


COMMUNITY VOICE

# Expanding Monument Would Set A Dangerous Precedent

The rush to establish the world's largest marine protected area ignores the lack of scientific proof that doing so is a good idea.

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ABOUT 9 HOURS AGO • By Caleb McMahan 

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The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently held a public meeting to discuss the proposed expansion of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument.

Proponents of the expansion stand behind the request of Hawaii Sen. Brian Schatz and a group of seven Native Hawaiians for President Barack Obama to consider invoking the Antiquities Act of 1906 to expand the existing 50 mile monument boundary four-fold. The new monument would include nearly all of the Exclusive Economic Zone surrounding the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and a whopping 60 percent of the greater Hawaiian Islands EEZ.

Proponents argue that the expansion is necessary and justified on a variety of accounts. But the invocation of the Antiquities Act would mean that nearly 1.3 million square kilometers of U.S. waters would be made off-limits to American fishermen without public review or scientific analysis of the impacts or potential benefits.



*Protestors rallied against expanding the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument last month at Honolulu's Pier 38.*

Given the permanence of such a designation and the ramifications for the affected user groups, it's no surprise that the recent meeting included a lively debate between those for and against expansion.

What I found most alarming after attending the event was that the proponents of expansion don't seem to recognize that the very nature of this proposal has unnecessarily divided the community. It represents a major setback for the notion that to achieve successful and meaningful outcomes in conservation and/or resource management, all stakeholder groups must be part of the process.

In the case of Schatz's proposal for monument expansion the concept of due process has been forsaken completely. The idea that sound science must be a basis for decision making has been abandoned in the face of a perceived urgency.

Instead, the proposal has served to undermine the very structures we have in place to preserve a fair and equitable means of addressing public concerns about a shared resource (read up on Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act.)

And why? So that the designation of a new monument boundary can serve as a memorable announcement at the upcoming World Conservation Congress? So that the U.S. can claim to own the largest marine protected area in the world? Because the Hawaii longline and other fishers can just go fish somewhere else? Because we need to set an example for the rest of the world to follow?

**In Schatz's proposal for monument expansion, the concept of due process has been forsaken completely. The idea that sound science must be a basis for decision making has been abandoned.**

This is certainly the wrong kind of example to be setting. Regardless of where one stands on environmental issues, conservation, and/or resource management, dispensing with due process should not be embraced as a tactic to achieve one group's desired outcome no matter what. One need only do a little bit of research to see that the

historical record is rife with examples of unilateral initiatives resulting in deep wounds that only resurface later to compound the problem.

Perhaps we should ask American Samoans what they think about the Rose Atoll Marine Sanctuary. Poll the people of Northern Marianas on what they think of their new monument and the processes by which it came about. Then maybe we would see that an "ends justifies the means" approach in unilateral conservation only serves to polarize communities and make collaboration for future initiatives more difficult.

On a side note, these monument designations tend to happen disproportionately in the Pacific, far from Washington, D.C., where the outcries of the disenfranchised user groups and/or marginalized native peoples are easily overpowered by the roar of environmental lobbies who don't have to rely on the resources they're making off-limits to others, but want to lay claim to, nonetheless.



*The Hawaii longline vessel, F/V Kawaiola, begins a night of fishing within the Hawaiian Islands EEZ.*

But alas, proponents of Schatz's proposal seem disturbingly content to bypass a real scientific review of the merits and potential consequences of expansion in their effort to garner support for their cause. Meanwhile they cite the amount of support they're receiving as evidence and a justification for it. It defies the kind of objectivism at the core of science based management.

While a petition with 1,000 or 100,000 signatures may merit the initiation of a decision making process on an issue like monument expansion, it does not constitute real scientific evidence in support or opposition to it. Neither does a [Civil Beat endorsement](#). Neither does a "[1,500 Scientists Can't Be Wrong Petition](#)."

Failing to understand this distinction precludes having an informed voice on the issue, and as I witnessed at the meeting, the pro-monument camp seems to embrace some very uninformed opinions and worse, mistakes these opinions for scientific justification.

The pro-monument speakers included a number of high school, college and graduate students. Several speakers identified as being conservationists and scientists. Some cited their experiences in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, the marine pastimes they enjoy and their commitment to helping to ensure long-term sustainability for the world's oceans. None of

them cited any peer reviewed research that demonstrates how a ban on longline fishing from 50 to 200 miles off the Hawaiian Islands would achieve any of their objectives.

For so many speakers that identified themselves as being scientists, students of science and even professors of science, I was dismayed at the lack of scientific evidence presented by any of them.

It pains me to see pseudo-scientific rhetoric wear the guise of real science and be lended credence in a public forum. It's disheartening to think that our students, their teachers, politicians and news outlets are so eager to take a stand on an issue without understanding more than one side of it or even initiating a process by which to be able to thoroughly understand it.

This isn't about conservation vs industry or greed vs sustainability. This is about setting a precedent for how we manage our public resources. Everyone is entitled to an opinion. Not everyone's opinion though, no matter how many people hold it, should become policy without due process.

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## About the Author



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Caleb McMahan is a former commercial fisherman, NOAA fisheries observer, and documentary filmmaker. He currently serves as director of media and marketing at Hawaiian Fresh Seafood. His 2016 documentary about Hawaii's longline fishery is called TIES THAT BIND: Hawaii In the Pacific and will premiere at the Hawaii International Film Festival In November.

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