



**Western
Pacific
Regional
Fishery
Management
Council**

April 5, 2023

Richard W. Spinrad, Ph.D.
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere
NOAA Administrator
1401 Constitution Avenue NW, Room 5128
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Dr. Spinrad:

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Council), at its 194th Meeting held March 27 to 31, 2023 in the Mariana Islands, discussed the designation of a National Marine Sanctuary in the Pacific Remote Island Areas. This designation comes at the request of President Biden from a White House announcement published March 21, 2023. The Council requests that NOAA, and all other involved agencies, consult with the U.S. Pacific Territories beyond the public comment opportunity on this proposed sanctuary. The Council also requests that the National Ocean Service (NOS) provide a presentation to the Council on the proposed sanctuary, so that the Council may ascertain its responsibilities and role in the process, as outlined by the National Marine Sanctuaries Act Section 304(a)(5).

The Council is concerned that the proposed sanctuary has not fully appreciated the needs of the U.S. Pacific Territories or the issues that they already face. The U.S. Pacific Islands and their communities already assume a disproportionate burden, nearly meeting the '30 by 30' aspiration under the Biden Administration's *America the Beautiful Initiative* through closures of 53% of U.S. Pacific Island waters through Marine National Monuments. The Council notes that further restricting fisheries that support the underserved territories may be in direct conflict with Equity and Environmental Justice as outlined in Executive Orders 13985 and 14008. Nearly one-third of the American Samoa workforce depends on U.S. tuna fisheries that are already restricted by domestic and international regulations. Further restricting U.S. fishery presence counters objectives outlined in the Biden Administration's *Indo-Pacific Strategy*, because sustainable fisheries are a shared economic driver among Pacific Island nations.

Please ensure that the Governors of the U.S. Pacific Territories are consulted with as the sanctuary designation process begins. Have NOS staff reach out to us as well to present to us on the Council's role in the process, at kitty.simonds@wpcouncil.org or +1 (808) 522-8220.

Sincerely,

John Gourley
Council Chair

Kitty M. Simonds
Executive Director

CC: Janet L. Coit, Assistant Administrator, NOAA Fisheries
Nicole R. LeBoeuf, Assistant Administrator, NOAA National Ocean Service

Enclosed: (1) Map of U.S. EEZ Regulated Fishing Areas of the Western Pacific Region
(2) Information Paper: *Strengthening Fisheries Development for US Pacific Territories: From Addressing Local Issues to the Pacific Landscape*