

January 29, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United State of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We trust you had a pleasant holiday in Hawai‘i with the First Family and were able to rejuvenate for the New Year. Today we write to you in regards to the critical state of our oceans and an important action you can take as President that will guarantee a healthier planet for future generations – expansion of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument.

As you may know, in 2000 President Bill Clinton created the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve and in 2006 President George W. Bush established Papahānaumokuākea as a fully protected marine reserve, the largest of its kind on the planet at the time. In 2016, the 10th anniversary of Papahānaumokuākea’s creation, you have the opportunity to continue this bi-partisan tradition of conservation by expanding the monument. This single action will provide added protection for the area’s incredible natural and cultural heritage and will once again recognize Papahānaumokuākea as the largest protected area on Earth. Of important note, our recommendation requests that the waters surrounding the two Hawaiian Islands of Ni‘ihau and Kaua‘i remain outside of monument boundaries.

The name Papahānaumokuākea commemorates the union of two Hawaiian ancestors – Papahānaumoku and Wākea – who gave rise to the Hawaiian Archipelago and our people. Native Hawaiians remain deeply connected to the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and surrounding waters on genealogical, cultural and spiritual levels.

The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands are a unique and generally isolated ocean gem. Consisting of the world’s oldest and longest volcanic chain, this part of the Hawaiian Archipelago includes environments that represent different stages of island and seamount formation and evolution. As such, the area includes a diverse set of habitats that reach ocean depths of greater than 15,000 feet below sea level.

Within this diverse and primarily isolated habitat of the region, there are more than 7,000 marine species, and scientists estimate that more than a quarter of those are endemic. The area is one of the few remaining predator-dominated ecosystems in the world, with strong populations of sharks, Hawaiian grouper and other large predatory fish that have been heavily overfished

elsewhere. Apex predators represent more than half of the biomass in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, compared with 3% in the main Hawaiian Islands.

While the current boundary of Papahānaumokuākea includes vital habitat for a number of species, it does not fully protect habitat and travel routes for several species including Hawaiian Monk Seals, green sea turtles, sharks, whales, Black-footed and Laysan Albatrosses as well as other species. Additionally, large, fully protected marine reserves and sanctuaries are more resilient to climate change and therefore have emerged as important to mitigating the impacts of our warming planet.

Mr. President, as an island boy from Hawai‘i, we trust that you understand the significance of the ocean to our islands. Mahalo for your time and we look forward to discussing the expansion of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument with your office in the coming months.

With Aloha,

William Aila, Jr.

Kaleo Manuel

Kamana‘opono Crabbe, Ph.D.

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Isaac "Paka" Harp

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Kekuewa Kikiloi, Ph.D.