Big Environmental Groups Continue to Prey Upon Hawaii Fishing Grounds
by Eric Kingma, Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council

The most recent request to expand the PMNM calls upon President Obama to use the Antiquities Act to again create the largest MPA in the world. The Antiquities Act, however, requires no public hearings and no environmental analysis to justify why such a closure would be beneficial to marine resources and the people of Hawaii. On the other hand, the expansion would come at a huge cost to Hawaii residents. Up to 85 percent of the US EEZ around Hawaii (EEZ) could be restricted to fishing. These are the same areas that produce your locally-caught ahi for poke and sashimi. Closing the NHWI will not improve tuna stocks available to Hawaii’s small scale fisherman. Already Hawaii commercial and non-commercial fishermen catch more yellowfin tuna (ahi) than the Hawaii longline fishery and the catch per unit of yellowfin in the Hawaii troll fisheries has been increasing over the last decade. Most of the concerns raised in the letter to the President are already addressed through existing federal statutes and regulations. The proposed benefits of the expansion area are incorrect, and Hawaii fisheries pose no threats to the cultural and marine resources identified by the non-Indian expansion proponents. The existing 100-mile wide, 1200-mile long PMNM already protects the NHWI coral ecosystem, monk seals, seabirds, sea turtles, marine mammals and other marine resources (e.g. crustaceans, various corals, etc.). Over 96 percent of the water from 200 to 500 nm is deeper than 4000 meters (over 12,000 ft). Within this vast area of the abyssal plain are small pockets of deep-sea corals and sponge communities. Recent exploratory research of these deep sea areas have shown these areas are pristine condition and not subject to any human activity, i.e. there are no threats to these deep sea resources. The Hawaii longline fishery has been prohibited from fishing within 50 nm from land in the NWHI since 1991. It is important to recognize that the deepest part of the longline fishes at 400 m, thus posting no threats to these deep sea communities. Bottom trawling, deep-sea tangle nets and other destructive fishing gear have been prohibited in the NWHI since 1986. **continued...**
Big Environmental Groups Continue to Prey

As mentioned, resources in the NWHI are currently protected through numerous US laws – Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act, Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, PMNM proclamation, and other applicable regulations and statutes. The table on the following page shows some of the reasons proponents are requesting the expansion, while the other column indicates the reality.

As a result of this potential massive federal ocean grab that has been urged and the weak scientific arguments, numerous letters have been sent to President Obama opposing the expansion and in favor of allowing Hawaii fisheries to continue to operate from 50-200 nm in the US waters around the NWHI. Letters have come from the following:

- Senate President Ronald D. Kouchi
- Bernard Carvalho, Mayor, Kauai County
- Edwin Ebisa Jr., Chairman and Ritty Smocde, Executive Director, Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council
- Governor Ralph DLG Torres, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
- Neil Kenyon, President, Pacific Islands Fisheries Group
- Phil Fernandez, President, Hawaii Fisheromn’s Alliance for Conservation and Tradition
- Basil Osorio, President, Maui Fishermen’s Cooperative
- Sean Martin, President, Hawaii Longline Association
- John Kaneko, Manager, Hawaii Seafood Council
- Dean Okimoto, Owner, Nalo Farms
- MGrew Rice, Captain, Charter Boat Operators

On May 5, 2016, prominent members from Hawaii’s fishing industry and seafood businesses provided testimony to representatives from the White House’s Council on Environmental Quality, Department of the Interior, Department of Commerce and Department of Defense at the NOAA Offices on Pier 38. Testimony provided varied perspectives on why the monument should not be expanded.

Alan Wong, Alan Wong Restaurants - “We’re an island state. We’re surrounded by the Pacific Ocean. We love to eat fish. We love to eat raw fish. We love to eat poke.” “Eating fish, eating raw fish comes with the first Hawaiians. It’s genuine to Hawaii, and it is a tradition, and that’s what we do. Fish becomes such an important part of all of our meals in Hawaii so that our guests can taste that.”

Roy Yamaguchi, Roy’s Restaurants - “From what I hear, even when I was in Australia, that Hawaii has one of the great fisheries in the world - which is purely to all of the people that run it. We don’t want this process to drive the people in our state to seek imports and to bring the money somewhere else and not showcase what Hawaii has to offer to the rest of the world.”

Dean Okimoto, Nalo Farms - “I believe that this will have a significant socioeconomic impact on Hawaii. It will affect the restaurants. It will even affect us because we have a movement right now in Hawaii that – and it’s very strong, where a lot of the restaurants, a lot of the people are starting to realize supporting local and buying locally is really important, not only because the money stays here, but it also makes people realize what we have here and appreciate it.” “At what point does it become really stupid, especially when none of the science supports this, and I believe the guys that are managing this fishery already are very responsible.”

Others providing testimony and participating in the meeting included representatives from Hilo Fish, Tropic Fish and Vegetable, Garden Valley Isle Fish and Seafood, Fresh Island Fish, Yamashiro Market, United Fishing Agency, Nico’s at Pier 38, Hawaii Production Associates, POP Fishing and Marine, Hawaii’s Hunting Fishing and Association Fishing, Pacific Fishing and Marine, Hawaii Seafood Council, Pacific Islands Sciences Center, Pacific Islands Fisheries Group, Hawaii Longline Association, Hawaii Fishermen for Conservation and Tradition and other members of the local fishing community.

Based on the current situation, it is important to recognize that Hawaii’s sustainable fisheries are under threat from individuals and environmental organizations with tunnel-visioned MPA agendas. MPAs are just one tool in the fisheries management tool box, but they are not a ‘fix-all’ solution. The effectiveness of MPAs on pelagic migratory tuna stocks has not been demonstrated and even smaller MPAs affecting coral reefs species or species with more site fidelity have not demonstrated increased catch rates in areas outside the MPAs. What MPAs typically do is displace fishing effort into areas outside the MPAs, increasing competition and lowering catch rates. MPAs have been demonstrated to increase abundance of low-ranging fish within the MPA, but spillover in terms of recruitment, abundance, and improved catch rates outside MPAs have not been shown.

Sustainable fisheries management is achieved with comprehensive data collection and the ability of the fishery management system to exert timely controls on fishing effort and catch through an adaptive regulatory framework, including addressing climate change. Marine Monuments and other no-take MPAs with fixed boundaries are not adaptive and more about establishing aquariaums with little benefits to fisheries, fishermen, and local food security. In this perilous time, Hawaii fishermen need to be vigilant, vocal, and stand together to demand that actions such as the one to expand the PMNM need to be based on science, and not based on the agenda of environmental groups and individuals with no interests in fisheries or knowledge of the importance of fishing to Hawaii. Fishing is culture in Hawaii and our sustainably-managed fisheries are critically important to our lifestyle and local food security.

To learn more, visit www.wpcouncil.org
NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETINGS

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council announces the following public meetings on fisheries management in offshore waters of Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), and the Pacific Remote Island Areas. For more information and complete agendas, go to www.wpcouncil.org or contact the Council at info@wpcouncil.noaa.gov or in Hawaii, phone (808) 522-8226; in Guam, phone (671) 687-6812; in CNMI, phone (670) 322-9834 or (670) 287-9462; and in American Samoa, phone (680) 249-9588.

123rd Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)
May 25-27 (F-T) - 8:30 am to 5:30 pm, 1164 Bishop St., #1400, Honolulu, HI 96819

Major agenda items: Options to revise the risk determination & uncertainty characterization process to specify annual catch limits

Guam Regional Ecosystem Advisory Committee (REAC)
June 2 (Th) - 8:30 am to 3 pm, Hilton Guam Resort & Spa

Major agenda items: Pelagic & archipelagic annual fishery reports; Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) implementation activities

CNMI REAC
June 3 (F) - 1 pm to 5 pm, Salisan Fiesta Resort, CNMI

Major agenda item: Same as Guam REAC.

Joint Guam and CNMI Marians Advisory Panel
June 4 (Sa) - 8:30 am to 4 pm, Salisan Fiesta Resort, CNMI

Major agenda items: Research needs; Council meeting major agenda items; community activities; FEP scores

Fishery Data Collection & Research Committee
June 4 (Sa) - 9 am to noon, Salisan Hyatt Regency, CNMI

Major agenda items: Fisheries research; CNMI fishery database analysis; annual SAFE report data; regional strategic plan

Standing Committees
June 4 (Sa) - 1 pm to 5 pm, Salisan Hyatt Regency, CNMI

Major agenda items: Program Planning and Research; Executive and Budget

166th Council Meeting
June 6-7 (M-T) - 8:30 am to 5 pm, Salisan Fiesta Resort, CNMI
June 9-10 (Th-F) - 8:30 am to 5 pm, Hilton Guam Resort, Tamuning, Guam

Major agenda items: Same as SSC plus modifying the Hawaii shallow-set observer coverage

Fishers Forum "Data, data everywhere but not a megabyte to eat"
June 6 (M) - 6 pm to 9 pm, Salisan Fiesta Resort, CNMI

Fishers Forum "Mapping Fishery Resources"
June 9 (Th) - 6 pm to 9 pm, Hilton Guam Resort, Tamuning, Guam

Mapping Coral Reef Fisheries in Guam (fishermen session)
June 1 (Sa) - 9 am to 2 pm, Hilton Guam Resort, Tamuning, Guam

For more information and full agendas, go to wpcouncil.org or phone (808) 522-8226, fax (808) 522-8262 or email info@wpcouncil.noaa.gov; in Guam, phone (671) 687-6812; in CNMI, phone (670) 322-9834 or (670) 287-9462; and in American Samoa, phone (680) 249-9588. Written comments for the 166th Council meeting received by June 1, 2016, will be distributed to Council members prior to the meeting. Send comments to Kitty M. Simonds, Executive Director, WPCFMC, 1164 Bishop St., Suite 1400, Honolulu, HI 96813; fax to 808 522-8226, or email to info@wpcouncil.noaa.gov. After June 1, the submitters must provide Council staff with at least 40 copies of the written comments at the meeting. Written comments are also available during the meeting as noted on the agenda. These public meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be requested at least five days prior to the meeting.