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# Obama links Hawaii marine monument expansion to climate change efforts

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President [Barack Obama](#) announced the expansion of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in Honolulu Wednesday evening using an old Hawaiian proverb that loosely translates to “unite to move forward,” linking the effort to quadruple the amount of protected waters in Hawaii to climate change.



POOL PHOTO/CINDY ELLEN RUSSELL, HONOLULU STAR-

“It seems simple enough, but the ADVERTISER natives used it as a reminder that if you want to row a canoe, every oar has to be moving in unison, otherwise, you’ll go in circles,” he said. “The pace slows, you drift, you get caught up in currents and you get off course.

“When it comes to climate change, there’s a dire possibility of us getting off course and we can’t allow that to happen,” he said. “That’s why our united efforts are so important.”

The Hawaii-born president [signed a proclamation on Friday that expanded the protected marine area](#) surrounding the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands that’s twice the size of Texas to 582,578 square miles. He delivered remarks about the expansion Wednesday evening at the East-West Center in Honolulu, adjacent to the **University of Hawaii Manoa** campus to about 200 representatives from the Pacific Island Conference of Leaders and IUCN World Conservation Congress, which starts Thursday morning.

He was joined by dignitaries from the Asia-Pacific region, as well business and political leaders from Hawaii, including [Henk Rogers](#), founder of **Blue Planet Foundation**; [George Szigeti](#), president and CEO of the **Hawaii Tourism Authority**; [Donna Tanoue](#), president of Bank of Hawaii Foundation; U.S. Sen. [Brian Schatz](#); former Hawaii Gov. [John Waihee](#); Honolulu Mayor [Kirk Caldwell](#); and state Sen. [Chris Lee](#).

“This announcement is big, it’s really big,” Rogers told Pacific Business News. “One of the people who’s here is the guy who wrote the book ‘[Half Earth](#).’ The book basically says we need to preserve half the

planet if we're going to survive. Right now, we are at 15 percent land and 3 percent ocean.

“With two-thirds of our planet made up of ocean, for us to be at 3 percent, we haven't even scratched the surface,” Rogers said. “If we just keep on fishing, the tuna will be fished out of existence. It's really important for us to protect some area where they can at least survive. This is huge. it will be one of [Obama's] last legacies.”

The effort to increase the size of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument has not been without criticism.

Fishing Means Food, a coalition representing Hawaii's fishing industry, along with Hawaii chefs, restaurant owners and public figures such as former Gov. [George Ariyoshi](#) and [Peter Apo](#), a trustee with the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, [have raised concerns about the expansion](#) of the marine monument.

The expanded ban could reduce the supply of fresh, locally caught fish, impacting such businesses as restaurants, poke shops and wholesalers.

The coalition says the expanded fishing ban will push Hawaii's 140 active commercial fishing boats into international waters where they'll be forced to compete with less regulated foreign fishing vessels.

But Rogers, a big proponent of renewable energy and conservation, said that everybody's going to have to make a little sacrifice, and that it's not protecting those fish against Hawaii fishermen, it's protecting the fish against the other fishermen from other places.

“There are other places in the world where they have no-fish zones,” he said. “They just don’t have a Coast Guard to protect those areas. We have the ability to say, ‘you’re not fishing here.’”

Obama, a Punahou School alumnus, was not shy to let the audience know about his Hawaii roots.

He started off his remarks by saying, “Welcome to Hawaii. Aloha. It’s not often I get to welcome people to my home state. It’s always wonderful to be here even if it’s only for a day.”

The first Hawaii-born U.S. president also made remarks about the two storms — Tropical Storm Madeline and Hurricane Lester — passing near the Islands.

“I just ask the people of Hawaii to listen to your state and local officials, make sure you and your families are prepared for the storms, but the governor says he’s gotten it all taken care of, he’s pushing them all south,” Obama said.

During the latter part of his speech, he said making the remarks about the expansion of the marine monument in Hawaii is especially meaningful.

“I was telling my staff, a lot of my life started about a mile radius around here,” Obama said. “My mother and father met probably a couple hundred yards from here. I went to school about a mile from here. I was born about a mile from here. My grandparents lived most of their lives a short way away from here.

“So since Malia was born, my oldest child, I’ve brought them to Hawaii every Christmas for the last 18 years now. I want to make sure when they’re bringing their children, or their grandchildren, that they’re able to appreciate the wonders and the beauty of this island,” he said. “I know you have the same feeling. That’s why we’ve got to unite to move forward. We have to row as one. If we do, we might just save the one planet that we’ve got.”

On Thursday, Obama will travel to Midway Atoll, which is located 1,300 miles from Honolulu within the monument, to mark the significance of the expansion. After that, he will be traveling to China where he will be part of the G20 summit, which will include climate change as the centerpiece of its agenda.

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