



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, March 14, 2019

Joel Hannahs (202) 225-8577
Communications Director

PRESS RELEASE

Amata Urges Congress to Reform Marine Monuments

Washington, D.C. – Wednesday, Congresswoman Aumua Amata gave a statement in the Committee on Natural Resources calling on Congress to make much-needed reforms to the marine monuments for American Samoa. This full Committee Oversight Hearing was titled, *Forgotten Voices: The Inadequate Review and Improper Alteration of Our National Monuments*.

Video of her remarks is available [here](#).



Congresswoman Amata speaking in Committee to call on Congress to reform marine monuments.

The text of her speech is as follows:

Thank you, Chairman Grijalva and Ranking Member Bishop for holding this hearing today. The topic of today's hearing is a bipartisan issue I have been strongly advocating for since I was first elected to Congress.

On January 6th, 2009, President Bush established the Rose Atoll Marine National Monument and the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument with Proclamation 8337 and Proclamation 8336. On September 29th, 2014, President Obama expanded the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument with Proclamation 9173. The American Samoan Government and its people were barely consulted before these monuments were established or expanded. As a result, our local fishermen were barred from accessing the waters that Samoans have been visiting for over a millennium.

The monuments serve a good purpose, and I fully support that effort, but not without local input, and not at the expense of access to our people who have utilized these areas for centuries, long before any relationship with the United States.

Many island economies are often heavily reliant on a single industry and in our case it's the fishing industry. Our tuna cannery is the dominant economic force in our community. American Samoa's economy depends on access to our own EEZ. The establishment or expansion of the monuments and the restriction of all local fishing has had a major negative impact on American Samoa. We have lost two out of three of our canneries in the last decade alone.

Our fishermen are the most responsible and regulated in the world. As it stands currently, these fish swim through the monuments and are then caught by nations with little to no environmental regulations...that is not helping the sustainability for the future stock. Using the Antiquities Act to close U.S. waters to domestic fisheries is a clear example of federal overreach and regulatory duplication and obstructs well managed, sustainable U.S. fishing industries in favor of their foreign counterparts, especially when the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument was arbitrarily expanded to over six times its size. It is now half a million square miles or an area the size of three California's that now is off limits to U.S. domestic fishing.

Congress has already passed laws that ensures the protection and conservation of ecosystems and the species contained therein including the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The Department of Interior has asked the President to restore regulated fishing in the monuments because of the protections put in place by the Magnuson-Stevens Act, protections that the Antiquities Act does not have. Limited commercial fishing can be done without harm to fish stock sustainability or the environment because Congress has already passed and continues to update laws to ensure it.

The Rose Atoll and Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monuments are just two local examples, and the establishment and alteration of our national monuments remains a bipartisan issue affecting the whole country. We need to be looking at the Antiquities Act, because any President from either party should not be permitted to establish or alter a declared monument without input from the public. To that end I am proud to cosponsor Mr. Bishop's Monument Reform Bill again this Congress, and I want to make it clear that I will welcome legislation from either side of the isle that addresses this oversight.

The unilateral use of an executive order when declaring sites for a national monument designation is not the right way to go about protecting our lands and waters. American Samoans and the other indigenous and local groups represented here today should not have had their way of life so easily threatened by the establishment and alterations of monuments without their input. We must ensure that all parties involved have a say, and I look forward to working with the committee on addressing what I hope remains a bipartisan issue.

###