



**Western
Pacific
Regional
Fishery
Management
Council**

October 9, 2023

Gina Raimondo
Secretary of Commerce
US Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Raimondo:

The Magnuson–Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) is the most effective legal instrument our nation has to address threats to US ecosystems and fishery resources. The MSA, by design through the Regional Fishery Management Council process, offers a comprehensive and thorough approach to assess threats and make informed policy decisions for NOAA to promulgate effective regulatory regimes. The Council process incorporates interests of indigenous, territorial, state, non-Federal entities and the public who participate in the open process facilitating a “bottom-up” approach which shapes effective conservation measures. Unfortunately, we find this model paradigm is often subverted in the Western Pacific. The federal government, through prior administrations, has opted to manage Pacific Island marine resources through the use of Marine National Monuments, National Marine Sanctuaries, and international initiatives. These mechanisms, which lack a thorough public process comparable to the MSA, often originate via “top down” mandates and neglect the will of stakeholders and local communities.


The resounding success of the MSA is proven through its ability to rebuild stocks consistently since its inception in 1976. NOAA’s *Report to Congress on the Status of U.S. Fisheries* show that overfishing has decreased to all-time lows and overfished stocks are rebuilding. All marine resources under purview of the MSA, including the ecosystems for which marine resources are integrated, are beholden to the ten National Standards. These range from integration of best available science as it becomes available to consideration of communities to prevent disproportionate burdens. The MSA offers tools to address essential fish habitat, in order to ensure habitat protections that can serve ecosystem services, and benefit both fisheries habitats and ecosystem as a whole. In addition, all MSA actions must address other statutes, laws and policies, such as National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). We have found that far too often, the process to establish Marine National Monuments and National Marine Sanctuaries have little to no scientific evaluation or measurable objectives (required in Council actions under the MSA) and circumvents NEPA. In fact, nearly 15 years after development of Marine National Monuments in the Pacific Remote Islands, Marianas Trench, and Rose Atoll – NOAA still does not have any management plans!

In the Pacific Islands, the Western Pacific Council's management has created a paradigm from which sustainable production of 60% of the United States' fresh tuna and swordfish supply, from the Hawaii-based longline fishery, is made possible with minimal impacts to the ecosystem. The Council has had a long history of taking on innovative and progressive management approaches which led it be early practitioners of limited entry programs, pioneers in the use of satellite-based vessel tracking systems, incorporating area-based management tools, prohibiting destructive fishing methods, such as bottom trawls and drift gillnets, and applying ecosystem-based approaches in fisheries management. By contrast, Marine National Monuments and National Marine Sanctuaries have not proven to yield demonstrable successes like our Council. Nor have they followed an ecosystem-based plan that is inclusive of the diverse Pacific Island communities that represent our region.


As described above, the Council process under the MSA has successfully managed our Nation's fisheries for more than 45 years. Decisions are transparently derived based on sound science and thorough input from a broad spectrum of stakeholders and the public. The ongoing subversion of the MSA by special interest groups to establish monuments and sanctuaries in the US Pacific Islands must stop. More than 52% of US EEZ waters are already closed to US longline and purse seine fishing fleets in the Pacific Island region with no proven conservation benefits to marine resources. Efforts continue to close remaining US EEZ waters to fishing which will further marginalize US fishermen who already compete on the high seas with an overabundance of international fleets. The Administration must support management of US Pacific Island fishery resources through the MSA and stop pursuing the establishment or expansion of Monuments and Sanctuaries in the region.

Contact Kitty Simonds, Executive Director, at +1 (808) 522-8220 or via email kitty.simonds@noaa.gov to discuss the Council's deep concern that US fishermen will continue to be unfairly marginalized by the US government.

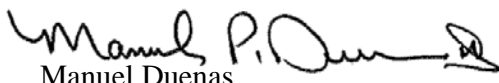
Sincerely,



William A. Sword
Council Chairman



Archie Soliai
American Samoa vice Chair



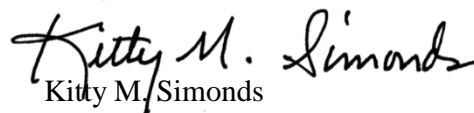
Manuel Duenas
Guam vice Chair



Sylvan Igisomar
CNMI vice Chair



Roger Dang
Hawaii vice Chair



Kitty M. Simonds
Executive Director

Encl: Map of US Pacific Island EEZ, Monuments and Sanctuaries

CC: Jeffery Zients, White House Chief of Staff
Richard Spinrad, Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere & NOAA
Administrator
Janet Coit, Assistant Administrator, NOAA Fisheries
Council Members