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Their View

Unintended Consequences of Monument Expansion

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The proposed expansion of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument has been touted as a move to protect marine life and, at the same time, reclaim the United States' position as having the largest marine monument in the world.

While the expansion is being pursued with the best of intentions, great care must be taken to ensure the expansion doesn't harm the very people it is intended to help. Fishing by Hawaii's longline fisherman must be allowed to continue in the proposed expansion zone, or Hawaii's people will feel the sting of unintended consequences.

Eighty percent of the fish caught in Hawaii is consumed in Hawaii. We are a state that struggles with food security. Other than fish, less than 10 percent of our food is locally sourced. Do we want to jeopardize our most reliable local food source?

A ban on fishing in the expansion zone could also have significant economic consequences. Longline fishing and the work that supports it are a \$100 million industry, far larger than any other food production in our state. An end to fishing in the expansion zone will force our boats to compete with foreign vessels that aren't as highly regulated. The upshot is that we'll see less fish and increased fish prices in markets and restaurants throughout our state. Hawaii would be forced to import more frozen, carbon monoxide treated fish, at a time when we are already struggling with food security.

Today, 24 percent of Hawaii's waters are "no take" fishing zones, much higher than other states. By comparison, 9 percent of California's waters and 3 percent of Oregon's waters are "no take" zones. If fishing is prohibited in the proposed expansion zone, a staggering 67 percent of Hawaiian waters will be off limits to fishing. This is exceedingly disproportionate given the fact that Hawaii fisheries bring in just 1.65 percent of all big eye tuna caught in the Pacific Ocean.

Expansion proponents claim that only 8 percent of last year's catch came from the expansion zone. That's an illogical argument. Fish do not stay in one place. And when you increase the "no take" zone by 350 percent, you effectively close off the ability for fishermen to ever fish in these waters. So in two years, 40 percent of the fish could be in the expansion area, we just don't know. So why force our local fishermen out of our entire exclusive economic zone (EEZ) where only Hawaii boats can fish, and into international waters to compete with foreign boats?

Hawaii's fishery is a world leader in sustainable fishing. It has pioneered a number of conservation measures that other countries are now adopting. We have seen no scientific evidence showing that a ban on fishing in the proposed expansion zone will have any substantial environmental benefit.

In addition, our fishermen, chefs, community leaders and others like us who have promoted responsible fishing for many years have had their voices completely shut out of the process. The federal government has not held formal public hearings on the issue and we are not aware of future meetings where public dialogue will be heard. A proposal of this magnitude deserves a transparent public process.

U.S. Sen. Brian Schatz recently proposed an exemption for fishermen on Kauai and Niihau that would allow them to fish in the proposed expansion zone. We support this exemption, but all of Hawaii's fishermen need the same protection. Our longline fishermen fish responsibly and sustainably, and they must be allowed to continue to fish in the proposed expansion zone for the good of everyone in this state.