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PACIFIC ISLANDERS VOICE SUPPORT FOR PROPOSAL TO DESIGNATE A NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY IN THE PACIFIC REMOTE ISLANDS AND SURROUNDING WATERS

MĀNOA, O‘AHU — Pacific Island voices filled the Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa campus Wednesday night to back efforts to create a new national marine sanctuary for the Pacific Remote Islands (PRI) and its surrounding waters. Many of the dozens of people who provided in-person comment expressed their strong desire to preserve and perpetuate the cultural heritage linked to this area and to protect the ocean and the rare marine lifeforms surrounding the PRI.

“Now is the time to preserve these islands for our future, and to honor the sacrifices of Native Hawaiians in the past,” said William Aila of the PRI Coalition. “We are encouraged to see the outpouring of support from so many Pacific Island descendents who answered the call to protect this special region. We know that this wahi pana cannot be protected without their voices and are hopeful that their comments will allow us to protect the PRI for generations to come.”

The 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.

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.

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.

"The importance of protecting the Pacific Remote Islands, not only to people in the Pacific, but broadly to humanity, is really the future—to create a sustainable future," said PRI Coalition member Nai'a Lewis. "In this age of climate change, it is vital that we really think about protecting entire ecosystems, and that is what protecting the Pacific Remote Islands will do."

The next in-person meeting will be in Hilo on Thursday, May 11 at the Mokupāpapa Discovery Center at 76 Kamehameha Avenue at 5 p.m. Public comments will be accepted virtually, online, or by mail through June 2, 2023. Additional meeting dates, and information 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.