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**OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
AMERICAN SAMOA GOVERNMENT**

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March 30, 2023

President Joe. R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20500

Subject: Proposed Designation of Marine Sanctuary for the Pacific Remote Islands

Dear Mr. President:

Please hear and consider American Samoa's strong objection to the designation of a Marine Sanctuary around the Pacific Remote Island Areas (PRIA). This follows my letter of June 15, 2022 urging you to consider the devastating impact this designation could have on our small island home. The concerns expressed in that letter have not changed. Our community is staunchly opposed to the expansion of Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument (PRIMNM), as proposed by the Pacific Remote Islands Coalition (Appendix 1). The restrictions on commercial fishing that will result from this designation will cripple the single largest private industry in our economy. I implore you to please take into account the serious cultural and financial impacts that this proposed action will have on the people of American Samoa.

As the Governor of a small island territory, I am more than aware of the effects of climate change and the need for preservation of natural resources. The people of American Samoa experience first-hand the results of environmental degradation. Unfortunately, this designation, however well-intentioned, is not in the best interest of Pacific Islanders. The creation of a marine sanctuary in the PRIA will be yet another devastating nail in the coffin for the tuna industry that supports our small, fragile economy. The PRIA and the high seas have been important traditional fishing grounds for American Samoa-based U.S. flagged purse seine vessels that supply approximately 70% of the tuna needed to sustain our local cannery. Due to the creation of the Marine National Monument by President Bush in 2009 and expansion by President Obama in 2014 and 2016, more than 50% of the U.S. EEZ's in the Pacific are closed to commercial fishing which includes the American Samoa-based U.S. flagged tuna vessels.

Losing the tuna industry here in American Samoa would mean more than just the loss of almost 5000 jobs. It would also result in a 40% increase in shipping and freight costs and a dramatic increase in electricity costs for residents. Without access to these traditional fishing grounds, our tuna industry and entire economy will be annihilated.

The Pacific region has already done more than its share to achieve the goals of your administration's 30x30 Initiative. We, the Pacific territories and communities, should not have to

bear the burden of these Executive Orders. That burden is a very heavy one for the people of American Samoa due to our dependence on fishing access of our fleets in these waters. If the attempt in this designation was to better protect the communities of Pacific Islanders, I ask that you please consult with us before closing access to our waters. I ask that you please consider the welfare of the U.S. Nationals who rely on and whose ancestors relied on fishing to sustain the local economy. And I ask that you not further destroy the single industry that keeps our economy afloat.

Before announcing the intent to designate this marine sanctuary, closing access to nearly 777,000 miles of Pacific Ocean, not a single representative from your administration or the federal government contacted my office or a representative from American Samoa. American Samoa is repeatedly left out of the conversation of what is best for our communities. We are disappointed that actions that could cripple the economy of a U.S. territory would be taken without the consultation of its people. The federal government continues to make policies that have negative impacts on American Samoa without meaningful consultation with the people that those policies affect. These policies are not only counter-productive but run contrary to your Executive Orders 13985 and 14008. American Samoa remains a marginalized and underserved community, and our need for equity must be considered in the policy deliberations of your administration.

Our people deserve to be consulted before these actions or policies are implemented, and I request an immediate audience with your Secretary of Commerce to discuss our concerns prior to any action being taken.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,



LEMANU P. S. MAUGA
Governor

cc: Honorable Gina Raimondo, Secretary of Commerce
Honorable Deb Haaland, Secretary of Interior
Honorable Uifaatali Aumua Amata Radewagen, Congresswoman
Honorable Carmen Cantor, Assistant Secretary for Insular Affairs and International
Honorable Keone Nakoa, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Insular and International Affairs
Honorable Tualo Manaia E. Fruean, President of the Senate
Honorable Savali Talavou Ale, Speaker of the House of Representative
Honorable Talauaga E. V. Ale, Lieutenant Governor of American Samoa
Janet Coit, NOAA Fisheries Assistant Administrator
Kitty Simmonds, Director WPFMC Executive Director
Taotasi Archie Soliai, Director, ASG Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources