

Friends of the Mariana Trench withdraws sanctuary nomination; says more public education and dialogue needed

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(FOTM) — The Friends of the Mariana Trench is withdrawing their nomination for a Mariana Trench national marine sanctuary and requesting that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration remove the Mariana Trench from the sanctuary inventory, Friends board chairwoman Sheila Babauta said.

“The Mariana Trench is a national treasure, a great natural wonder of the world that is worthy of pride and protection,” Babauta said. “But in the 15 years that have passed since the Friends first requested a national marine sanctuary, and the six years since NOAA accepted our nomination, circumstances in our

community have changed and we see the need for more dialogue and education.”

“We need to have more conversations about how we can work better together with our local and federal government partners to protect our ocean resources and achieve our conservation goals. We are withdrawing our sanctuary nomination for now, to make space for these important conversations,” she added.

Friends board member emeritus Ignacio V. Cabrera “Ike” noted that the Friends leadership consulted with many stakeholders prior to making their decision to withdraw the sanctuary nomination. “We had meetings with ocean elders and youth, community

members, U.S. Congressman Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan and Gov. Arnold Palacios,” he said.

“Withdrawing the sanctuary nomination right now doesn’t close the door on resubmitting a nomination in the future,” he added. “But we believe that at this time we should focus our efforts on gathering more community input, implementing our ongoing ocean programs, and improving the management of the Mariana Trench Marine National Monument.”

The Friends of the Mariana Trench is a community-based, nonprofit organization whose mission is to be guardians of the Mariana Trench Marine National Monument and the ocean resources of the Marianas, by empowering communities with ocean conservation strategies and research grounded in traditional teachings. For more information, contact Executive Director Laurie Peterka at (670) 483-7499 or visit www.friendsmarianatrench.org/.