



Center for
Coastal Conservation



August 15, 2014

Mr. Mike Boots
Acting Chair
White House Council on Environmental Quality
722 Jackson Place, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Mr. Dan Ashe
Director
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Kathryn D. Sullivan, Ph.D.
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Acting Chair Boots, Director Ashe, and Under Secretary Sullivan:

We thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on President Obama's proposed expansion of the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument. As deliberations about the scope of this proposal continue, the undersigned groups support the spirit and intent of Executive Order 12962, as amended by Executive Order 13474¹. In describing how federal agencies shall provide for increased recreational fishing opportunities, and by stating that recreational fishing should be managed as a sustainable activity in federal waters and on federal lands, Presidents Clinton and Bush recognized the conservation and economic contributions of the recreational fishing community, as well as the overall positive environmental and social benefits associated with responsibly regulated angling.

¹ Exec. Order No. 13474, FR Doc. E8-23235 (Sept. 26, 2008).

In addition, through the *America's Great Outdoors* initiative, the Obama Administration demonstrated the importance it places on natural resource conservation and reconnecting Americans to our nation's outdoors. One of the key goals of this initiative is to enhance recreational access and opportunities. The recreational fishing and boating community has embraced the *America's Great Outdoors* initiative and continues to work with the Administration to help advance this program, but it is critical that its core tenants are upheld consistently throughout this Administration's actions, including the proposed Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument expansion.

While it is our understanding that no determination has yet been made on how recreational fishing will be managed within the expanded monument areas, we wish to reinforce that a closure to recreational fishing in these large areas of the Pacific Ocean would be scientifically unjustified; undermine the Executive Order on recreational fishing; and send the wrong message to the nation's 60 million recreational anglers.

America's recreational anglers and boaters are the backbone of aquatic resource conservation. For the past several decades, anglers and boaters have played the leading role in helping to rebuild marine fish stocks and prevent overfishing. Through federal excise taxes on fishing equipment and motorboat fuel, fishing license fees and direct donations, anglers and boaters contribute nearly \$1.5 billion annually to fund our nation's fisheries conservation and habitat restoration successes². Our community invests substantially in aquatic resource conservation because we know that the future of recreational fishing and boating directly depends on the health of fish populations and their habitat.

We strongly believe that in almost all instances, including in the contemplated waters for inclusion in the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument, well-regulated recreational fishing can be allowed while still ensuring sustainability of fish and habitat. According to the Marine Protected Area (MPA) Center, approximately 41 percent, or over 1.2 billion acres, of all U.S. waters are in some form of MPA³. Within the current system of MPAs, 86 percent allow for recreational fishing.

As with any good fisheries management decision, discussions about measures that restrict public access to public resources must involve an open public process, a solid scientific basis,

² Southwick Associates. *Sportfishing in America: An Economic Force for Conservation*. Produced for the American Sportfishing Association (ASA) under a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Sport Fish Restoration grant (F12AP00137, VA M-26-R) awarded by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA), 2012.

³ Department of Commerce, Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management, "*Analysis of United States MPAs, March 2012*" (Silver Spring, MD, 2012)

and specific guidelines on implementation and follow-up. The establishment of any MPA that closes areas to recreational fishing should:

- Only be considered after well-enforced conventional fisheries management tools, such as bag limits, size limits, quotas and seasons, have failed;
- Be limited to the smallest area possible to achieve fisheries management goals;
- Require that sufficient, long-term government funding is available for regular monitoring and enforcement of the closed area;
- Include a timetable for review of the closed area's performance in meeting fisheries management goals, and
- Have the ultimate goal of reopening the area to recreational fishing once fisheries management goals are achieved.

We are concerned that the justifications for the proposed monument expansion, as was the case for the original designation, are vague. While we share President Obama's goals of conserving important marine resources and ensuring that marine ecosystems remain productive for our children and grandchildren, we are doubtful that the contemplated marine monument expansion and any associated fishing bans will have a meaningful positive impact on the region's marine resources.

Prohibiting recreational fishing in these areas would set an unacceptable precedent and send the message to the nation's 60 million recreational anglers that at any time -- and without scientific justification -- they can be shut out of public waters. We maintain that recreational fishing poses no threat to the sustainability of the aquatic resources in these areas, and therefore it would be entirely unjustified to ban this activity.

When President George W. Bush established the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument in 2009, recreational fishing was not allowed until the Secretaries of the Interior and Commerce completed a lengthy and costly rulemaking process to permit recreational fishing. These management plans went into effect in 2013 and allow for recreational fishing under a permit and logbook requirement⁴. While the final outcome of this process was positive, albeit at the expense of considerable federal resources, it allowed several years of uncertainty while the recreational fishing community waited and hoped for the right decision to be made. It also placed managers and the recreational fishing community in the position of having to defend why the activity should be allowed despite no evidence demonstrating that it was having a negative impact on marine resources.

⁴ 50 CFR Part 665

Our nation's state and federal natural resource agencies for over a century have operated under the principle that recreational fishing is an allowable activity unless it is demonstrated to be threatening the health and sustainability of natural resources. Forgoing this highly successful model and instead requiring that a case first be made to allow recreational fishing to occur places managers and recreational fishermen in the difficult position of having to prove an unknown, and goes against our successful model of fisheries management that is the envy of countries the world over.

Rather than banning recreational fishing, this administration could use this opportunity to highlight the important social, economic and conservation benefits that recreational fishing provides to the nation. By specifically stating that recreational fishing will be allowed in the expanded monument areas, as is now the case in the existing monument areas, the President would send the powerful message that recreational fishing and marine conservation are not only compatible, but complimentary.

The tremendous popularity of recreational fishing and the accompanying benefits it provides to the nation have been achieved through a management system that strives for healthy and abundant fisheries resources and ample public access to those resources. This successful model has been threatened in recent years by the increasing number of proposals to close public waters for reasons other than fisheries management purposes. Should he move forward with this proposed marine monument expansion, we strongly urge President Obama to uphold our nation's fisheries management principles and allow for responsibly regulated recreational fishing to take place.

Sincerely,

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American Sportfishing Association

Jeff Angers, President
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Patrick Murray, President
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Jeff Crane, President
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Ellen Peel, President
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