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U.S.

Obama Heralds Creation of World's Largest Marine Reserve off Hawaii

The move expands the area where commercial fishing is prohibited and is divisive among politicians and fishermen



President Barack Obama arrives at Joint Base Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on Aug. 31, ahead of the start of the World Conservation Congress. *PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES*

By **ALEJANDRO LAZO**

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HONOLULU—President Obama touted his decision to create the world's largest marine reserve here, and during an address Wednesday night also urged countries to work together to combat climate change.

“If you want to row a canoe, every oar has to be moving in unison,” Mr. Obama said in remarks ahead of the start of the World Conservation Congress, which convenes every four years and draws thousands of environmental activists and politicians. “When it comes to climate change, there’s a dire possibility of us getting off course.”

The president noted his close ties to the state, remarking that his parents met not far from where he spoke, and that his family has spent every Christmas in Hawaii since his daughter Malia was born.

The president returned to his home state Wednesday having created the world's largest marine reserve off the coast of the Hawaiian Islands.



An unusually large cluster of sea stars found within waters now protected within the expansion area of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. *PHOTO: NOAA OFFICE OF OCEAN EXPLORATION AND RESEARCH*

“Teddy Roosevelt gets credit for starting the National Park Service,” Mr. Obama said. “But when you include a big chunk of the Pacific Ocean, you now have actually done more acreage.”

Through an executive action, Mr. Obama last week expanded the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument by more than four times to more than half a million square miles—a remote sweep of deep-hued green and blue ocean with a long strand of tiny islands and atolls. The president is scheduled Thursday to travel to the reserve’s Midway Atoll.

“This is a hallowed site and it deserves to be treated that way from now on,” Mr. Obama said. “And it will be preserved for future generations.”

The expansion of the monument, first established by President George W. Bush in 2006, is the culmination of a campaign by native Hawaiian groups and environmentalists.

But the move, which expands the area where commercial fishing is prohibited, is divisive among politicians, and has raised concerns about its impact on the

state's fishing industry.



A new species of octopod discovered during the a 2016 Hawaii expedition. PHOTO: NOAA OFFICE OF OCEAN EXPLORATION AND RESEARCH

“I am concerned about the future of Hawaii and the people of Hawaii,” said former Gov. George R. Ariyoshi. “The state is in a better position to decide how to preserve the ocean.”

State Rep. James Kunane Tokioka, a Democrat, sent a letter opposing the expansion of the marine preserve, signed by 30 members in the state's House of Representatives, including House Speaker Joseph M. Souki.

The expansion came together too quickly, with not enough public input, Mr. Tokioka said in an interview.

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, established by Congress to manage offshore fisheries in the region, also opposed the expansion. Eric Kingma, a coordinator with the Honolulu-based council, said the designation was “unnecessary” and will affect a longline fishing fleet of roughly 140 vessels based in Honolulu.

About 10% of the annual catch comes from the area now included in the reserve, he said, or roughly \$10 million of the fleet's revenue.

“Closing off large parts of the ocean to fisherman...it is overreach,” Mr. Kingma said.

But William Aila, deputy to the chair of the Department of Hawaiian Homelands, said native Hawaiians have long sought more federal protection for the area

from fishing activities. The region has cultural and spiritual significance for native Hawaiians—considered the place where a soul enters and exits the world.

The White House said the expansion will provide protection for more than 7,000 marine species, including whales and sea turtles protected by the Endangered Species Act. The area is also home to black coral, which has been found to live more than 4,500 years old.

Richard Pyle, an associate zoologist with the Bishop Museum's Hawaii Biological Survey, said since the reserve was created in 2006, scientists have come to better understand how far the marine and animal life of the region extends: for example, birds and monk seals travel further than previously thought and the larvae of coral also disperse well outside the previously protected zone.

Deep-sea cameras in the last year have also shown a diverse ocean floor in the area, he said.

The location of the coral reefs in the reserve are situated in relatively cooler waters than those reefs closer to the equator, Dr. Pyle said. That means the newly protected reefs can serve as a “global reservoir of coral” that can help rehabilitate other coral reef areas in the future, he said.

“It is essentially a habitat that can exist even as sea temperatures continue to rise in the decades to come,” he said.

But the expansion will mean Hawaiian fishermen will likely face more international competition.

Fishing outside the reserve could mean higher fuels costs and potentially longer trips, said Jim Cook, who has six boats in the fishery, and is a member of the board of directors of the Hawaii Longline Association.

“I think it's a little ironic that the U.S. would close U.S. waters to a U.S.-certified sustainable fishery, but that is what's happening,” he said.

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