



Photo: Elyse and Matt Mallams

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PAPAHANAUMOKUAKEA: IT IS HAWAII'S BUSINESS

What does the proposed expansion mean for the 50th State?

 Malia Ito |  *August, 2016*

The people of Hawaii are divided over the expansion of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. Papahānaumokuākea encompasses 10 islands and 140,000 square miles filled with seamounts, atolls, coral and rare species indigenous to Hawaii.

Senator Brian Schatz first proposed the plan to increase the monument's territory from 50 nautical miles to 200 nautical miles off the shores of each of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. Supporters say that protecting this region would help maintain the biodiversity that thrives in these waters for future generations. The Antiquities Act gives President Obama has the power to create national monuments to protect important cultural, scientific and natural resources without holding a public hearing. But opponents of the expansion say the plan needs a thorough discussion with Hawaii's people.



Photo: Sterling Kay

Some argue that the expansion will harm Hawaii's fishing industry, and potentially make it more expensive to "buy local." This could cause Hawaii to rely more on mainland imports, says Mike Irish, owner of Diamond Head Seafood, Halm's Enterprise and Keoki's Lau Lau.

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"All the fishermen of the state of Hawaii will be impacted. All the fish that is caught here, over 80 percent is eaten by us," explains Irish. "It's our one sustainable industry we have today and they want to start taking that away from us."

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The proposed expansion would protect the many ahi who cross the area, prohibiting commercial fishing vessels from entering Papahanaumokuakea.

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Schatz's office says there is no concrete evidence that the proposal will severely hurt Hawaii's fishing industry. Only 5 percent of the strict quota on ahi set by an international treaty are caught in the expanded waters. Longline fishermen will still be able to reach their ahi quota, Schatz's office says, though they would have to travel a bit further. Bigeye tuna is a global market and much of the price is determined by Japan, which consumes 80 percent of all sashimi-grade tuna, the office says.



Photo: Elyse and Matt Mallams

Papahānaumokuākea is co-managed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the State of Hawaii. Some people in the native Hawaiian community, are frustrated with the federal management of Papahānaumokuākea. OHA trustee, Peter Apo, calls it a federal takeover.

“Hawaiians managed fishery conservation much more scientifically in creating ‘no take,’ usually running a six-month cycle, then you open the area again for fishing,” says Apo. “We call it the kapu system, which worked well and I don’t see why it would

not work except that we would like it to work the way the people of Hawaii said it should work, not by some third party thousands of miles away.”

Expansion opponents say the proposal lacks transparency. Mililani Trask, a lawyer and long-time Hawaiian activist, is concerned about the ambiguity throughout the process and Hawaii’s lack of awareness of potential consequences resulting in the expansion.

“The studies show that in order to bring our health needs back to normal, we need to move to the fish and poi diet. In addition to the food security and health reasons, the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands is the home of many cultural resources,” says Trask. “We have *heiau* there, we have traditional routes of our voyages, we have very precious resources that are non-marine resources that we can only access here. I’m speaking about the white feathers that we need for our *kahili* (a feathered staff symbolizing royalty).”

Hawaii’s longline fishing business is a leader in sustainable practices and follows a strict regulatory system vetted through a public process, says Sean Martin, a well-known advocate in Hawaii’s fishing industry. However, the proposed expansion lacks public discussion, he says.

“Through the regulatory process, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council and the Hawaii fishing industry, there are a strong set of rules to mitigate the impacts of the fishery, taking conservation into account as well as a whole bunch of statutory requirements having to do with mammal protection acts,” he says. “There’s a whole process that the council has to go through to implement rule and it’s all a public process and that’s what we are asking for.”

Advocates say an expansion provides an opportunity to protect native species, discover new creatures and combat damage to the ecosystem. For Native Hawaiian supporters like William Aila Jr., this effort goes beyond the fishing industry. It's about protecting what is important to Hawaii for future generations.

“Large marine protected areas provide resilience; we don't know how bad climate change is going to be,” says Aila, former chairman of the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources. “So if we are able to protect corals and allow them to find a refuge while the rest of the Pacific warms up, generations from now that's going to be the seed bank for the rest of the Pacific.”

State Senator Laura Thielen sees the expansion as a way into the federal system. OHA has requested to be a co-trustee for the marine monument, which would give Hawaii more control over Papahānaumokuākea, Thielen says.

“Papahānaumokuākea was set up differently from all other national monuments, where the federal government committed to and included language that said it would co-manage the marine national monument with the state of Hawaii,” she says. “So if we expand the monument, that gives the state of Hawaii and our residents a say in what's going to happen from the 3 mile mark out to the final boundary of the monument.”



Sean Martin, co-owner, POP Marine Supply and fishing industry veteran. Photo: Elyse and Matt Mallams

Martin and other opponents of expansion say there is pressure to rush a decision so the expansion can be declared at the World Conservation Congress, which opens in Honolulu on September 1. Supporters say the world's largest conference of environmentalists, scientists and global leaders is the ideal venue to announce that Hawaii will have the largest marine sanctuary in the world.

Schatz's office says the Congress will benefit Hawaii's economy because it is forecasted to deliver \$3.6 million in state and local tax revenues and \$37.7 million in visitor spending.

However, Mililani Trask argues that the Congress, held every four years by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), is just a show to put on for environmentalists and does not advance Hawaii's interests or deal with the big

problems that Hawaii faces.

“What happened when they nominated the Galapagos Islands under World Heritage rest? It resulted in massive tourism that destroyed the ecosystem of the Galapagos Islands. Who is responsible for paying for this? There was no federal fiscal commitment here,” Trask says. “There was no fiscal commitment from the World Heritage Committee, so the fiscal obligation still rests with our state, but the benefit is completely denied. One of the things I’m very concerned about is that Hawaii is again being used. We were promised that the IUCN conference was going to bring in millions. Well our ex-senator, Pohai Ryan, took a look at it and realized that the IUCN had not actually made a fiscal commitment to this. She did not support it. When you look at the facts here and the negative impacts and the manner in which it was pushed forward, it’s hard to view it in any positive way.”

With just five months left in Obama’s presidency, organizers hope he will announce the Papahānaumokuākea expansion during the Honolulu conference. Opponents say more discussion and transparency is needed before any decision is made on the proposal. There are strong passions on both sides and many people in Hawaii are anxiously awaiting the next move.

THE HISTORY OF PAPAĀHANAUMOKUĀKEA

1903

The U.S. effectively seizes control of Midway Atoll when President Theodore Roosevelt issues Executive Order No. 199A to protect seabirds at Midway Island from poachers who were hunting the animals for their feathers and eggs.

1909

To further preserve the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and its resources, Roosevelt issues Executive Order No. 1019, which establishes the Hawaiian Island Bird Reservation spanning the waters from Nihoa Island to Kure Atoll.



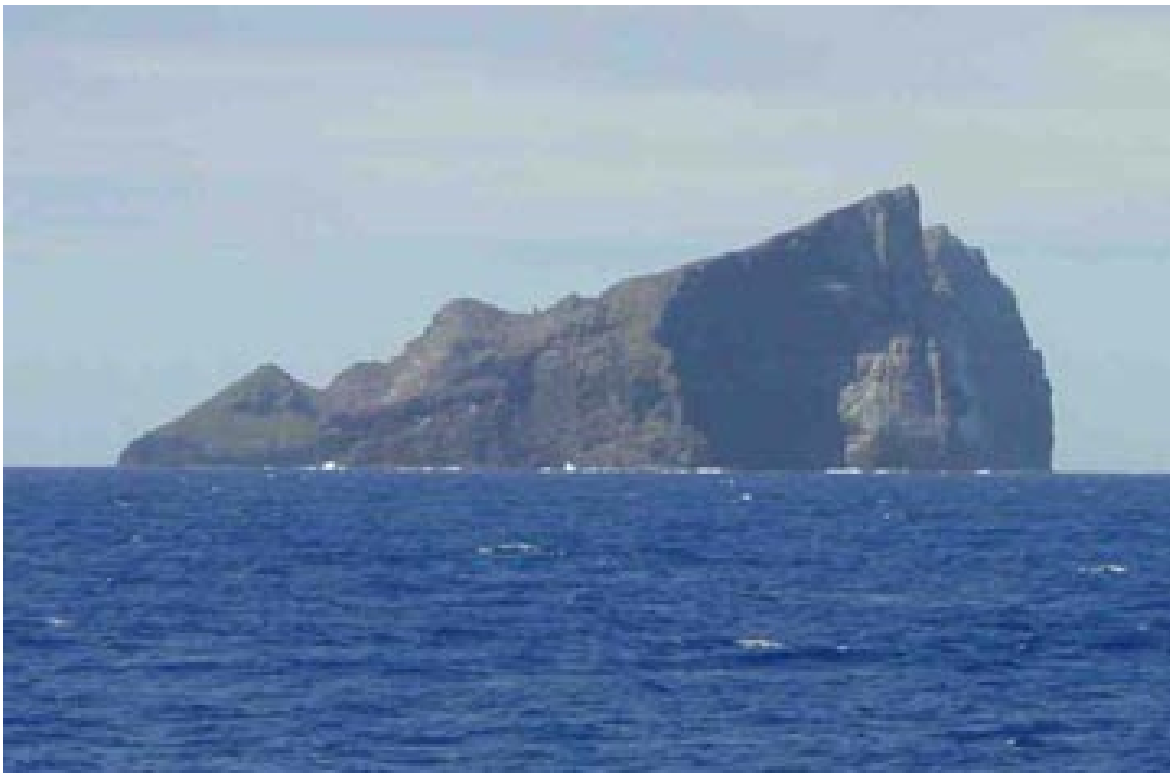
Photo courtesy of NOAA Media Library

1940

President Franklin Roosevelt issues Presidential Proclamation No. 2416, expands the species protected under the reservation from only seabirds to all wildlife and renames the area the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge.

1967

President Lyndon B. Johnson and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service expand the refuge to include French Frigate Shoals, Laysan Island, Nihoa Island, Lisianski Island, Necker Island, Gardner Pinnacles, Pearl and Hermes Reef and nearby submerged land.



Nihoa. Photo courtesy of NOAA Media Library

1988

President Ronald Regan designates Midway Island as a National Wildlife Refuge to preserve its historical and biological resources.

1993

The state Board of Land and Natural Resources declares Kure Atoll a state seabird sanctuary.



1996

President Bill Clinton signs Executive Order No. 13022, which reassigns jurisdiction of Midway Atoll and surrounding areas from the U.S. Navy to the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service.

2000 and 2001

President Clinton endorses Executive Order No. 13158 encouraging the public to participate in creating further protection measures for Papahānaumokuākea and constructing a plan to preserve its ecosystem. After public concern and discussion between Clinton and Congress, the 2000 amendments to the National Marine Sanctuaries Act allow for the beginning of a Northwestern Hawaiian Islands reserve. In December 2000 and January 2001, Clinton signs Executive Orders No. 13178 and No. 13196 to initiate the start of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve, which extends 50 nautical miles out from land.

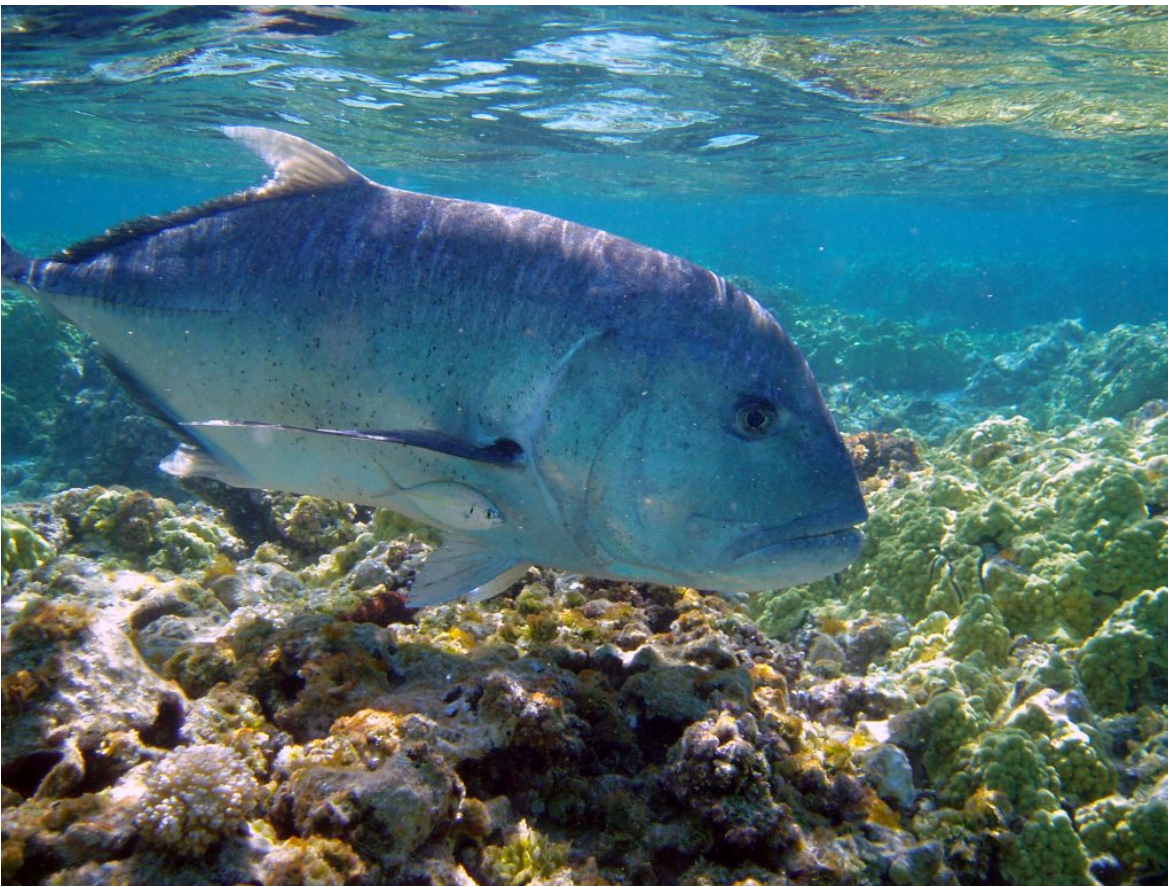


Photo courtesy of NOAA Media Library

2002

During the presidency of George W. Bush, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) works with the public to set an appropriate level of protection for the sanctuary and criticizes rules that allow the collection of rare corals as unaligned with the fishing restrictions set by the executive orders.

2004

NOAA proposes goals and targets for Papahānaumokuākea. It described the purpose of the sanctuary as the “long-term protection of the marine ecosystems in their natural character.”

2005

Gov. Linda Lingle agrees to regulations that establish the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine Refuge. This designation includes all state waters stretching three miles out to the ocean from areas between and including Nihoa Island and Kure Atoll, but not Midway Atoll.



2008

The International Maritime Organization appoints Papahānaumokuākea as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA.) Ships and all other transiting vessels entering these boundaries must go through a reporting system that allows the U.S. to closely monitor all vessels. It is America's second PSSA and one of 10 in the world.

2010

Delegates attending the UNESCO's 34th World Heritage Convention unanimously declares Papahānaumokuākea as one of 26 natural and cultural World Heritage Sites in the world.