance of the region.

“The proposed sanctuary designation allows us to recognize, share, and celebrate the deep connections Indigenous Pacific Islanders have to the area and give us a seat at the table to be part of the decision-making, renaming, and the future of this area that means so much to our people,” said William Aila, a Pacific Remote Islands Coalition member, Native Hawaiian fisherman, and retired public servant. “We are excited to see this process move forward and want to mahalo the Biden-Harris Administration, the Department of Commerce, Hawai'i's Congressional Delegation, and Governor Josh Green for recognizing and appreciating the unique cultural, ecological, and scientific significance of the Pacific Remote Islands and giving this effort the momentum and support it needs and deserves.”

The public is invited to comment on the proposed sanctuary designation through June 2, 2023. NOAA will hold in-person public meetings in Hawai'i and across the Pacific to gather input on:

- Boundaries
- Compatible uses
- Threats a new sanctuary would address
- How best to promote marine science and education

The meetings are scheduled as follows:

- May 10, 2023 Honolulu
- May 11, 2023 Hilo
- May 17, 2023 Hagatna, Guam
- May 18, 2023 Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
- May 19, 2023 Rota, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
- May 20, 2023 Tinian, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
- May 24, 2023 Pago Pago, American Samoa

Meeting times, locations, and virtual meeting links will be provided at least 15 days prior to each meeting.

Comments can be delivered online, in-person, and virtually at public meetings. Mailed comments must be postmarked by June 2, 2023 to:

PRI-Proposed Sanctuary, NOAA/ONMS
% Hoku Kaaekuahiwi Pousima
76 Kamehameha Ave.
Hilo, HI 96720

For more information on the Pacific Remote Islands, the sanctuary designation process, and public meetings, [click here](#).

###

About the Pacific Remote Islands Coalition

In 2014, the Pacific Remote Islands Coalition formed to protect the cultural, natural, and historical legacy of these special islands, atolls, and reefs. Our diverse network includes elders, fishers, educators, cultural practitioners, non-profits, community groups, scientists, religious organizations, veterans, and many others across the Pacific and beyond. We are a coalition brought together by a love for the ocean that connects and sustains us.