

Regional fishing body opposes expansion of Hawaii monument

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TRANSCRIPT

A regional fishing body is opposing the planned expansion of United States protected waters around Hawaii.

Members of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council have raised their concerns about the sustainability of local fishing if the area is expanded.

Indira Stewart has more.

The expansion of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument comes under a series of measures announced by the US president Barack Obama in 2014 to protect the world's oceans. The plan would increase the Hawaiian protected zone fivefold and could reduce the size of legal fishing grounds there from 63 percent to 15 percent. Paul Dalzell, the council's senior scientist, says that the president's executive order to expand the monument under the Antiquities Act is abuse of federal law.

PAUL DALZELL: The antiquities act was meant to protect small places. Stop them from being overrun by tourists or being stripped by souvenir hunters. And it's supposed to be the for the smallest area possible. It was never intended to parcel off great large areas of land or indeed to be applied to make these huge expansions of water.

Manny Duenas, president of the Guam Fishermen's Co-operative, says other US Pacific territories fear it'll happen to them too.

MANNY DUENAS: If they expand 200 [nautical miles] in American Samoa they practically cover all accessible fishing grounds close to the main island of Samoa. If you talk about the Marianas, that would close off the Northern quadrant, about one third of the Northern Marianas waters which has cooler waters and other fish types may be available to the CNMI fishermen.

Mr Duenas says Hawaii's fisheries are highly dependent on the EEZ with 95 per cent of its fisheries relying on domestic fishing. He says its fisheries already have so many restrictions, and another one will threaten its economy, food security and food production.

MANNY DUENAS: They're already limited in a number of vessels, number of participants, in their catch limit, they require a lot of full observers, they're required 100 per cent VMS system. They're the most highly regulated fishery in the world and yet they have to succumb to further rules and regulations that will be detrimental to their survivability.

More than 7,000 marine species are protected by Hawaii's Papahānaumokuākea monument. It's believed a quarter of them are found nowhere else. Mr Dalzell, says claims that expanding it will improve conservation are false.

PAUL DALZELL: It will not improve things for fisheries or for the abundance of marine fish. For a start off, it's open ocean so pelagic species just swim through it. It won't pile up there and then replenish fish stocks around the main Hawaiians.

He says the current longline fishing is not a threat to conservation.

PAUL DALZELL: The area is about four miles deep and it's like about .01 percent of it which is within the range of a longline hook. It's a very narrow range of species [there] compared to what's on the seamounts and on the abyssal plain. But there is no contact between the longline fishery and the substrate. Any further expansion will be detrimental to any type of perpetuation of a fishery within the Pacific island areas. Which is almost disheartening because Pacific islanders have lived on fish for most of our course since time immemorial and with the removal of the stock, we're going to be looking at canned tuna as being our fish supply in the near future.

The Council has written to Mr Obama opposing the proposal.

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