

## Section I – Basics

**Nomination Title:** Mariana Trench National Marine Sanctuary

**Nominator Name(s) and Affiliation(s):** Friends of the Marianas Trench

**Nomination Point of Contact:**

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## Section II – Introduction

The Friends of the Marianas Trench formed in 2008 to express the voice of the local community and consists of a cross-section of indigenous and resident people of the CNMI who are dedicated to the conservation, preservation and protection of marine flora, fauna and geological features of the oceans; and the creation and proper management of a Marianas Trench Marine National Monument. Inspired by the Commonwealth's founding fathers and the CNMI Constitution, they successfully petitioned former President George W. Bush to declare the Marianas Trench Marine Monument.

The Friends of the Monument consist of about 20 highly active members, led by Chairman Ignacio V. Cabrera, and have sought community engagement for the Marianas Trench Monument. In 2008, the year before the monument was declared, this group in collaboration with The Pew Charitable Trusts, held over 100 public meetings on Saipan, Tinian, and Rota, collected more than 6,000 signatures on a petition, and wrote letters to the editor and to the federal officials. After the declaration of the monument they have provided testimony to Congress, advocated for funding to build a visitors center, provided comments on draft fishing regulations, and attended government meetings as observers.

The Friends of the Monument have also sought to improve the original declaration of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument. For most of 2008, the organization advocated for a very large, highly protected marine protected area, managed by the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS). When the monument was finally declared, the marine protected area was one tenth the size than that proposed by the community, the protections fell far short of expectations, and US Fish & Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries were tasked as the management authorities.

Friends of the Marianas Trench have written multiple times to NOAA to ask for ONMS involvement in the management of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, and to enhance the protections afforded the Marianas Trench and surrounding areas. We did not receive positive responses in 2009, 2010, or 2013, but are hopeful that conditions today are more likely to allow for us to begin the sanctuary designation process.

Governor Ralph DeLeon Guerrero Torres and US Delegate Gregorio Camacho “Kilili” Sablan wrote to President Barack Obama in September 2016 to request that a sanctuary process begin in the Northern Mariana Islands for the marine areas of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument. Several island leaders have joined this call, along with 1,500 of our citizens. The Friends of the Marianas Trench take this request one step further and ask that during the sanctuary process, the community have the opportunity to explore options for protecting additional resources as we initially identified in 2008, but also those discovered in the years since.

## Narrative Description:

“Each person has the right to a clean and healthful public environment in all areas, including the land, air, and water.”-- CNMI Constitution, Article I, Section 9

The Marianas Trench Marine National Monument was established by President George W. Bush on January 6, 2009 and protects over 95,000 square miles of seafloor and waters in the Mariana Archipelago under federal jurisdiction. The monument consists of three units: the Islands Unit, which protects the seafloor and waters around the three northernmost Mariana Islands, Farallon de Pajaros or Uracas, Maug, and Asuncion; the Volcanic Unit, which protects the seafloor surrounding 21 volcanic sites of exceptional scientific and conservation value; and the Trench Unit, which protects the seafloor east of the archipelago inside the US Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) from north of Uracus to south of Guam.

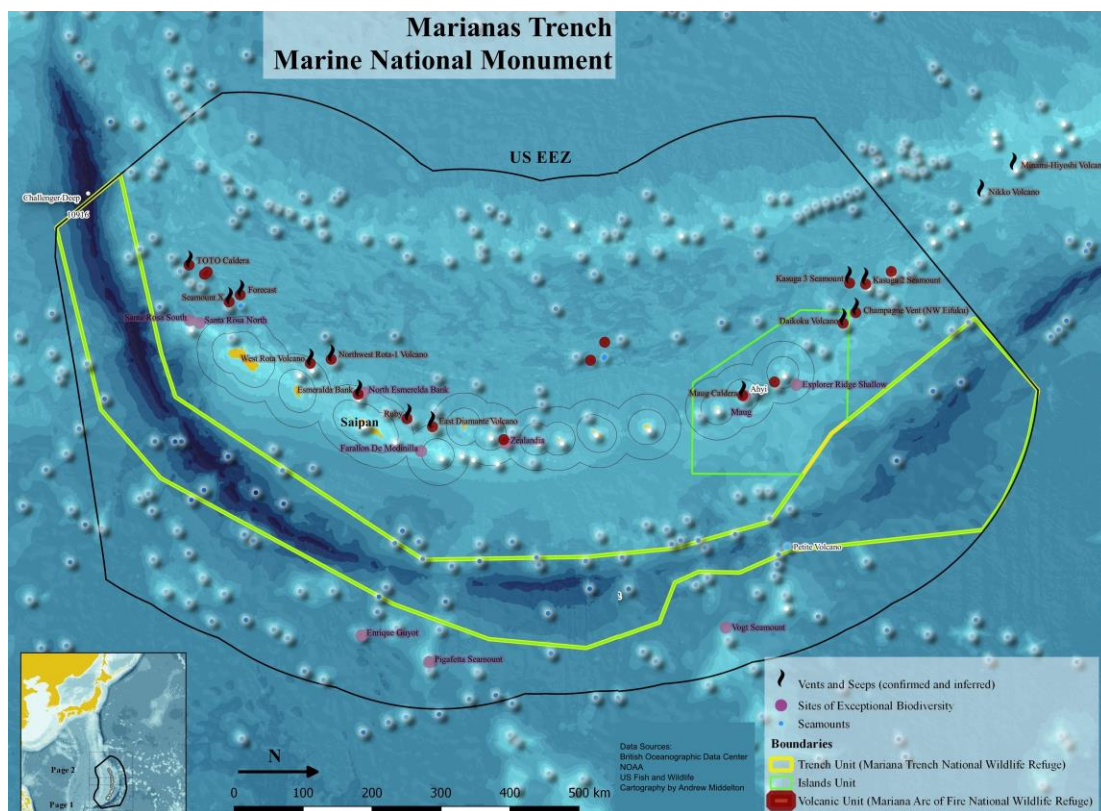


Figure 1: Seamounts in the US EEZ surrounding the Mariana Islands.

It is the only marine monument in the Pacific President Barack Obama has yet to improve during his administration. The president has the opportunity to begin the National Marine Sanctuary designation process in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) consistent with the National Marine Sanctuaries Act. This will protect and preserve unique aspects of Chamorro and Carolinian culture, as well as internationally significant natural resources inside the US Exclusive Economic Zone. The Islands Unit of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument is one area that has been identified by CNMI leaders for inclusion in the National Marine Sanctuary Program, but there are others that should be explored during the designation process. There are at least 130 seamounts outside the borders of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, but inside the US EEZ around the Mariana Islands. These are areas of high biodiversity, biomass, and endemism, and should be considered for protection.

The community should have the opportunity to provide input into any additional areas considered for inclusion for a future national marine sanctuary. We have heard from some citizens and elected leaders on Rota that they would be interested in looking into including areas close to their island in a proposed sanctuary. There is currently a study taking place to look into creating a national park on Rota, and there could be a number of synergies between these two federal offices, as well as the appropriate local offices on Rota, such as the Office of the Mayor and the CNMI Department of Lands and Natural Resources. Several residents of Tinian, Saipan, and even Guam, have asked how the waters surrounding their islands could be included, but these discussions have been limited.

These areas close to the southern inhabited islands, however, have not been the focus of the Friends of the Marianas Trench. The proposal put forward by the Friends in 2008 called for the protection of the full extent of the US EEZ surrounding the northernmost islands of Uracus, Maug, and Asuncion. The waters surrounding these islands were identified because of the islands' inclusion in the CNMI Constitution as "uninhabited places and used only for the preservation and protection of natural resources." It was culturally and politically appropriate to extend these constitutional protections to the full ecosystem.

The Trench Unit was not advocated for by the Friends of the Marianas Trench in 2008, but it was identified by the Bush Administration as an area in need of protection. The Friends support this protection, but believe that an opportunity was missed by only protecting the seafloor, and not providing protections for the habitat in the water column. There is rigorous scientific reasoning to protect the water column. Large, remote, marine reserves work and have been shown to be beneficial to populations of fish and the people that depend on them. The Trench Unit could be included in a potential sanctuary if the water column habitat is included, as could the area east of the Trench Unit out to the extent of the US EEZ without negatively affecting any fisheries on Saipan, Tinian, Rota, or Guam.

## Marianas Trench Marine National Monument

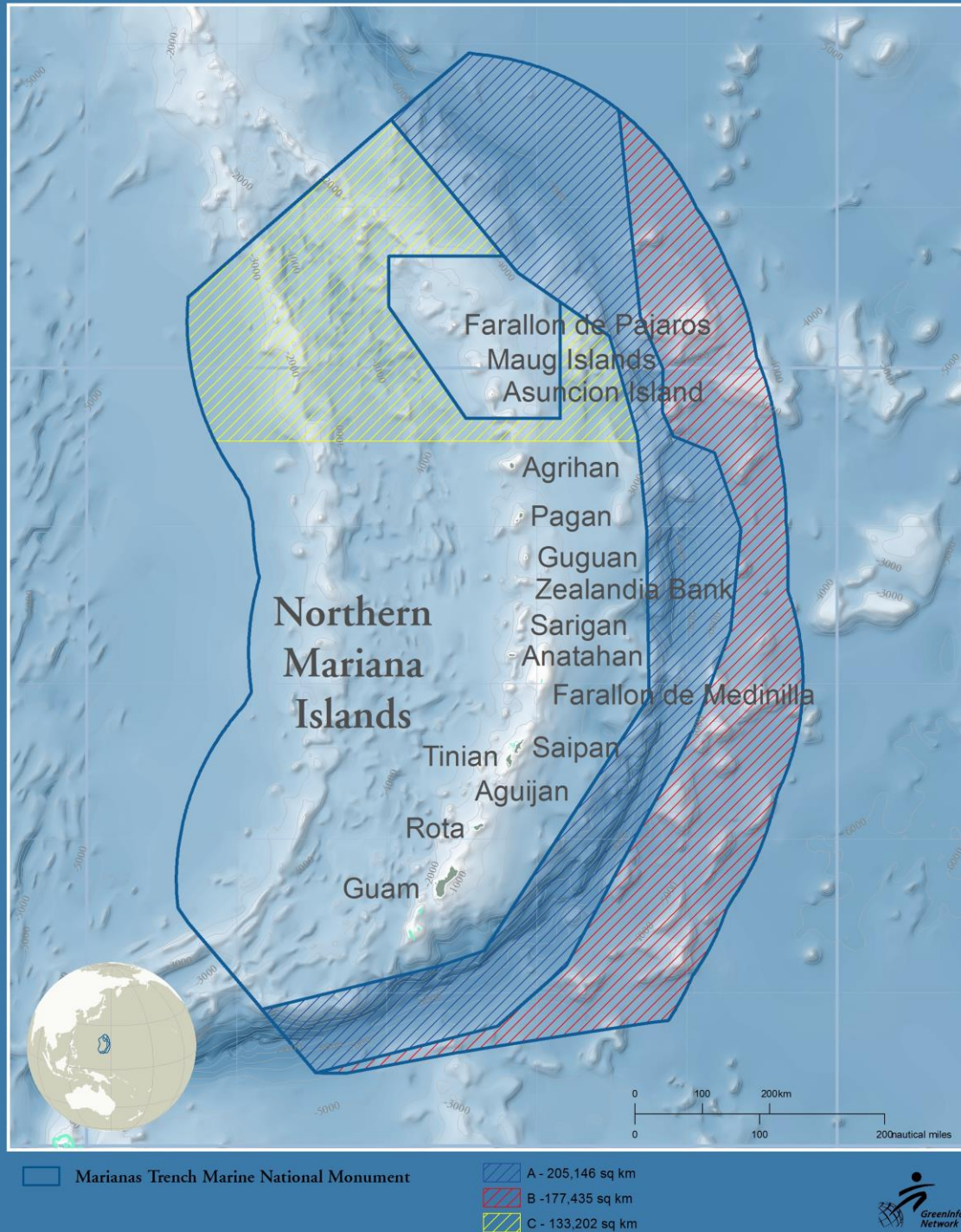


Figure 2: Marine areas that could be included if the sanctuary designation process looks beyond the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument Islands Unit. There is no commercial fishing in any of these areas, and the Friends of the Marianas Trench would advocate for the allowance of cultural and subsistence fishing, consistent with our 2008 vision statement.



## **Goals Description:**

**Management and Enforcement**, by which we mean not only management of the sanctuary once it is declared, but also the process of defining how the sanctuary would function once it is established.

The Friends of the Marianas Trench envision that the federal and local government officials will co-manage the sanctuary. We would like the Friends to be involved in this co-management; we are sure that there are innovative means for our members' support and contribution. For example, we hope that the initial Advisory Committee for the sanctuary includes members of the Friends and other conservation-minded people who actively supported the designation of the sanctuary. Additionally, critical to these efforts are the necessary resources to enforce any protections. With this regard, we request assistance with the necessary equipment, training and support to properly enforce the designated area. We envision having boats for enforcement and patrol. In order to better manage and enforce the protections of the monument, we suggest that all vessels entering the sanctuary area should be required to carry a VMS and AIS tracking system and adopt strict invasive species prevention measures.

We believe that a permitting system would be appropriate for limiting and managing the types of vessels entering the sanctuary. This would help with enforcement because vessels entering without a permit would be suspected of illegal activities, and authorities would be alerted to their presence with the use of VMS, AIS, and other technologies. Research vessels and cultural practitioners will appreciate this system as it will maintain the integrity of the resource. Historically the Islands Unit of the monument has been rarely visited, but there is evidence of the occasional illegal foreign fishing vessel entering the area. The permitting system should be based on Saipan, and support for local people to apply for a permit, especially those related to cultural activities, should be provided using federal resources.

**Culture and Tradition**, by which we mean the lifestyle, practices and beliefs of the Chamorro and Carolinian peoples that have been handed down from generation to generation. The Friends believe, first of all, that the Chamorro and Carolinian cultures and tradition must be treated with respect, and taken into full account in decisions that are made about the management and use of the sanctuary. We should take into consideration the precepts of our indigenous culture and tradition when deciding issues like, for example, sustenance fishing, canoe travel and other similar matters.

Our culture is also one of inclusion, and we hope to create a sanctuary advisory council that represents all people of the Northern Mariana Islands, beyond typical local government agency interest. In addition to the resource agencies, we believe that the Historic Preservation Office, Office of Indigenous Affairs, Office of Carolinian Affairs, and Office of Women's Affairs should have a seat at the table. Additionally, we would like to see participation from conservation groups, fishing clubs, student groups, teacher unions, indigenous organizations, and businesses.

**Conservation**, by which we mean the protection and preservation of the marine ecosystems and their interrelationship with land ecosystems and indigenous cultures; and their continued presence and existence in the future.

The proposed sanctuary contains some of the world's most unique habitats and unusual features, such as chemosynthetic and photosynthetic organisms living side-by-side, mud volcanoes, vent communities, and other natural wonders. One of these is volcanic coral reefs, which occur nowhere else in Micronesia. The coral reefs that exist there are flourishing and vibrant, and need protection to help guard our planet from the impacts of global warming and potentially act as a source of corals for other marine areas.

The Friends acknowledge that people of the CNMI and the world have historically relied on the oceans for food and other resources. We believe that the need for continued availability of our precious, limited marine resources does not conflict with conservation. We believe that creating the sanctuary will help increase the ocean's abundance by contributing to the survival and recovery of depleted marine resources and biodiversity.

**Education**, by which we mean both formal and informal education, for students as well as the public, for residents as well as the rest of the world, in all relevant media formats, produced both commercially and non-commercially.

The Friends believe that funding should be made available to enable oceanography to be taught in schools, at the college and through lectures and programs for the public, and to ensure that pertinent education materials will be readily available, that careers in the marine and geological science will be encouraged, that opportunities for field trips for students, teachers, the general public and tourist should be made available.

We envision educational visitors' centers, including a centrally-located facility funded under the auspices of the NOAA National Marine Sanctuaries Program that would be open to everyone that would contain displays of various sorts, offer education and outreach opportunities, and could have related items for sale. The island of Rota is particularly well-suited for an education facility. There is support from the local government and local elected leaders to manage and upkeep a facility for both local students and visitors.

The Friends believe that the visitors' center would bring benefits not only to the local economy by attracting tourists, but also to the people of the CNMI, as it would showcase information about marine geology in general, about the sanctuary in particular, and about the CNMI and its indigenous history and culture; It would present, in a variety of formats, the results of marine research done in the area and relevant research done elsewhere; it would regularly present programs open to the public on matters related to marine life in general as well as marine life specific to the area, thus allowing the people of the CNMI, tourists, and other visitors, to benefit from the establishment of the sanctuary.

We believe that there are opportunities to collaborate with other institutions, including the Naval Historical Society, Smithsonian, Underwater World of Guam, and National Park Service to provide the community with exhibits and materials on exploration, research, history, and science.

It is our dream that this sanctuary will inspire and contribute to the first indigenous students receiving their Ph.D. in marine biology, deep-sea geology, or other related sciences.

There are 10,000 public school students attending 20 schools on Saipan, Tinian, and Rota and 1,000 students enrolled at the Northern Marianas College. There are also about a dozen private schools. We envision all of these students having at least an annual interaction with the programs of the proposed sanctuary. In addition to students visiting sanctuary facilities, we envision sanctuary staff conducting outreach directly to the schools.

Visitor arrivals surpassed 500,000 in fiscal year 2016, and the number of tourists is expected to grow. Visitors come mainly from Korean, China, and Japan, but also Russia, Guam, and the mainland United States.

**Research and Exploration**, by which we mean the process of studying marine life, geology and other sciences, and of data generation, as well as the products of such activity generated by scientists, teachers, or students.

The Friends believe the researchers and scientists who base their work on the sanctuary and its environs should be required to obtain permission prior to undertaking research in the area, and should share the information they garner with the local community through presentations at the Visitors' Center, or in other forms and forums. They should make accommodations to take along local students and teachers on research trips, so that local students are encouraged to become scientist and researchers.

Researchers from Scripps Research Institute and Brigham Young University-Hawaii visit the Northern Mariana Islands each year and could collaborate with ONMS on research projects. Additionally, the Northern Marianas College has close ties with the University of Guam and University of Hawaii and there are a number of opportunities that could be explored, from classes taught locally on the sanctuary, to internships, and summer research projects for local students as well as visiting researchers.

NOAA Fisheries data shows that CNMI has the highest unique biomass in the US flag territories with endemism rivaling the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. The habitat diversity of the region combined with proximity to the Coral Triangle results in high levels of biodiversity and endemism. For example, the 2016 expedition 'Deepwater Exploration of the Marianas' by the NOAA Ship *Okeanos Explorer* found hundreds of new species. The possibilities for exploration and new discoveries are staggering.

**Economic Development**, by which we mean assistance in improving the economy toward enabling the CNMI to become self-sufficient. The CNMI, being small islands with limited assets, will always be dependent to some extent on outside forces and influences, but certainly more is needed and can be done to increase independence.

There are many great economic benefits that we anticipate from the sanctuary. We envision a surge in the media attention from your designation of the Marianas Trench National Marine Sanctuary, which will attract more visitors to the CNMI. The CNMI relies heavily on tourism as

its number one industry, and help to this sector of economy—whether from traditional or high-end visitors—will have a significant beneficial impact. The sanctuary will likely attract scientists and other researchers, who will contribute financially while visiting or living here. The operation of the visitors' center and administration of the sanctuary will create jobs, both directly and indirectly.

The contribution that a sanctuary would make to the CNMI economy is in stark contrast to the present situation, where the only economic benefit that presently occurs from this significant resource is limited to illegal foreign fishing activities. Obviously, this current economic activity has little benefit to the CNMI.

The Friends believe that the federal funding provided for the management of the sanctuary and the associated increase in visitor spending are much more suited to the CNMI's image in the world and more productive of tangible benefits when compared to fishing. The increased flow of traffic from Saipan, Tinian, and Rota to the sanctuary would also benefit the people of the CNMI in that it would make more feasible resettlement of the Northern Islands and provide transportation and communication with the "lower" Northern Islands.

More than 500,000 tourists visit the CNMI each year. The main source of arrivals come from Korea (43%), China (34%), and Japan (15%). The remaining visitors come from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Russia, Philippines, Guam, and the mainland United States. Even a small increase in visitor spending in regards to a sanctuary would have a significant impact on the CNMI economy.

There are numerous potential local partners in the private sector, federal and local government, and community that could support implementation of the goals of the sanctuary. In addition to the Friends of the Marianas Trench, the Mariana Islands Nature Alliance is very active in the community and has experience developing multimedia and social marketing materials to educate the community on the importance of marine protected areas. The Marianas Visitors Authority and the Hotel Association of the Northern Mariana Islands, who both supported designation of the monument would partner with ONMS to conduct outreach to visitors. Also, as previously noted, there are education institutions such as the Northern Marianas College and CNMI Public School System that can form a bridge to connect to local students.

### **Location Description:**

The United States Exclusive Economic Zone surrounding the Marianas Islands is vast enough to include an unprecedented cross section of the most volcanically active region on Earth—called the Ring of Fire. Its spectacular geology and rare ecology arise from the subduction of the world's largest tectonic plate, the Pacific Plate, under the smaller, slower moving Philippine Plate. This wild, dangerous, tantalizing region is so remote that many of its wonders are yet to be quantified. Recent expeditions in the area, both inside and outside of the existing Marianas Trench Marine National Monument have discovered new geological features and dozens of species and habitats previously unknown to science. The most important thing to remember when describing this area is how little we actually know about it. Only three humans have ever been to the bottom of the Marianas Trench, with only a handful of remote explorations. To put



this in context, more humans have walked the surface of the moon and more robots have crawled on Mars than have been to the deepest point in our ocean.

The proposed sanctuary could include the deepest ocean trench and the greatest diversity of seamount (underwater extinct volcano) and hydrothermal vent life yet discovered. Here, the oldest species on Earth thrive amidst monstrous active mud volcanoes, and strange new species push life beyond all extremes. The world's first discovery of hydrothermal vent fish was made in a boiling undersea lake of liquid sulfur on one of the seamounts that dot the proposed sanctuary area. The submerged caldera at Maug is one of only a handful of places on the planet where photosynthetic and chemosynthetic communities of life are known to exist together, fueling a microbial biodiversity hotspot of extraordinary complexity. This area provides a unique natural laboratory for studying ocean acidification and a potential coral refuge for climate change.

The US EEZ surrounding the Marianas Islands is home to endemic, migratory, iconic, and threatened ocean species that are vulnerable to exploitation and extraction. These waters also are backdrop to a voyaging tradition of indigenous Chamorro and Carolinian people who are only now reclaiming and experiencing a renaissance of this traditional practice.

There are several issues we advance in considering National Marine Sanctuary protection:

#### *Protection of highly endemic ecosystems*

The high geological diversity in the deepwater of the Mariana region lends itself to a large biological diversity. Prior to the 2016 *Okeanos Explorer* expedition, areas that were not volcanically-active had been poorly explored, many never, resulting in little known about the non-vent-endemic, deep-sea communities. As a result, there were hundreds of new species observed and many collected during the *Okeanos Explorer* expedition. These included several new species of jellyfish, nudibranch, slit-shell gastropod (an ancient type of snail), holothurians, carnivorous cladorhizid sponges of the most fascinating morphologies, an electric-blue tilefish and many more. There were also several new species of hexactinellid sponges including one that could not be identified past the taxonomic level of class! Additionally, there were many rarely-seen species and new records observed both within and outside of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument. This included the first records for the region of the family, Ateleopodidae (jellynose eels), a slit-shell gastropod (cf. *Bayerotrochus teramachii*) and an anemone-like cnidarian (*Relicanthus* sp.) with 8-foot long tentacles. Another highlight of the *Okeanos Explorer* expedition was the first-ever live sighting of a fish from the family Aphyonidae (ghostfish). It was observed while exploring a ridge feature at a depth of approximately 2500 meters, and was about 10 cm in length with transparent gelatinous skin, which lacked scales, and highly reduced eyes that lacked pigment. But even if an organism was not a new species, new record or rare, many were still extremely strange; from the numerous walking fish to the candelabra-shaped sponges and the hermit crabs with actinarians that replaced their shells.

The black-smoker vent communities in the Mariana Arc are some of the most spectacular in the deep sea, as they feature very high abundances of a high diversity of animals, many of which are vent endemic<sup>i</sup>. These include *Chorocaris* shrimp, *Gandalfus* crabs, actinarians, barnacles, *Bathymodiolus* mussels, *Paralvinella* tubeworms and many others<sup>ii</sup>. One of the most enigmatic animals observed at these vents is the deep-sea vent-endemic snail, *Alviniconcha hessleri*. Not

only does it have blue blood due to the respiratory pigment hemocyanin and gets its food symbiotically from bacteria that live in its gills, but it also has hair-like projections on its shell, the purpose of which is unknown<sup>iii,iv</sup>. During the 2016 *Okeanos Explorer* expedition, a new active vent field was visualized for the first time after discovery during an R/V *Falkor* expedition. This extraordinary site outside of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument at 3292 meters included a 30-m (or ten-story tall) black-smoker chimney. The chimney is amongst the hottest vents in world at 339°C and hosted large communities of chemosynthetic animals similar to other high-temperature vent communities observed by the submersibles *Shinkai* and *Alvin* at vent fields between 1,500 and 4,000 meters in this area.

#### *Protection from foreign and illegal fishing*

Currently, there is no longline fishing taking place in the CNMI or Guam. Small scale commercial and recreational boats are not active in waters above the Trench Unit or north of Pagan. Proposed increased protections can be put in place with almost no disruption to the commercial fishing industry, which has minimal presence in the area. There is no evidence that a marine protected area above the Trench Unit or expanded Islands Unit would reduce fish catches, as longlining efforts are distributed across the Pacific to target migratory species. NOAA data from the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument strongly supports this claim. Upon creation of that monument, fishing effort simply shifted to the 97% of the ocean still open to fishing.

Marine protected areas are most effective when they are large, remote, strongly protected, protected for a long time, and enforced. Expanding the monument's protection to include National Marine Sanctuary status would make it even more effective at safeguarding these waters from domestic or foreign commercial fishing exploitation.

Decades of scientific evidence point to solutions to better manage our ocean fisheries, and that message is clear: large, remote marine reserves work and prove to be beneficial, not a hardship, to fishermen. No negative impacts on US fisheries landings has resulted from previous designations of fully-protected marine reserves throughout Pacific States and Territories. The creation and expansion of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument as well as the creation of the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument have demonstrated no adverse effects to fisheries bottom line. Rather, these no-take zones serve as insurance policies for commercial fishing viability into the future.

#### *Protection from future seabed mining*

As the worldwide demand for metals increases, humans are seeking these resources in ever more remote places, such as the deep ocean. The water column and benthos within the existing Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, as well as their inhabitants, are still vulnerable to the severe effects of mining in neighboring waters. Within the EEZ of the CNMI, as well as just outside, there are two sources of metals that could be mined in the future: ferromanganese crusts and seafloor massive sulfides.

Given the close proximity of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument to areas that may be mined in the future, adverse ecological impacts are still possible. Deep-sea mining will be extremely destructive; the process involves the removal of the top mineral-rich layer of the

substrate along with all of the benthic animals that may be living on it. Sediment and rock particles will be suspended by machinery, forming sediment plumes that travel with currents in the water column and are then deposited on the benthos across wider areas, potentially within the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument.

After the processing of mined material on surface support vessels, tailings will likely be deposited at depth in the water column, again creating further large sediment plumes. If done in close proximity to the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, this could smother both animals in the water column, as well as on the seafloor. The mining machinery will also result in high levels of noise and light pollution in the deep ocean. Furthermore, the strategic location of the CNMI may result in some of the islands serving as bases for the mining operations, leading to a large increase in ship traffic within and near to the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, compounding the issue of noise pollution and possibly resulting in an increase in marine debris and the possibility of accidents. These impacts could impact fisheries, marine mammals, turtles, sharks and other pelagics in the water column. Because of the great expense involved in exploring the deep sea, industrial exploitation is primed to get there first. Without comprehensive protection for sites of exceptional biological diversity, we may never know the value of what we lost.

#### *Potential for exploration and research*

The deep sea is the last great unexplored wilderness. Every expedition yields new and surprising discoveries which often fundamentally challenge our understanding of life on Earth. Currently only about 3% of the ocean is strongly or fully protected. The Islands Unit of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument is the smallest of the world's large scale marine protected areas. At 42,000 square kilometers (16,000 square miles), it encompasses only 4% of the United States EEZ surrounding Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands. The Volcanic and Trench Units of the monument are not marine protected areas as they protect only the submerged lands in the deepest part of the ocean and none of the water or marine life swimming above them. Should the water column above the Trench Unit be included a national marine sanctuary, in addition to protecting species and ecosystems that are known, such as tuna, sharks, and whales, protection will also be extended to those species which are yet to be discovered. The Marianas Trench is one of the least studied areas in the world, and recent scientific expeditions have found staggering amounts of biodiversity previously unknown to science. The potential for discovery is astounding, and protecting this unique habitat now would protect these species for future study. It is estimated that ninety-one percent of all species in the ocean are unknown to science.

Globally, on both land and sea, scientists have identified barely 2 million species to date, but as many as 8.7 million are thought to exist, with as many as 2.2 million in the seas alone. Many of these discoveries are likely to be found in unprotected areas within the US EEZ around the Mariana Islands.

The opportunities for future research critical to our understanding of our oceans under climate change are also unparalleled. Within the crater of Maug, found in the Volcanic Unit of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, shallow hydrothermal venting acidifies the surrounding coral reef. The location is now used as a proxy for our future oceans (given rising

ocean temperatures due to global warming) to help scientists gain an understanding of the effects of ocean acidification on marine organisms.

### **Section III – Criteria Information**

#### ***Criterion 1***

Currently only about 3% of the ocean is strongly (all commercial activity prohibited, only light recreational and subsistence fishing allowed) or fully protected (no extractive activities allowed). The International Union for Conservation of Nature recommends protecting 30 percent of the ocean, based on a recent scientific re-evaluation of coverage targets for marine protected areas showing that protection of at least 30 percent of each marine habitat globally is necessary to achieve conservation goals and broader management targets. Leading scientist E.O. Wilson recommends as much as 50 percent.

The Islands Unit of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument is the smallest of the world's large-scale marine protected areas. At 42,000 square kilometers (16,000 square miles), it encompasses only 4% of the United States EEZ surrounding Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands. The Volcanic and Trench Units of the monument are not marine protected areas as they protect only the submerged lands in the deepest part of the ocean and none of the water or marine life swimming above them.

It is estimated that ninety-one percent of all species in the ocean are unknown to science. Globally, on both land and sea, scientists have identified barely 2 million species to date, but as many as 8.7 million are thought to exist, with as many as 2.2 million in the seas alone. Many of these discoveries are likely to be found in unprotected areas within the US EEZ around the Mariana Islands.

In the Islands Unit, unique reef habitats support marine biological communities dependent on basalt rock foundations, unlike those throughout the remainder of the Pacific. These reefs and waters are among the most biologically diverse in the Western Pacific and include the greatest diversity of seamount and hydrothermal vent life yet discovered. They also contain one of the most diverse collections of stony corals in the Western Pacific, including more than 300 species, higher than any other U.S. reef area.

The submerged caldera at Maug is one of only a few known places in the world where photosynthetic and chemosynthetic communities of life co-exist. The caldera is some 1.5 miles wide and 820 feet deep, an unusual depth for lagoons. The lava dome in the center of the crater rises to within 65 feet of the surface. Hydrothermal vents at about 475 feet in depth along the northeast side of the dome spew acidic water at scalding temperatures that quickly ascends to the sea surface near the coral reef. Thus, coral reefs and microbial mats are spared much of the impact of these plumes and are growing nearby, complete with thriving tropical fish communities. As ocean acidification increases across the Earth, this caldera offers scientists an opportunity to look into the future and ensure continuation of coral reef communities.

The coral reef ecosystems within the Islands Unit have high numbers of apex predators, larger than anywhere else along the Mariana Archipelago. One site has the highest density of sharks anywhere in the Pacific, even higher than those of the remote islands of the Central Pacific.

Similarly, these northern islands have the highest large fish biomass in the Mariana Islands. The rare bumphead parrotfish – the largest parrotfish species – thrives in these waters. The species has been depleted throughout much of its range and is included on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

Should the waters column above the Trench Unit be included a national marine sanctuary, in addition to protecting species and ecosystems that are known, such as tuna, sharks, and whales, protection will also be extended to those species that are yet to be discovered. The Marianas Trench is one of the least studied areas in the world, and recent scientific expeditions have found staggering amounts of biodiversity previously unknown to science. The potential for discovery is astounding, and protecting this unique habitat now would preserve these species for future study.

Protecting the waters above the Trench Unit, or expanding the Islands Unit out to the extent of the US EEZ will also build resilience against the effects of climate change, which the President has identified as a major threat to national security. Additionally, an enlarged protected area will serve as a refuge for species faced with warming, and increasingly acidic, seas. Furthermore, scientists have suggested that attempts to protect coral reefs from the impacts of climate change by solely reducing emissions may have little impact unless protected areas are also established.

A 2014 article published in *Nature* concluded that the effectiveness of marine protected areas (MPAs) yields the greatest conservation benefits when they are large, remote, strongly protected, protected for a long time, and enforced<sup>v</sup>. The authors found that the conservation benefits of marine reserves “increase exponentially” with the accumulation of these features. The most effective reserves had twice as many large fish, five times as much fish biomass, and fourteen times more shark biomass than fished areas. By comparison, those with just one or two of these essential characteristics were ecologically indistinguishable from fished areas.

Beginning the sanctuary designation process in the Northern Mariana Islands is timely based on recent science. A 2016 survey of global ocean priorities for marine biodiversity identified the Marianas and Samoan Islands as the top marine conservation priorities within the United States EEZ<sup>vi</sup>.

## ***Criterion 2***

The Marianas Trench Marine National Monument and US EEZ surrounding the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands are home to many cultural and historical sites. During the 2016 expedition of the *Okeanos Explorer*, a B-29 Superfortress bomber plane from World War II was located in the channel between Tinian and Saipan. These are likely quite common given the significance of the region during WWII. This site, and all as yet undiscovered, represent the final stages of the war, a historically significant time in American history, and are of interest to the Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, Saipan Historic Preservation Office, National Park Service, U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force, and several universities and foundations working to identify crash sites for the families of lost servicemen. (This site was also biologically

significant as it housed a large community of sessile and mobile animals, which included many commercially valuable fishes.)

Saipan has a World War II Maritime Heritage Trail<sup>vii</sup> consisting of Japanese and American aircraft and naval vessels wrecked in the Saipan Lagoon and in other near shore areas. These are unique archaeological sites that also are home to abundant marine life. Similar wrecks can be found around Tinian, and possibly other islands.

European vessels have frequented the Marianas for nearly 500 years. Magellan arrived in Guam in 1521 and one of the ships under his command, *Trinidad*, visited Maug in 1522. There are numerous cases of shipwrecks, such as the *Nuestra Senora de la Concepcion* which sank off the coast of Saipan in 1638. There are anchors inside the Maug Lagoon and outside the Saipan Lagoon of unknown origin that have been discovered by recreational divers. These anchors, and possibly others, could date back to the Spanish explorers, or possibly come from whaling vessels.

Indigenous Chamorros and Carolinians are a seafaring people descended from voyagers who crossed the ocean using the knowledge of the winds and the waves, and natural occurrences such as schools of fish or flocks of birds that appeared along ancient maritime highways. The people consider the ocean itself, and the many animals and fish that live there, a cultural resource in of itself. They view the ocean as something that connects them to other people and islands, and nearly all dream of one day venturing north to explore the Northern Islands.

There is a nascent movement to bring traditional voyaging and wayfinding back to the Northern Mariana Islands, however, and the islands of Asuncion, Maug, and Uracus, within the Islands Unit of the monument serve as beacons calling to sailors. Indigenous Chamorros and Carolinians have a strong bond to these traditionally owned islands and it is a lifelong dream of many to visit the islands, rounding Uracus, to have seen the entire Archipelago.

There is a strong cultural tradition still practiced in the Northern Mariana Islands today that has helped maintain the richness of the Northern Islands. Natural resources, particularly coconut crabs (*ayuyu*) and fruit bats (*fanihi*) can be utilized while visiting the islands, but these resources must be consumed before returning to the south. This tradition often times conflicts with local and federal laws, but these laws are used to punish those who violate the tradition when poachers bring these resources back to Saipan or Guam. Being able to utilize these resources is a privilege afforded community members who have braved a visit to the Northern Islands, but along with this privilege comes the responsibility to protect the resource and ensure that future generations can benefit from them.

### ***Criterion 3***

The Islands Unit of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument is one of the most isolated marine protected areas on the planet. The closest port is nearly 300 miles to the south on Saipan. Currently, there are no tour operators that cater to this area and visits must be undertaken on one's own. There are only a handful of visitors to the region each year, if that.



There is no history of commercial or recreational fishing in the Islands Unit, but there is evidence of subsistence fishing.

#### ***Criterion 4***

As stated in Criterion 3, access to the Islands Unit is limited. The resources, however, are extremely fragile, and conservation and management of the area would ensure that this natural heritage is passed down to future generations of indigenous Chamorros and Carolinians.

### **Section IV – Consideration Information**

The Northern Mariana Islands were recognized as far back as the 1990s as possible ONMS sites and appear on the first ONMS site evaluation list. Over the years, several areas, including the waters surrounding some of the Northern Islands, the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, and smaller areas near Saipan and Rota, have been proposed as possible ONMS sites. While the sanctuary program has yet to reach the shores of the Northern Mariana Islands, the biological and cultural diversity of the CNMI's marine environment has long been recognized.

#### ***Consideration 1***

Undoubtedly, the most well-known area of the Marianas Trench region is Challenger Deep, the deepest point in our world's oceans at 10,989 meters. The vast majority of deep-sea research (>200 meters) within the Marianas Trench has been focused on this one region. This has meant that most of the deepwaters of the US EEZ surrounding the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and Marianas Trench Marine National Monument have remained relatively unexplored, especially the water column and its inhabitants. Since 2003, there has been an increase in research activity in this area. NOAA sponsored nine expeditions to the CNMI region; eight of those were focused on volcanic activity and the most recent, the 'Deepwater Exploration of the Marianas' expedition by the NOAA ship *Okeanos Explorer*, collected baseline biological and geological information from a variety of deepwater habitats. There have also been expeditions undertaken by the Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology (JAMSTEC), Schmidt Ocean Institute (SOI) and the DeepSea Challenge expedition of James Cameron. These expeditions have contributed to improved scientific knowledge and provided a small window into the amazing and unique geology that abounds here, as well as the fascinating biology that accompanies it.

The US EEZ surrounding the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands is one of most geologically-diverse places on planet. Within this relatively small area, there are seamounts with and without ferromanganese crusts, hydrothermal vents, cold seeps, sedimented plains, active and extinct volcanoes, carbonate platforms and mountains, mud volcanoes, as well as the deepest trench on the planet. During a NOAA expedition in 2006, a number of volcanoes in the back-arc were confirmed to be hydrothermally active, many in ways never seen before and found nowhere else on the planet. A hydrothermally-active area is one where seawater percolates downward through oceanic crust becoming superheated and chemical-rich. It eventually becomes so hot and buoyant that it rises back to the seafloor surface. When this super-hot vent fluid meets the very cold water (2°C) of the deep sea, minerals that are carried in the fluid precipitate out of solution, forming spectacular vent chimneys that emanate clear, white or black fluid. The vent fluid is then

used by chemoautotrophic bacteria as a source of energy to produce organic material and fuel much of the food web at these sites. The process, called chemosynthesis, occurs in a similar way to which plants use sunlight via photosynthesis. Chemosynthetic bacteria are then grazed on by heterotrophs, which in turn are eaten by larger predators. Some of these bacteria even live inside vent fauna or grow on specialized appendages. Hydrothermal-vent communities are extremely important for understanding how animals live in extreme conditions, the origin of life on Earth, and connectivity between these ‘patchy’ habitats.

### ***Consideration 2***

There is a very strong desire for education programs regarding the Marianas Trench and the ocean in the Northern Mariana Islands. Government agencies, including the public school system, and businesses are interested in collaborating on educational opportunities for both local students and residents, as well as the nearly one half million visitors that come to the Northern Mariana Islands each year.

The CNMI Public School System, private schools, and the Northern Marianas College could be strong local collaborators in achieving the goals of the sanctuary program. Additionally, the University of Guam and other research institutions that frequently visit the Northern Marianas could collaborate on research and education programs.

Since 2003, there has been an increase in research activity in the Marianas. NOAA sponsored nine expeditions to the CNMI region; eight of those were focused on volcanic activity and the most recent, the ‘Deepwater Exploration of the Marianas’ expedition by the NOAA ship *Okeanos Explorer*, collected baseline biological and geological information from a variety of deepwater habitats. There have also been expeditions undertaken by the Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology (JAMSTEC), Schmidt Ocean Institute (SOI) and the DeepSea Challenge expedition of James Cameron. These expeditions have contributed to improved scientific knowledge and provided a small window into the amazing and unique geology that abounds here, as well as the fascinating biology that accompanies it.

### ***Consideration 3***

Climate change, deep sea mining, and fishing have been identified as the major threats to the proposed Marianas Trench National Marine Sanctuary.

#### ***Climate Change***

Large, strongly protected marine reserves have emerged as important policy solutions that carry the dual benefit of being both marine climate change mitigation, and adaptation strategies. By increasing ocean health, marine reserves are one of the most efficient means to protect Earth and its climate. Fully-intact marine ecosystems, such as those protected by marine reserves, are healthy and resilient, better able to withstand the impacts of climate change. On the other hand, damaged ecosystems are weak and susceptible to further destruction and disease.

Scientists have suggested that attempts to spare coral reefs from the impacts of climate change by solely reducing emissions have little impact unless protected areas are also established in lockstep with policies that guard essential fish communities, and thus protect healthy reef functioning. For example, in the large, fully-protected reserve in the Indian Ocean around the

Chagos Islands, healthy lagoon habitat was critical to coral reef resilience to a large-scale warming event, enabling these ecosystems to recover from this unanticipated environmental shock.

### *Deep Sea Mining*

As the worldwide demand for metals increases, humans are seeking these resources in ever more remote places, such as the deep ocean. Although deep-sea mining is prohibited within the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, the water column and benthos, as well as their inhabitants, are still vulnerable to the severe effects of mining in neighboring waters. Within the EEZ of the CNMI, as well as just outside, there are two sources of metals that could be mined in the future: ferromanganese crusts and seafloor massive sulfides.

East of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, both within and outside of the EEZ, there are many deep-sea flat-topped seamounts, known as guyots, covered in thick ferromanganese crusts. These crusts are potential sources of cobalt, copper, manganese, platinum and other metals. These guyots, located in the Prime Crust Zone, are extremely vulnerable to deep-sea mining, as they are among the oldest and thickest in the Pacific Ocean, and therefore potentially some of the most valuable on the planet. In international waters, just to the east of the CNMI, there have already been three exploratory licenses granted to Japan, Russia, and China.

West of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument within the US EEZ surrounding the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, there are numerous massive polymetallic-sulphide deposits at sites of hydrothermal venting, another potentially valuable metal resource. These deposits are known to have high concentrations of zinc, copper, cadmium, gold, silver and other metals. A number of both hydrothermal and ferromanganese-encrusted sites within the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument and US EEZ surrounding the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands were investigated by the NOAA Ship *Okeanos Explorer* in 2016, highlighting the high diversity of animals that live at these unique deep-sea habitats. The guyots appeared to host unique communities which are interesting from a management perspective, however only a small area of each was investigated.

### *Fishing*

Currently, there is no longline fishing taking place in the CNMI or Guam. Small scale commercial and recreational boats are not active in waters above the Trench Unit.

Ancient Chamorros and Carolinians heavily on the resources of the seas for their subsistence. They had a great variety of fishing equipment and many methods of catching fish. Some of the fishing methods are unique to the aborigines of the Mariana Islands. Juan Pobre de Zamora (1602), Spanish priest, described the Chamorros as “the most skilled fishermen ever to have been discovered.”

While the majority of the fishing was coastal, fishing for subsistence while traveling was a necessity. There were restrictions on catches and types of fishing allowed during certain times of year. Any excess catch would be shared with, not sold to, the village and/or salt cured. Different areas were off limits during different times of year and fishing was organized by a caste system with the lowest element forbidden to even touch the sea. Other people were allowed only in the

shallows, while yet others (those highest in the system) were granted access rights to the deep sea. Men fished the waters while women would collect sea life from the shallow reefs. Of those granted rights to fish, fishing areas were owned by clans or matrilineages.

Today, fishing is still very much a part of Chamorro and Carolinian cultures as with all Pacific island nations. There are fishing derbies and family outings. Fishing for the purpose of subsistence living is inter-mixed with a reliance on store bought canned and boxed foods. There are small-scale commercial fisheries focused on catching fish to sell to local restaurants, but they rarely venture to the monument waters. Most fish are caught and sold locally within a confined radius around the southern Mariana Islands. While a couple of attempts have been made at creating a local commercial fishery post WWII, these have not been successful.

During the 2016 expedition by the NOAA ship *Okeanos Explorer*, a number of commercially-viable fish species were seen inside and outside the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument. These included the pale snapper (*Etelis radiosus*), deepwater longtail red snapper (*E. coruscans*), deepwater red snapper (*E. carbunculus*), eightbar grouper (*Hyporthodus octofasciatus*), amberjack (*Seriola* sp.), dogtooth tuna (*Gymnosarda unicolor*), monchong or sickle pomfret (*Taractichthys steindachneri*), roughy (*Hoplostethus* sp.), oblique-banded snapper (*Pristipomoides zonatus*), ornate jobfish (*Pristipomoides argyrogrammicus*), goldflag jobfish (*Pristipomoides auricilla*), and golden grouper (*Saloptia powelli*). There were also a number of precious corals observed (including pink, red, black, gold and bamboo coral), although fewer than expected. Precious corals are extremely long lived (some species have been known to live over 2,000 years) and slow growing. Although the precious-coral fishery is listed as a managed fishery in Guam and the CNMI, no known harvesting in this region of the Pacific is known to occur.

#### ***Consideration 4***

There is strong support for marine protected areas in the Northern Mariana Islands, but limited resources to implement them, especially for the remote areas that have been proposed for inclusion in a sanctuary. The proposed national marine sanctuary would bring much needed resources to the islands for conservation and management of the area's resources.

However, despite capacity restraints, local government has expertise with research and enforcement staff with expertise in the region. A partnership between local resource agencies or research organizations and ONMS would help achieve the goals of the sanctuary program.

#### ***Consideration 5***

The existing management structure does not meet all of the needs of the people living in the Northern Mariana Islands. There is an opportunity for the Obama Administration to use the National Marine Sanctuaries process to create a sanctuary in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), building upon a cultural, scientific, and environmental legacy for future generations. The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (OMNS) is one of the few federal programs that has in their enabling legislation a mandate to conduct educational and research programs, as well as resource protection. OMNS has the history and experience to operate the visitor centers and volunteer programs that were discussed when the monument was established.

### ***Consideration 6***

There is widespread support by local and municipal government leaders for the designation of a national marine sanctuary in the Northern Mariana Islands and local government could help secure office space and provide staff time to help with the designation process.

The Okeanos Foundation for the Sea has expressed interest in helping to integrate traditional voyaging and wayfinding into the proposed sanctuary and have offered to provide a vessel that can be used for transport of people and cargo, as well as a platform for scientific research and cultural activities.

The Mariana Islands Nature Alliance is available to support outreach efforts in the Northern Mariana Islands. The organization supported the original designation and over the years has conducted social marketing campaigns on marine protected areas and sharks. They also have a staff of local rangers that conduct outreach in the community, and support enforcement efforts of the government by reporting and providing evidence for prosecuting environment laws.

### ***Consideration 7***

Governor Ralph Deleon Guerrero Torres and U.S. Delegate Gregorio Camacho “Kilili” Sablan wrote to President Barack Obama in September 2016 to ask him to direct the Secretary of Commerce to begin a sanctuary designation process in the Northern Marianas Islands. A public campaign was launched after the local and federal elections on November 8, 2016, and a number of island leaders have come on board to support the idea in a short amount of time, including every single elected official on the island of Rota, the mayor of Tinian, the mayor of the Northern Islands, and the Northern Mariana Islands Democratic Party. A petition was passed around on the islands of Saipan, Tinian, Rota, and Guam, and in under two weeks volunteers were able to gather more than 1,500 signatures from residents supporting the sanctuary process.

During the designation of the monument in 2009, the Friends of the Monument put together a very large coalition of supporters from business, government, and the community. This coalition would like to see the benefits of a marine national sanctuary come to the Northern Marianas, as they feel like they have been waiting 8 years and US Fish & Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries have yet to hire a single person on Saipan. The coalition believes that the sanctuary program would bring the types of programs that our community desires and would benefit from. These letters from 2008, and the 6,000 signatures from residents that asked for a monument are available upon request.

Supporters of the proposal to start the sanctuary process in the Northern Mariana Islands include:

- 1) Governor Ralph Deleon Guerrero
- 2) US Delegate Gregorio Camacho “Kilili” Sablan
- 3) 1,500 signatures from residents of Saipan, Tinian, Rota, and Guam
- 4) The Pew Charitable Trusts
- 5) Board members of the Friends of the Marianas Trench
  - a) Ignacio V. Cabrera
  - b) Agnes M. McPhetres
  - c) Chailang Palacios
  - d) Karl T. Reyes

- e) MarjaLee C. Taitano
- f) Laurie Peterka
- g) Jane Mack
- 6) Mayor Jerome K. Aldan, Northern Islands Mayor
- 7) Mayor Efraim M. Atalig, Rota Mayor
- 8) Mayor Joey P. San Nicholas, Tinian Mayor
- 9) Chairman Daniel O. Quitugua, Democratic Party of the Northern Marianas
- 10) Rota Municipal Council
  - a) Honorable George O. Hocog
  - b) Honorable Roman M. Calvo
  - c) Honorable T. Mereb
- 11) CNMI Legislature Rota Delegation
  - a) Senator Teresita A. Santos
  - b) Senator Paul A. Manglona
  - c) Senator Steve K. Mesngon
  - d) Representative Glenn L. Maratita
- 12) Mariana Islands Nature Alliance
- 13) Representative Trenton B. Conner, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Legislature
- 14) Vice Speaker Alejo M. Mendiola, Jr., former lawmaker
- 15) Okeanos Foundation for the Sea

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<sup>i</sup> Kojima S, Watanabe H (2015) Vent Fauna in the Mariana Trough. In: Subseafloor Biosphere Linked to Hydrothermal Systems. Springer, Japan, pp 313-323

<sup>ii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>iii</sup> Okutani T, Ohta S (1988) A new gastropod mollusk associated with hydrothermal vents in the Mariana Back-Arc Basin, Western Pacific Venus 47:1-9

<sup>iv</sup> Wittenberg JB, Stein JL (1995) Hemoglobin in the symbiont-harboring gill of the marine gastropod *Alviniconcha hessleri* Biological Bulletin 188:5-7

<sup>v</sup> Edgar, G. *et al.* (2014) Global conservation outcomes depend on marine protected areas with five key features. *Nature* 506, 216–220.

<sup>vi</sup> Jenkins and Van Houtan (2016) Global and regional priorities for marine biodiversity protection. *Biological Conservation*: 10.1016/j.biocon.2016.10.005

<sup>vii</sup> [www.pacificmaritimeheritagetrail.com](http://www.pacificmaritimeheritagetrail.com)





Friends of the Mariana Trench  
PO BOX 7048 SVRB  
Saipan, MP 96950  
USA

December 5, 2016

President Barack Obama  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20500

Subject: Marianas Trench National Marine Sanctuary Designation

Director President Obama,

On behalf of the Friends of the Marianas Trench, as well as a broad coalition of organizations and stakeholders, we hereby submit the attached proposal and letters to begin the sanctuary designation process in the Northern Mariana Islands.

We specifically request that you forego the usual sanctuary process and direct the Secretary of Commerce to begin a sanctuary designation process immediately in the Northern Mariana Islands, as outlined by the letter from Governor Ralph DeLeon Guerrero Torres and Delegate Gregorio Camacho "Kilili" Sablan.

The Marianas Trench is the "Grand Canyon" of the ocean, including the deepest known areas on earth. The active volcanoes and thermal vents found in the area support life under some of the harshest conditions on the planet. The waters of our archipelago's northern islands are also among the most biologically diverse in the Western Pacific. The greatest diversity of seamount and hydrothermal vent life yet discovered on the planet has been found in the Marianas Trench.

A National Marine Sanctuary designation would help advance conservation and protect the area from illegal fishing and overfishing, as well as oil, gas, and mineral exploration and extraction. At the same time, it would protect the natural heritage of the indigenous Chamorro and Carolinian people while helping to promote its continued economic contribution to the local, state, and regional economy. A Sanctuary would also enhance science and monitoring, expand ocean education and awareness, and provide a transparent and inclusive management process.

Enclosed with this letter you will find:

- A scientific paper outlining the justification to begin the sanctuary designation process.
- The nomination for the sanctuary outlining the criteria and considerations for beginning the sanctuary process.
- Letters of support and resolutions from a diverse range of federal and local elected officials, non-profits, and the general public.

- Signatures from residents of Saipan, Tinian, Rota, and Guam asking for a national marine sanctuary.
- We are continuing outreach to elected officials, other stakeholders and the general public, and expect additional letters of support.

Thank you for the opportunity to nominate the Marianas Trench, and possibly additional areas, as a National Marine Sanctuary. We look forward to working with you on this important opportunity.

Sincerely,



Ignacio V. Cabrera



Agnes M. McPetres



Chailang Palacios



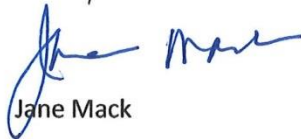
Karl T. Reyes



MarjaLee C. Taitano



Laurie Peterka



Jane Mack

cc: Governor Ralph DeLeon Guerrero Torres  
 Delegate Gregorio Camacho "Kilili" Sablan  
 Christy Goldfuss, Council on Environmental Quality  
 Kathryn Sullivan, NOAA  
 John Armor, NOAA



## COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

**Ralph DLG. Torres**  
Governor

**Victor B. Hocog**  
Lieutenant Governor

September 28, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

As elected leaders of the Northern Mariana Islands, representing a community whose history and present day culture are intimately tied to the ocean, we wish to voice our support and thank you for your recent decisions to create the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument and expand the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. Related to these conservation efforts, we write at this time to request that you consider enhancing another existing national marine treasure – the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument.

Specifically, we ask that you consider initiating the designation of the present Marianas Trench Marine National Monument as a National Marine Sanctuary consistent with the National Marine Sanctuaries Act (16 U.S.C. 1431 et seq.). Overlaying a Sanctuary Designation to include the marine areas of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument would advance the goals of both the National Marine Sanctuary Act and the original objectives of the Monument proclamation. It would also support the conservation values, practices and aspirations of the people of the Marianas and our nation.

The Marianas Trench Marine National Monument was established on January 6, 2009 by President George W. Bush through Proclamation 8335, under authority granted by the Antiquities Act (16 U.S.C. 431 et seq.). The Marianas Trench Marine National Monument protects the marine areas around the Mariana Islands of Uracas, Maug, and Asuncion (the "Islands Unit"). Our Monument also protects the volcanic areas of the Mariana Ridge (the "Volcanic Unit") and the Mariana Trench (the "Trench Unit"). The Marianas Trench Marine National Monument contains a total area of approximately 95,216 square miles.

Proclamation 8335 gave management responsibilities for the Monument to the Secretaries of Interior and Commerce. The Secretaries were also directed to prepare management plans and promulgate implementing regulations by January 6, 2011 to provide for scientific exploration and research, public education and outreach, and sustainable fisheries, especially sustenance, recreational, and traditional indigenous fishing. The government of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands was to be treated as a cooperating agency in the development and implementation of any management plans and regulations.

However, in the eight years since the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument was created, our endeavor to realize a fully functioning national marine protected area in the Marianas has proven difficult and progress has been slow. For example, the management plan for the Monument from the Department of the Interior has been delayed repeatedly -- and to date, has not been put forward for public review. A visitor center and sustained public outreach programs have yet to find funding or materialize.

The people we represent remain hopeful for a well-managed national marine protected area with programs that support conservation, research and education and complement our cultural traditions. We believe that the designation of a National Marine Sanctuary in the Marianas will bring us closer to realizing this vision.

Adding the marine areas of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument to the National Marine Sanctuary System would improve the management, scientific knowledge and public appreciation of ocean resources that are of exceptional national and global significance. From the sea floor to the surface, the marine areas of our Monument encompass biological, chemical, and geological marvels -- and provide critical habitat to an astonishing diversity of deep-sea life, corals, fish, whales, turtles, and seabirds. These are places of special conservation, recreational, ecological, historical, cultural, scientific, educational, and aesthetic value -- exactly the types of areas that Congress intended to protect in passing the National Marine Sanctuaries Act.

Effective management of the living resources and unique scientific objects contained in the Monument requires the comprehensive and coordinated approach afforded by the National Marine Sanctuary program. Greater emphasis on public education and scientific research, both key elements of the Sanctuary program, would further improve and enrich the management of these exceptional marine ecosystems.

We offer several recommendations for your consideration of this proposal:

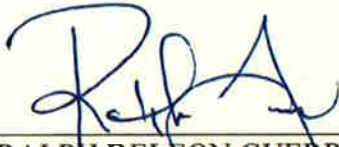
- 1) Sanctuary management offices should be based in the Northern Mariana Islands and staffed by qualified Commonwealth residents with funding from the federal government;
- 2) The Marianas Trench Marine National Monument should continue to exist with a Marine Sanctuary overlay;
- 3) Sanctuary overlay designation should not diminish or undermine existing monument regulations;

- 4) Sanctuary management plans should include and highlight research, public education and outreach, enforcement, and visitor center elements, particularly on the island of Rota;
- 5) A Sanctuary Advisory Council should be established that includes but is not limited to Commonwealth government agencies, federal agencies, Marianas Trench Marine National Monument management, Commonwealth residents, fishermen, and non-governmental organizations;
- 6) Exemptions for cultural practices should be included in a Marine Sanctuary designation, similar to existing monument regulations.

The special biological communities, ecological services and natural wonders of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument would be better preserved for future generations if they were made part of the National Marine Sanctuary System. We stand ready to assist in the effort to bring to fruition a fully-functioning national marine protected area in the Mariana Islands.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal.

Sincerely,

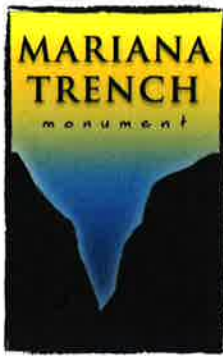


RALPH DELEON GUERRERO TORRES  
Governor, Northern Mariana Islands



GREGORIO KILILI CAMACHO SABLAN  
Member of Congress

cc: Ms. Penny Pritzker, Secretary of Commerce  
Ms. Sally Jewell, Secretary of the Interior  
Ms. Christy Goldfuss, Managing Director, Council on Environmental Quality



Friends of the Mariana Trench  
PO BOX 7048 SVRB  
Saipan, MP 96950  
USA

November 1, 2016

President Barack Obama  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20050

Dear President Obama,

We are the Friends of the Mariana Trench, an organization formed in 2008 to express the voice of the local community and consists of a cross-section of indigenous and resident people of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) who are dedicated to the conservation, preservation and protection of marine flora, fauna and geological features of the oceans; and the proper management of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument.

We write to request that you begin the process of Sanctuary designation in the Northern Mariana Islands using Section 304 of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, in an area that includes, but is not limited to, the area of the Mariana Trench Marine National Monument. Governor Ralph DeLeon Torres and Delegate Gregorio Camacho "Kilili" Sablan recently wrote to you asking the same, and we join our voice to theirs.

Our request specifically asks that:

- Sanctuary management offices should be based in the Northern Mariana Islands and be staffed by qualified local people with funding from the federal government;
- Sanctuary overlay designation should not lessen any Mariana Trench Marine National Monument regulations;
- Sanctuary management plans should include and highlight research, education, enforcement, and visitors center elements, particularly on the island of Rota;
- Establish a sanctuary advisory council to include but not be limited to CNMI local government, federal agencies, Mariana Trench Monument management, as well as local citizens, fishermen, and NGO groups;
- The Mariana Trench Marine National Monument should continue to exist with a sanctuary overlay;
- Include exemptions for cultural practices, similar to existing monument regulations.



The first eight years of the monument have seen benefits. There has been an increase in interest in the undiscovered wonders of our part of the world as both private and government funding have brought scientific expeditions to our shores. The highest profile exploration came several years ago when James Cameron successfully became only the third person in history to reach the abyss of the Mariana Trench, the deepest point in the global ocean. But there has also been some disappointment with the pace of the benefits accruing to our islands.

The management plan for the monument from the Department of Interior has been delayed repeatedly; and despite progress has not been put forward for public review. We bring attention to this not as a criticism, but to explain that there is much frustration coming from the American citizens living in the Commonwealth who hope to see benefits of a fully functioning marine protected area. Our people have aspirations involving the monument related to our cultural identity, protection of endangered species, funding of conservation programs for research and education, increased enforcement capacity, and promotion of our islands as a unique tourist destination with clean, healthy oceans. The people of the Commonwealth hope to see the full range of benefits of a large scale marine protected area in the Northern Mariana Islands realized. We look forward to seeing the draft management plan sometime during the next Administration, but understand that further delays are expected during the comment period.

The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands has made conservation a priority ever since we joined the American family in 1976. Article I Section 9 of the CNMI Constitution guarantees all of our people the right to a clean and healthful public environment in all areas, including the land, air, and water. Our Constitution furthermore identifies the islands of Maug, Uracas, Asuncion, and Guguan as uninhabited places to be used only for the preservation and protection of natural resources. The CNMI legislature has also designated the island of Sarigan as uninhabited and created marine protected areas on Saipan, Tinian, and Rota.

Since 2006, the Northern Mariana Islands have committed to the Micronesia Challenge, joining our neighbors in Guam, Federated States of Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands to pledge to effectively conserve at least 30% of near shore resources and 20% of terrestrial resources by 2020.

We still hope for expanded protections for the waters surrounding the Mariana Trench and the Mariana Islands. When the monument was created, the waters above the Mariana Trench Marine National Monument Trench Unit were not protected and the Islands Unit was one tenth the size we had proposed. This is a major shortcoming of the monument, as the effectiveness of reserves has been shown to increase with size. We believe that starting a sanctuary process will allow our people to take a look at what areas of our ocean are deserving of enhanced protection.

The threat of climate change makes this expansion a priority for the people of the CNMI. Expanding protections will build resilience against the effects of climate change and serve as a refuge for species faced with warming and increasingly acidic seas. Fully-intact marine ecosystems, such as those protected by marine reserves, are healthy and resilient, better able to withstand the impacts of climate change.

The amount of carbon pollution in the atmosphere is higher today than at any time in the last 400,000 years, while the global concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere surpassed 400 parts per million in 2013. The ocean is key to fighting climate change. Estimates vary, but the ocean absorbs

between 26% to half of all carbon dioxide released in the atmosphere. The ocean has significantly reduced, and mitigated, the impacts of increased concentrations of atmospheric carbon dioxide.

Along with the expansion of the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument, Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa, and nearly 4 million acres of Western Land you have protected using the Antiquities Act, by the end of your presidency, you will have protected more of the Earth's surface than any person before you and it is unlikely any future leaders will surpass you for a long time to come.

You still have a few months left in office, however, and we ask you as members of our small island community, and join our governor and non-voting delegate in inviting you to finish the job by beginning a sanctuary process in the Northern Mariana Islands. We further request that you direct your Council on Environmental Quality to meet with us and representatives of our duly elected officials to discuss this issue.

Sincerely,



Ignacio V. Cabrera



Agnes M. McPetres



Chailang Palacios



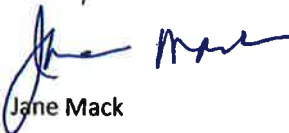
Karl T. Reyes



Marjalee C. Taitano



Laurie Peterka



Jane Mack

cc: Governor Ralph Deleon Guerrero Torres  
Delegate Gregorio Camacho "Kilili" Sablan  
Christy Goldfuss, Council on Environmental Quality  
Kathryn Sullivan, NOAA  
John Armor, NOAA



**COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS**

**Northern Islands Mayor's Office**

Caller Box 10007, Capitol Hill

Ascencion Ct. Bldg. #1345

Saipan, MP 96950

Telephone: 664-6466, 68-71 / Facsimile: 664-6467



November 28, 2016

NIMO17-048

President Barack Obama  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20050

Dear President Obama,

I write to request that you begin the process of Sanctuary designation in the Northern Mariana Islands using Section 304 of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, in an area that includes, but is not limited to, the area of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument. Governor Ralph Deleon Torres and Delegate Gregorio Camacho "Kilili" Sablan recently wrote to you asking the same, and we join our voice with theirs.

Our people are united in seeing the full range of benefits of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument accrue to these islands. I am aware that the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries provides research and monitoring, education and outreach, community engagement, a sanctuary advisory council, and the development of visitors' and educational centers.

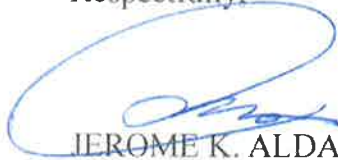
In unity with the letter from our governor and delegate, our request specifically asks that:

- Sanctuary management offices should be based in the Northern Mariana Islands and be staffed by qualified local people with funding from the federal government;
- Sanctuary overlay designation should not lessen any Marianas Trench Marine National Monument regulations;
- Sanctuary management plans should include and highlight research, education, enforcement, and visitors center elements, particularly on the island of Rota;
- Establish a sanctuary advisory council to include but not be limited to CNMI local government, federal agencies, Marianas Trench Monument management, as well as local citizens, fishermen, and NGO groups;

- The Marianas Trench Marine National Monument should continue to exist with a sanctuary overlay;
- Include exemptions for cultural practices, similar to existing monument regulations.

Thank you for your consideration and continued support. I look forward to your response.

Respectfully,



JEROME K. ALDAN

Mayor, Northern Islands aka Gani Islands  
In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Senatorial District of the CNMI  
CNMI's Last Northern Frontier

cc: File



COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

**OFFICE OF THE MAYOR**  
**THE HONORABLE EFRAIM M. ATALIG**  
Mayor of the Municipality of Rota



Mailing Address: Post Office Box 537 Rota, MP 96951  
Phone: 670.532.9451/9452 \* Fax No.: 670.532.9454 \* Email: mayorefraimatalig@gmail.com

President Barack Obama  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20050

Dear President Obama,

I write to kindly request that you begin the process of Sanctuary designation in the Northern Mariana Islands using Section 304 of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, in an area that includes, but is not limited to, the area of the Mariana Trench Marine National Monument. Governor Ralph Deleon Torres and Delegate Gregorio Camacho "Kilili" Sablan recently wrote to you asking the same, and I join my voice to theirs.

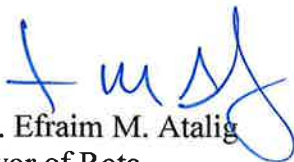
Our people are united in seeing the full range of benefits of the Mariana Trench Marine National Monument accrue to these islands. We are aware that the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries provides research and monitoring, education and outreach, community engagement, a sanctuary advisory council, and the development of visitors' and educational centers.

In unity with the letter from our governor and delegate, my request specifically asks that:

- Sanctuary management offices should be based in the Northern Mariana Islands and be staffed by qualified local people with funding from the federal government;
- Sanctuary overlay designation should not lessen any Mariana Trench Marine National Monument regulations;
- Sanctuary management plans should include and highlight research, education, enforcement, and visitors center elements, particularly on the island of Rota;
- Establish a sanctuary advisory council to include but not be limited to CNMI local government, federal agencies, Mariana Trench Monument management, as well as local citizens, fishermen, and NGO groups;
- The Mariana Trench Marine National Monument should continue to exist with a sanctuary overlay;
- Include exemptions for cultural practices, similar to existing monument regulations.

Thank you for your gracious consideration and I look forward to a response.

Sincerely,



Hon. Efraim M. Atalig  
Mayor of Rota



**Office of the Mayor**  
*Municipality of Tinian and Aguiguan*

**Joey P. San Nicolas**  
*Mayor*

President Barack Obama  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20050

Dear President Obama,

I write to request that you begin the process of Sanctuary designation in the Northern Mariana Islands using Section 304 of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, in an area that includes, but is not limited to, the area of the Mariana Trench Marine National Monument. Governor Ralph DeLeon Guerrero Torres and Delegate Gregorio Camacho "Kilili" Sablan recently wrote to you asking the same, and I join my voice to theirs.

Our people are united in seeing the full range of benefits of the Mariana Trench Marine National Monument accrue to these islands. We are aware that the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries provides research and monitoring, education and outreach, community engagement, a sanctuary advisory council, and the development of visitors' and education centers.

In unity with the letter from our governor and delegate, my request specifically asks that:

- Sanctuary management offices should be based in the Northern Mariana Islands and be staffed by qualified local people with funding for the federal government;
- Sanctuary overlay designation should not lessen any Mariana Trench Marine National Monument regulations;
- Sanctuary management plans should include and highlight research, education, enforcement, and visitors center elements, particularly on the island of Rota.
- Establish a sanctuary advisory council to include but not be limited to CNMI local government, federal agencies, Mariana Trench Monument management, as well as local citizens, fishermen, and NGO groups;
- The Mariana Trench Marine National Monument should continue to exist with a sanctuary overlay;
- Include exemptions for cultural practices, similar to existing monument regulations.

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to a response.

Sincerely,



Joey P. San Nicolas





## DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF THE NORTHERN MARIANAS

*The People's Party: Rebuilding the Commonwealth*

*November 24, 2016*

*The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20050*

*Dear President Obama:*

*Allow me to preface this letter by expressing our collective reactions to the just concluded Presidential and local election outcomes. As your fellow democrats in this part of the Pacific, we, here in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, were greatly disappointed and divested by the outcomes of the 2016 elections. However, no matter what our opinions regarding the election results, our citizens have expressed their will and as Democrats, we respect their decisions and honor their intent.*

*Honorable President, in 2009 then President George Bush through the authority of the Antiquities Act of 1906 signed Presidential Proclamation 8335 establishing the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument (MTMNM). This proclamation places more than 96 thousand square miles of submerged lands and water in the Marianas Archipelago.*

*The proclamation assigned management responsibility of the MTMNM to the Secretary of the Interior in consultation with the Secretary of Commerce. There were other policies consideration established for purposes of carrying out the mandates of Proclamation Order 8335.*

*Honorable President, the 10 year anniversary of the MTMNM establishment is fast approaching and the people of the Commonwealth have yet to see significant development, notwithstanding scientific and marine protection, arising out of this unilateral presidential decision. After all, economic benefits were one of the primary arguments made during the public discussions and group presentations by advisers of the President back in 2009, and our people reluctantly acquiesced.*

*I am writing this letter on behalf of your fellow democrats respectfully pleading for your intervention to begin a serious process of Sanctuary designation through Section 304 of the National Marine Sanctuary Act (NMSA). This designation would increase and enhance the economic viability*



of the MTMNM, especially from its special scientific, ecological, historical, cultural, recreational, and educational and marine conservation significance.

Honorable President, I join our local leaders who have already expressed their profound interest in advancing our desire to realize a functional, well administered and adequately funded MTMNM for the benefits of our citizens and future generations.

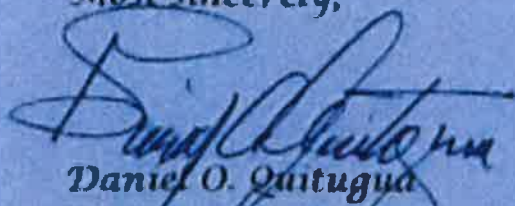
I respectfully and specifically request that the:

- Marianas Trench Marine National Monument continues to exist with a sanctuary designation status;
- Our traditional practices and cultural affinity to the ocean be respected and exempted from current and future monument regulations and policies consideration;
- Establish Visitors Center on the island of Rota together with a practical Marine Sanctuary protection management plans promoting educational research and scientific studies;
- Establish Sanctuary management offices in the Northern Marianas funded by the Federal government and staff by well-trained local US workforce;
- Sanctuary Advisory Council SAC must be established and member compositions must include both local and federal government representatives. We also recommend membership from representatives of fishermen, Northern Marianas Decent Corporation NMDC and marine resources advocates;

Honorable President, it is our fervent hope that you include this designation in one of your memorable legacies, a legacy that would have far reaching fundamental significance for generations to come. Before you leave office, your fellow democrats in this part of the world, wishes to be part of your extraordinary presidential history.

Please keep us inform of any development on this matter.

Most sincerely,



Daniel O. Quitugua  
Chairman  
Democratic Party of the  
Northern Marianas Inc.



# MARIANAS TRENCH SANCTUARY RESOLUTION



URGING THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES TO INITIATE  
A MARINE SANCTUARY DESIGNATION PROCESS THAT WILL  
STRENGTHEN PROTECTIONS FOR THE  
MARIANAS TRENCH MARINE NATIONAL MONUMENT.

WHEREAS, **The Marianas Trench Marine National Monument** located in the Mariana Archipelago is a United States National Monument created by President George W. Bush by presidential proclamation no. 8335 on January 6, 2009; and

WHEREAS, the Monument provides permanent protection for approximately 95,216 square miles of submerged lands, waters, and deep sea in the Pacific Ocean consisting of three units: the Islands Unit which protects the seafloor and waters around the three northernmost Mariana islands, Farallon de Pajaros or Uracas, Maug, and Asuncion; the Volcanic Unit, which protects the seafloor surrounding 21 volcanic sites of exceptional scientific and conservation value; and the Trench Unit, which protects the seafloor from the northern extent of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Exclusive Economic Zone to the southern extent of the Guam Exclusive Economic Zone; and

WHEREAS, a peer reviewed study published in 2016 has found the Mariana waters have been scientifically determined to be the single greatest marine priority for conservation in the US waters; and

WHEREAS, the threat of climate change makes protection of the Monument a priority for the people of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands; and

WHEREAS, generations of Chamorros and Carolinians have understood the need for wilderness areas in preserving the indigenous identity of the island community and the Monument's protection would benefit Northern Mariana residents who rely upon an intact and preserved marine ecosystem for cultural uses, such as ocean voyaging; and


WHEREAS, the President of the United States has been asked to initiate a marine sanctuary designation by **Governor Ralph Deleon Torres and Delegate Gregorio Camacho "Kilili" Sablan**; and

WHEREAS, the existing management structure of the Mariana Trench Marine National Monument does not prioritize educational programs and a visitors center, and that a management plan is five years delayed; and,

WHEREAS, there is abundant scientific and cultural justification for conservation benefits derived by protection of the Monument; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE OFFICE OF THE MAYOR OF ROTA AND BY THE 15<sup>TH</sup> ROTA MUNICIPAL COUNCIL that the President of the United States is urged to approve a request to initiate the process of Sanctuary designation in the Northern Mariana Islands using Section 304 of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, in an area that includes, but is not limited to, the area of the Mariana Trench Marine National Monument; and

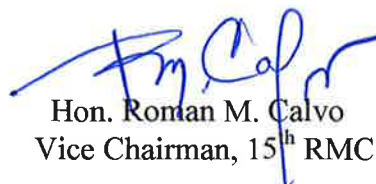
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this Resolution be transmitted to the President of the United States, Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Congressional Delegation, the Governor.



Hon. Efraim M. Atalig  
Mayor of Rota



Hon. George O. Hocog  
Chairman, 15<sup>th</sup> RMC



Hon. Roman M. Calvo  
Vice Chairman, 15<sup>th</sup> RMC



Hon. Ivan T. Mereb  
Secretary, 15<sup>th</sup> RMC





**ROTA LEGISLATIVE DELEGATION**  
**First Senatorial District**  
**Nineteenth Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature**

**FOURTH REGULAR SESSION, 2016**

**ROTA LEGISLATIVE DELEGATION**  
**COMM. RESOLUTION NO. 19-10**

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***A ROTA LEGISLATIVE DELEGATION***  
***COMMEMORATIVE RESOLUTION***

Urging the President of the United States to initiate a Marine Sanctuary designation process that will strengthen protections for the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument.

1           **WHEREAS**, the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument (Monument) located in  
2 the Mariana Archipelago is a United States National Monument created by President George  
3 W. Bush through Presidential Proclamation No. 8335 on January 6, 2009; and

4           **WHEREAS**, the Monument provides permanent protection for approximately 95,216  
5 square miles of submerged lands, waters, and deep sea in the Pacific Ocean consisting of three  
6 units: the Islands Unit which protects the seafloor and waters around the three northernmost  
7 Mariana islands, Farallon de Pajaros or Uracas, Maug, and Asuncion; the Volcanic Unit, which  
8 protects the seafloor surrounding 21 volcanic sites of exceptional scientific and conservation  
9 value; and the Trench Unit, which protects the seafloor from the northern extent of the  
10 Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Exclusive Economic Zone to the southern extent of the  
11 Guam Exclusive Economic Zone; and

12           **WHEREAS**, a peer reviewed study published in 2016 has found the Mariana waters  
13 have been scientifically determined to be the single greatest marine priority for conservation in  
14 the U.S. waters; and

15           **WHEREAS**, the threat of climate change makes protection of the Monument a priority  
16 for the people of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands; and

17           **WHEREAS**, generations of Chamorros and Carolinians have understood the need for  
18 wilderness areas in preserving the indigenous identity of the island community; and

**Rota Legislative Delegation Commemorative Resolution No. 19-10**

---

1           **WHEREAS**, the Monument's protection would benefit Northern Mariana residents  
2 who rely upon an intact and preserved marine ecosystem for cultural uses, such as ocean  
3 voyaging; and

4           **WHEREAS**, there is abundant scientific and cultural justification for conservation  
5 benefits derived by the protection of the Monument; and

6           **WHEREAS**, overlaying a sanctuary designation to include marine areas of the  
7 Marianas Trench Marine National Monument would ultimately advance the goals of both the  
8 National Marine Sanctuaries Act and the original objectives of the Monument proclamation;  
9 and

10          **WHEREAS**, the President of the United States has been asked to initiate a marine  
11 sanctuary designation by Governor Ralph Deleon Torres and Delegate Gregorio Camacho  
12 “Kilili” Sablan; and

13          **WHEREAS**, the existing management structure of the Mariana Trench Marine  
14 National Monument does not prioritize educational programs and a visitors center, and that a  
15 management plan is five years delayed; and

16          **WHEREAS**, the Rota Legislative Delegation respectfully requests that sanctuary  
17 management plans should include and highlight research, education, enforcement and visitors  
18 center elements, particularly on the island of Rota;

19          **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Rota Legislative Delegation  
20 hereby urges the President of the United States to initiate a Marine Sanctuary designation  
21 process that will strengthen protections for the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument;  
22 and

23          **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Chairperson of the Rota Legislative  
24 Delegation shall certify and the Secretary of the Rota Legislative Delegation shall attest to the  
25 adoption of this resolution, and the Delegation Clerk shall thereafter transmit a certified copy  
26 to the President of the United States; the Administrator of the National Oceanic and  
27 Atmospheric Administration; to the Director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service; to  
28 the Honorable Ralph DLG. Torres, Governor, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana  
29 Islands; to the Honorable Gregorio “Kilili” Sablan; the Honorable Efraim M. Atalig, Mayor of  
30 Rota; and the Honorable George O. Hocog, Chairman, 15<sup>th</sup> Rota Municipal Council.

**Rota Legislative Delegation Commemorative Resolution No. 19-10**

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Prefiled: 11/23/2016

Date: 11/23/2016

Introduced by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
/s/ Senator Teresita A. Santos

\_\_\_\_\_  
/s/ Senator Paul A. Manglona

\_\_\_\_\_  
/s/ Senator Steve K. Mesngon

\_\_\_\_\_  
/s/ Representative Glenn L. Maratita



P.O. Box 506645, Saipan, MP 96950  
670.233.7333  
[mina@minapacific.org](mailto:mina@minapacific.org)  
[www.minapacific.org](http://www.minapacific.org)

*Working to sustain the natural environment to ensure the islands' way of life*

November 28, 2016

President Barack Obama  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20050

Dear President Obama,

We write to request that you begin the process of Sanctuary designation in the Northern Mariana Islands using Section 304 of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, in an area that includes, but is not limited to, the area of the Mariana Trench Marine National Monument. Governor Ralph Deleon Torres and Delegate Gregorio Camacho "Kilili" Sablan recently wrote to you asking the same, and we join our voice to theirs.

Our people are united in seeing the full range of benefits of the Mariana Trench Marine National Monument accrue to these islands. We are aware that the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries provides research and monitoring, education and outreach, community engagement, a sanctuary advisory council, and the development of visitors' and educational centers.

In unity with the letter from our governor and delegate, our request specifically asks that:

- Sanctuary management offices should be based in the Northern Mariana Islands and be staffed by qualified local people with funding from the federal government;
- Sanctuary overlay designation should not lessen any Mariana Trench Marine National Monument regulations;
- Sanctuary management plans should include and highlight research, education, enforcement, and visitors center elements, particularly on the island of Rota;
- Establish a sanctuary advisory council to include but not be limited to CNMI local government, federal agencies, Mariana Trench Monument management, as well as local citizens, fishermen, and NGO groups;
- The Mariana Trench Marine National Monument should continue to exist with a sanctuary overlay;
- Include exemptions for cultural practices, similar to existing monument regulations.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to a response.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Furey  
Interim Executive Director





**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**  
**NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE**  
**Office of National Marine Sanctuaries**  
1305 East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

12/5/2016

## **MEMO FOR THE RECORD**

Please note that in addition to the support letters included in this document NOAA also received a petition with 102 pages of signatures. The petition text is below. Each page had the capacity for 20 signatures, 76 pages were fully completed and 26 pages were partial completed with signatures.

Petition Text:

### **OUR FUTURE IS NOW!**

We, the undersigned, in support of Governor Ralph Deleon Guerrero Torres and Delegate Gregorio Camacho “Kilili” Sablan, respectfully request that you initiate the designation of a National Marine Sanctuary in the Northern Mariana Islands consistent with the National Marine Sanctuaries Act. A National Marine Sanctuary would advance the goals of both the National Marine Sanctuaries Act and the original objectives of the Mariana Trench Marine National Monument proclamation. It would also support the conservation values, practices and aspirations of the people of the Marianas and our nation.

