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**PACIFIC ISLANDERS VOICE SUPPORT FOR EFFORTS TO CREATE A NATIONAL MARINE
SANCTUARY IN AND AROUND THE PACIFIC REMOTE ISLANDS**

HILO, HAWAI'I ISLAND — Dozens of people, keiki to kūpuna, answered the call Thursday night in Hilo, raising their voices in support of efforts to create a new national marine sanctuary for the Pacific Remote Islands (PRI) and its surrounding waters. Many of those who provided comments, in person or virtually, passionately backed the proposal seeking not only to protect the Pacific and the rare marine lifeforms in and around the PRI, but to also preserve and perpetuate the cultural and historic significance of the area for so many Indigenous Pacific Islanders.

“We are looking at a cultural opportunity here that has not yet existed,” said PRI Coalition member Rick Gaffney. “That is to bring in all of the surrounding people of the Pacific to talk about their voyaging traditions, their wayfaring traditions, their use of these islands. And I think the end result of that is going to be a closer affiliation of all of the people of the Pacific based on their voyaging history.”

Despite claims by the industrial fishing industry that a sanctuary designation in the area would significantly impact economies, science and data show that is not the case. According to an independent analysis of fishing effort in the PRI using publicly available Global Fishing Watch data, from 2013 to 2022, less than a half percent of the U.S. purse seine and U.S. longline fleets’ fishing effort happens inside the currently unprotected area.

“The fishing industry should be in support of what we are proposing,” added Gaffney. “We know from recent studies on Papahānaumokuākea that fishing on the outer edges of the closed area results in greater catches. The yellowfin catch went up 50 percent on the area just outside Papahānaumokuākea which is a strong indication that marine protected areas work.”

Public comments are being accepted by NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) as it considers whether to designate a national marine sanctuary for the area— about 777,000 square miles in and around the PRI— which would make it the world’s largest protected ocean area. The nomination submitted by the Pacific Remote Islands Coalition calls for the sanctuary area to honor the cultural and historical legacy of these islands and atolls, preserve the area as an intact cultural voyaging seascape, and protect abundant populations of wildlife such as coral, fish, sharks, turtles, rays, whales, dolphins, birds, and other important marine ocean species in the face of threats like deep-sea mining, climate change, and overfishing.

A national marine sanctuary designation would not only ensure the highest protections for the ocean and marine life. This proposed designation also:

- Encourages a co-management structure that includes the voices of Indigenous Pacific Islanders in the decision-making process.
- Advocates for a culturally-appropriate process for renaming the area.
- Expands protections across the entire 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone in the Pacific Remote Islands Area around Howland and Baker Islands and Kingman Reef and Palmyra Atoll.

In-person meetings will take place in several nations across the Pacific including Guam, CNMI, and American Samoa throughout the month. **Public comments will be accepted virtually, online, or by mail through June 2, 2023.** Additional information on upcoming meeting locations and how to submit comments online or by mail, can be found [here](#).

For more information, please contact Honey Maltin-Wisot at (808) 445-0696, or visit protectPRI.com. [Click here](#) for broil and SOTs.

Please courtesy “PRI Coalition.”

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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.