

Reassess marine-monument expanded fishing ban

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The people of the U.S. Pacific Islands have a right to be heard at the federal table. Our nation's system of Regional Fishery Management Councils enables that right for Hawaii and other states with maritime interests. U.S. territories are included in that right to be heard at the top when ocean policies are discussed and decided.

Pursuing that rightful representation at the highest level has been part of the mandate of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council since its founding by Congress in 1976. Communicating fishery issues to the executive branch is not lobbying. This is part of the democratic process, of working to advance the message and share the concerns of local and geographically remote people.

The 16-member Western Pacific Council includes representatives of four federal agencies. They share in the Council mission of providing open avenues of communication among all levels of government.

A current discussion is the ban on commercial fishing in marine national monuments. Through presidential use of



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the Antiquities Act, U.S. commercial fishermen have been kicked out of over half of the U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) around Hawaii and the U.S. Pacific Islands.

This act was implemented in 1906 to protect Native American sites and artifacts. Using this act to close 1.1 million square miles of U.S. waters circumvents our nation's preeminent fisheries management law. It doesn't take into account impacts to our fishermen and fishing community as required by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 (MSA). It unnecessarily deprives our consumers of fresh, local fish and increases our country's dependence upon imports for over 90 percent of its seafood, of which up to 32 percent is from illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. This is at a time when Gov. David Ige is advocating Hawaii's ability to become more self-sufficient.

At the heart of MSA are

national standards that require the Council to "prevent overfishing while achieving optimal yield," use the "best scientific available information," protect essential fish habitat, minimize bycatch, and comply with the Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act and other applicable laws.

The Council has accomplished this and more. The Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument overlays the Protected Species Zone established by the Council 15 years earlier, which removed longline vessels 0 to 50 nautical miles from the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI). The Council was the first to develop a fishery plan for coral reef ecosystems, which established marine protected areas throughout the US Pacific Islands. It pioneered the vessel monitoring system now used globally on fishing vessels, reduced turtle and seabird interactions

by more than 90 percent and banned bottom trawling and drift gillnets. The highly monitored, environmentally responsible Hawaii longline fishery is regarded internationally as a model fishery.

Recently the nation's eight U.S. Regional Fishery Management Councils requested that President Donald Trump review the prohibitions against commercial fishing in the marine national monuments. Reopening the waters around the NWHI would not harm artifacts and other resources of concern. Pelagic longline fishing gear extends from the surface to at the most 1,200 feet; the average depth of monument expansion is over 15,000 feet. The Protected Species Zone would continue to keep longline fishing away from coral reefs.

With pineapple and sugar cane gone, commercial fishing is Hawaii's top food producer, worth \$110 million in landed value. Eighty percent of the landings stay in the islands and 20 percent to the U.S. mainland. Half of the seafood consumed in Hawaii is locally produced. Commercial fishing managed under the MSA is required to be sustainable. Access for Hawaii fishing vessels to U.S. waters is critical to reduce impacts from foreign competition and keep fresh local poke in our bowls.