

# NEWS RELEASE

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## Local leaders urge President Biden to protect the Pacific Remote Islands

*Community-wide effort launched to expand the protected areas,  
safeguard precious ecosystems and cultural resources*

**HONOLULU, HAWAI‘I** – Indigenous leaders from the Pacific Remote Islands Coalition today sent an official request to the White House, asking President Joseph Biden to use his authority to expand protection of the waters around the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument (PRIMNM). Made up of cultural practitioners, scientists, conservationists, fishers, and community members, the Coalition is working together toward protecting the precious ocean waters of the PRI. In the request, the Coalition asked the administration to visit their respective Pacific Islands to hear from stakeholders.

The proposed expansion would extend the monument around two sets of islands and atolls from 50 to 200 nautical miles, the full extent of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), making the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument the largest highly protected marine protected area (MPA) in the world. The PRI Marine National Monument was originally established in 2009 by President George W. Bush, and expanded in 2014 by President Barack Obama under the Antiquities Act. The remaining areas needing full protection now are the waters surrounding Howard and Baker Islands, and Kingman Reef and Palmyra Atoll. Many in the Coalition have been advocating for full protection since 2014.

“The Pacific Remote Islands hold precious connections to our past and promise for our future as Pacific peoples. In the same way these waters are at the nexus of cross-cultural voyaging pathways across Polynesia, they likewise are an intersection of climate change mitigation, cultural practice and scientific discovery. We must protect these waters,” said Sol Kaho‘ohalahala, Native Hawaiian Elder, Kupa ‘Āina ‘o Lāna‘i and member of the PRI Coalition.

The Pacific Remote Islands contain some of the last healthy, wild ecosystems in the Pacific Ocean. These waters are home to resilient coral reefs; threatened, endangered and critically endangered whales, sharks, rays, turtles, and seabirds; deep-sea species not found anywhere else on Earth; and the waterways of ancient and modern Indigenous voyagers.

“Expanding the monument boundaries will safeguard areas of open ocean ecosystems that are intricately connected to nearshore coral reefs, and would protect habitats for endangered and threatened species, such as sharks and birds, who travel far beyond the current boundaries to breed, forage, and rest.” said James Murphy, marine biologist and co-author of the scientific and cultural case statement for the expansion of the PRI Marine National Monument.

An estimated 98 seamounts exist outside the boundaries of the existing protections, where potential new species of corals, fish, and even bacteria may have efficacy in improving cancer treatments. Expanding protection means safeguarding these organisms for their future growth and discoveries that may change the tides of biomedical science. Most of the deep-sea biodiversity in this area remains unexplored, with recent expeditions identifying new species on every dive.

In expanding the PRI Marine National Monument boundaries, these systems gain protection fundamental to their continued success and growth - including dozens of threatened and endangered species.

The Pacific Remote Islands have significant historical and cultural connections to communities throughout the Pacific. More than 130 young men, mostly Native Hawaiian, known as the Hui Panalā‘au, were dispatched to Jarvis, Howland, and Baker from 1935 to 1942 to help secure America’s territorial claim over the islands.

In ancient times, the islands and surrounding waters had a rich legacy of oceanic voyaging and served as stopping points for resources, shelter, and cultural duties for various groups of Pacific Islanders. The ecosystems of PRI need to remain intact to ensure modern voyaging can be perpetuated and these islands can be utilized to train the next generation of voyagers in the Pacific.

According to current data and modeling, expanding protection for the waters of the Pacific Remote Islands would contribute to Pacific Ocean resilience in the face of climate change, as well as protect populations of endangered species as well as tuna and other fish stock in this area of the Pacific. Deep-sea mining interests have identified these waters as high-value areas and expansion of the monument would deny this major threat within its protected boundaries.

“Our world’s oceans are at mortal risk, a breaking point precipitated by unsustainable overfishing and other resource extraction, debris and land-based pollution, exacerbated and compounded by the devastating and pervasive marine effects of climate change,” said Congressman Ed Case (HI-01), a member of the U.S. House Appropriations and Natural Resources Committees. “Expanding PRIMNM would not only enhance protection of our precious marine environment from commercial exploitation, but also advance climate resilience and preservation of one of the last wild and healthy marine ecosystems in our world.” In a letter addressed to the President, Case expressed his full support for the expansion as proposed by the PRI Coalition. He also noted that expanding the monument would fulfill the Biden administration’s goal of bringing 30% of our country’s marine resources under protection as set forth in its *America the Beautiful* initiative.

In its request, the Coalition is asking President Biden to accept their invitation to the Pacific Islands to learn about the issue, hearing from the people most directly connected to this effort; the letter also calls for exploration of renaming the PRI Marine National Monument, to honor its unique history and cultural significance.

To learn more about the effort and to sign the petition in support of protection, visit [www.protectpri.com](http://www.protectpri.com).

## **MEDIA KIT**

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- News Release PDF
- VNR with spokesperson interviews and PRI b-roll; still photos
- One-page overview of the PRI expansion effort
- Backgrounders on the science, history and economics of PRI protection

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## **About the Pacific Remote Islands Coalition**

The Pacific Remote Islands (PRI) Coalition is a community-driven effort to expand the protections for the PRI Marine National Monument. Our diverse coalition includes kupuna (elders), fishermen, educators, cultural practitioners, non-profits, community groups, scientists, religious organizations, veterans, and many others across the Pacific. We have a collective interest in protecting the cultural, natural, and historical legacy of these special islands and atolls.