

**Marine Conservation Areas Open House
Washington, D.C. Meeting
October 9, 2008
Compilation of Verbal Public Comments**

Facilitated Group Summaries and Key Points:

- There should be a purpose clause to state the goal of the protected area. For example: “to protect, rescue and restore intact ecosystems”
- Implement a full no-take protection zone in the areas, extending 200 nautical miles, inclusive of: lands, waters, and submerged habitat
- Need full protection of all areas out to 200 nautical miles – these areas are definitely threatened and pressure will only increase in the future
- Agreement on value of these areas as natural and historic treasures, but differences on whether new protection is needed: some want more information on threats, etc., while others want to seize the current interest, be proactive
- There are diverse views regarding protection: sustainable use vs. no extraction
- These areas are national and global treasures – some of the last near pristine areas
- The areas deserve recognition
- Recognition must be backed by funding
- Areas should have clearly stated goals and objectives, and be science based
- Keep areas as pristine as possible – there are discoveries/resources yet to be identified
- Want full protection based on scientific study and research to maintain integrity of ecosystem and biodiversity
- Encourage a focus on environmental linkages
- Develop precautionary protections with appropriate scientific research
- Natural and scientific potential that will also increase opportunities for education – many discoveries/processes yet to be discovered/understood
- Widespread agreement that these areas are valuable scientific resources and for conservation
- These areas provide for conservation of biological diversity and refuges for commercially exploited stocks
- Encourage coordinated management between agencies but do not assign joint authority
 - Solve the current dispute between FWS & NOAA
 - Develop clear conservation objectives & roles for management
- Settle jurisdictional disputes / management conflicts among federal agencies (local governments) in many areas, including the Mariana Trench
- Leadership is important to management – need an accountable agency for “coordinated management”
- Importance of public input and local support for long term viability of management
- Need for strong monitoring and enforcement, recognizing challenges due to remoteness of areas
- Enforcement concerns exist
- Need to assess and evaluate impacts of current uses (military, tuna fleet, navigation) and future uses (tourism)
- Human activities should aim to preserve the relatively pristine conditions of these areas

- Subsistence fishing should be allowed with guidelines
- Ensure low impact tourism

Historic and Scientific Interest

Questions for discussion: Are there specific areas, living marine resources, cultural or historical resources, or artifacts of scientific or historic interest? For example: items or areas of interest related to World War II; areas important to telling the culture or history of the Pacific Islands; unique or special areas, ecosystems or living or non-living marine resources.

- Some areas are unique in that pelagic ecosystems merge with island areas with cold water upwellings that result in highly productive areas
- Areas provide unique sea bird habitat: foraging areas extend 200 nautical miles from the islands and atolls
- Areas contain threatened and endangered species
- Areas are valuable turtle habitat for foraging, nesting, and migrating
- Areas are important habitat for sea birds and predatory fish upon which the sea birds rely
- Areas are migration corridors for leatherback turtles
- Areas contain intact food pyramids with intact ecosystems that can be used as baselines
- Unique species live in extreme environments contained in these areas
- The potential for discovering and describing new species in these areas is huge
- Areas contain deep sea benthic habitats
- Areas have value for species protection, including seabirds, whales, and turtles
- Areas represent significant biodiversity
- Biodiversity protection is a key concern due to the high levels of biodiversity in areas selected for consideration
- Some areas have relevance as pristine ecosystems. They are important as a control area, due to their relative pristine/untouched qualities, which are rapidly diminishing throughout the world. Less than 4% of such areas exist in the world. Control areas are necessary to understand human impact
- Need to consider the combination of unique ecosystems
- Science should focus on links between sites
- All areas represent natural laboratories
- Importance of ecosystem protection
- Areas contain or could allow for the identification, discovery, or study of seamounts
- Areas contain geological functions
- Areas represent military history, including tanks, Pacific Rim battles, and the first flight out of Wake Island
- All areas have historic value
- Historic and cultural resources include: aviation, defense, WWII – could be a “fitting tribute,” and shipwrecks
- Most sites under consideration have human history
- The historic/cultural history in these areas is enough to warrant recognition
- Less than 1% of ocean areas are currently under protection
- The Marianas Trench is a natural laboratory and a source for coral repopulation and colonization

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- The northern waters of the CNMI contain 18 species of whales and dolphins, nesting habitat, etc
- The CNMI areas should be considered in relation to the rest of the world and diminishing/lacking biodiversity
- The CNMI areas represent a unique ecosystem
- Marianas Trench has huge scientific potential (e.g. place to study ocean acidification); contains 19 species of whales and dolphins, has unique attributes. Many unknowns about this site remain to be explored
- Kingman Reef has significant corals and reef
- Kingman Reef is a pristine ecosystem and can be used as a baseline for other communities
- National Park Service and Department of Defense should provide historical records, as they are key players in the decision making process
- Assessment needs to include focus on fishing pressures: commercial, recreational, subsistence
- Worldwide navigation history needs to be incorporated
- Impacts of climate change need to be identified and considered
- All areas lack high resolution maps of island topography and bathymetry
- Need to investigate sea level rise
- Need to further identify and classify species
- Extend research to deeper depths

Recognition

Questions for discussion: Should these places be given national recognition. For example: items of interest to the nation; opportunities for education and research; highlight for tourism.

- Healthy reefs provide an excellent arena for studying impacts of climate change/global warming/ocean acidification. For example, ocean acidification – there is hydrogen sulfur coming through the reef system and the reef is still thriving/resilient. There is a huge opportunity to study this
- Education and research should be done. It would be irresponsible to not use them as a research area. There is potential to use them as a research station in the future
- Protected areas would be ideal locations for research/monitoring climate change and its impacts
- Additional research is needed on the Mariana Trench
- There has been limited geologic study of this significant area and its resources
- Tourism should only occur to the extent that does not disrupt ecosystem management
- There is an opportunity for a huge historical legacy for President Bush if full protection is afforded to these areas
- Desire for extension of a conservation area boundary out to 200 nautical miles
- Additional protective designation needed for cultural resources in the Mariana Islands
- A monument is something that is of “great interest to the Nation”; these sites meet the test for monument status
- These areas are a national treasure
- These areas deserve at least the same protection as the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument
- The Antiquities Act is a good vehicle for providing recognition for these areas within the timeframe this Administration is working in

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- Need clearly stated and defined conservation and research goals for future management
- There is an opportunity to protect these areas before damage resulting from anticipated increased human use

Coordinated management

Questions for discussion: Would the areas benefit from improved management? For example: could there be better coordination among federal agencies, or better local-federal coordination? How? Why?

- Need better coordination throughout the system of management
- Need specific management plan based on clear goals
- Increase the common goals of management
- Need to include Department of Defense in the planning process
- Need to solve the NOAA / Fish and Wildlife Service dispute over jurisdictional boundaries
- Recommend coordinated management with no joint authority
- Need clear distinctions of management authority
- Need for a lead agency that is accountable for management, clearly defined jurisdiction, and boundaries on agencies
- Coordination / roles of the various agencies and governments may prove problematic
- There are jurisdictional differences (e.g., NOAA and DOI) that should be taken into consideration
- Use existing structure to maximize coordination of management
- Must clarify jurisdictional issues, including what agency has authority and where
- Need clear designations for federal agency roles and jurisdiction
- Consultation and coordination still needs to improve, although authority separated
- Need to incorporate local input: cultural values, state and local governments
- Need to consider island specific variation in social and cultural values
- Need to include local stakeholders throughout the process
- There is difficulty in staffing and managing remote islands / atolls
- Cost of staffing and managing remote islands / atolls
- Need to consider the questions of multiuse/conflicting interests
- These areas should be managed for multiple uses
- Should consider threats like climate change, degraded ships, etc. as stressors
- Should consider the impact of military activities on the transfer of invasive species (like brown tree snakes) that impact sea birds on islands
- Scientific research should continue uninterrupted. Want to see verbiage asserting this directive in the initial White House document
- How would this designation strengthen management of these areas? For example, some of these areas are already managed as Refuges, how would this strengthen the management for conservation?
 - o Not all of these areas are Refuges
 - o Refuges only provide authority to 3 nautical miles out
 - o Refuges are often focused on terrestrial issues/management (versus marine)
 - o Depends on the direction taken by the Administration, etc

- This designation could strengthen the biological integrity of these areas. For example, with regard to fisheries, this could provide additional buffer and extend jurisdiction
- Must provide for/delineate and fund law enforcement, or the designation has little effect.
- Strongest concerns are fishing and energy development
- We can increase enforcement over time and in the future; it is better to at least get the designation in place – especially because some of these are remote locations
- Constraints on law enforcement should not impede designation; but all agree must have enforcement
- Concern regarding illegal fishing in the CNMI, need for increased enforcement
- Need more assets applied for enforcement
- Implementation must be followed up with money and people
- Opportunities for research through military, Coast Guard, private industry partnerships
- Need coordination with industry, NGOs, and academia
- Concerns regarding difficulty in getting research permits

Strategic Implications

Questions for discussion: The President directed in his letter that any measures this assessment recommends needs to consider several strategic issues. Please comment on the strategic implications regarding the following activities: continued ability to carry out the military mission; compatibility with recreational and commercial fishing; compatibility with energy and mineral resources, opportunities for scientific study.

- Precautionary measures need to be taken to avoid irreparable damage
- Require DOD to develop cooperative or MOU agreements with management authorities to identify their roles and hold them accountable for their military activity
- Avoid military activity where possible, and justify activity in areas where required
- Navy presence assists navigation and protection
- Military is not really an issue, keep the same
- Funding and capacity for enforcement is with the military
- Military should assume a “quid pro quo” approach for their operations (group worked under assumption that military ops will continue regardless of level of protections afforded to conservation area). The military should provide support in form of funding for enforcement, enforcement capacity, and technology (satellite tracking, imagery)
- Coordinated management with the military is important
- Need to consider the types of military use and incorporate the effects of those uses on the ecosystem
- Need to consider establishing an oversight group/mechanism for use of live ammunition in the conservation area
- Should not allow commercial fishing and likely no recreational fishing. These are relatively pristine areas that we have few of. Fishing has known, scientifically-proven, detrimental impacts to ecosystem function and species behavior
- Monitoring of illegal commercial fishing
- Concern over bycatch issues associated with fishing
- Scientific study is definitely compatible
- Need to provide research access/opportunities

- There needs to be consideration of existing investments and planned and on-going activities for scientific research efforts (e.g., mapping) that may be affected in the interim (before final designation) and after designation. The group suggested the language should include: “Planned activities that are consistent with the intended use of the protected area are allowed”
- Education is compatible, but do not have to have this there/on site. Will be able to learn from the research
- Tourism can be compatible, as long as it does not conflict with management goals/principles
- Extractive actions – i.e. energy and mineral development – are definitely not compatible; there are no known sources there
- In the CNMI, extraction would impact Marianas, etc., and affect scientific study. Has currently been limited geologic study of this significant area and resources
- Population growth in SE Asia may cause increased fishing pressure around CNMI
- Ecosystem approaches to management require that all the pieces of the ecosystem are provided protections

Protections

Questions for discussion: Should there be additional protections put in place to limit adverse effects from existing or future activities, or to maintain the character and resources of the area? For example, from: development (cables, pipelines); discharges (dumping, wastewater); extraction (fishing, mining, energy development); other (ship groundings, anchoring).

Fishing:

- Eliminate commercial fishing to prevent grounding accidents from vessels
- Areas should be a “no take” protected area
- No take areas suggested for both commercial and recreational fisheries: will nourish outside commercial fisheries
- No take zone will maintain the health of the areas, especially for large pelagic fishes
- Establish no-take zones for fishing within 200 nautical miles
- Need no-take zones in nursery areas
- No take zones benefit sustainable fisheries and can provide “spillover effects” to fisheries that fish near the edge of the protected area
- Consider no-take zones with subsistence areas
- CNMI should have no-take zones and be designated under the Antiquities Act
- Oppose designation of no-take zones
- Commercial and recreational fishing are not compatible
- Need full protection of the areas that prohibits fishing
- It is possible that some fishing is not incompatible - “sustainable fishing”
- Non-destructive fishing practices should be maintained/allowed in the conservation area
- US tuna fishery is an important existing use in the region. It is concentrated around waters near American Samoa for access to the tuna canneries, and provides many job.
- Compatible fishing under quotas should be allowed to continue (Howard, Baker and Jarvis Islands, Kingman Reef and Palmyra Atoll)
- Potential for fishing fleets to monitor activity in the region (partnership opportunity)
- South Pacific Tuna Treaty should be consulted
- Regional Fishery Management Organizations should be consulted

- Fishery Management Councils should maintain authority over fisheries management issues because they have the technical expertise and existing structure to deal with these issues
- The mandate for designation should maintain the current management authorities for fisheries management
- Eliminate commercial tuna fishing within 200 nautical miles
- Subsistence and recreational fishing should be allowed
- If science dictates, recreational fishing should be limited
- Subsistence use should have guidelines; fishing methods have changed with technology
- Sustainable use should be allowed - fishing can be compatible with protected status
- Concern that depending on the authority used to create the conservation area, there would be different implications for management of fisheries (e.g., MSA vs. Sanctuaries)
- Whale protection is needed around the northern Marianas Islands
- The Mariana Islands have no commercial fishing, but pirate fishing
- The Central Pacific has very few commercial fishers, as well as little recreational
- There is currently little commercial fishing in some areas (e.g. Marianas Trench)
- Commercial fishing will likely encroach upon these areas in the near future and all fishing will increase pressure upon these ecosystems
- Have already seen illegal shark finning

Tourism:

- Tourism potential should be realistically assessed. What are the potential threats to the resource?
- Need for additional management with increased tourism
- Need for accurate economic valuation of tourism and its benefits to the communities
- Need clear standards for sustainable tourism (assuming that tourism is allowed in the conservation area)
- Explore tourism models employed in other regions/sectors to provide insight for best management practices/models
- Support low impact tourism that is regulated, well managed, geared towards education of the ecosystem, and research based
- Consider the impact of tourism, need to develop guidelines

Enforcement:

- Increase enforcement of protected areas
- Develop a new enforcement plan
- Develop remote observation for monitoring illegal fishing
- Enforce fishing laws
- Need robust, fully funded enforcement and management provisions
- The conservation should be a big protected area with clear “bright lines” which helps enforcement
- Concerns regarding whether there is enough capacity to enforce against illegal fishing from foreign vessels
- Monitoring and enforcement effectiveness is a key component to protecting the conservation area
- Enforcement can be problematic due to various causes including lack of resources
- Simpler protections are easier to enforce

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- Enforcement issues are not a reason for blanket restrictions
- Need monitoring and enforcement

Discharge:

- Seek to strengthen discharge regulations
- Eliminate the potential for ballast water exchange
- Regulate the source of marine debris

Development and Extraction:

- Require industry to justify development for cables / lines, and encourage alternate routes
- Do not allow mineral exploration
- Consider economic payments for mineral extraction in these areas
- Development, use (excluding military use), and extraction should be ceased and/or prohibited in the protected area
- Extraction would impact resources and scientific study, particularly in Marianas

Other Comments:

- Need analysis of competing uses
- Are military activities a threat? If so, don't exempt them from control (despite wording of Presidential memo). Military exemptions will be affected by other processes, including the position of a new Administration, the Supreme Court, etc
- Incorporate prohibitory zones in maps and charts
- Shipping lanes/access to navigation: need to articulate potential impacts
- Potential impacts of existing use of Midway for aircraft emergencies?
- Create a buffer zone for all ships within ____ proximity of the islands
- Opposed to activities/disturbance of certain benthic habitats (seamounts, etc)
- Protect the sea floor
- Maximum protection for intact ecosystems that is all-encompassing, regarding (but not limited to) water quality, extraction, ship grounding, discharges and other disturbances. Areas should be kept as pristine as possible
- Northern CNMI waters should have the maximum protection possible
- Areas should have the strongest protection available
- Full protection of resources is important
- Provide full protection for uninhabited areas
- Total protection in the west Pacific should be provided. It should be science based, regulated, extend 200 nautical miles (to protect seabird foraging and migration corridors).
- We should protect pristine areas before they are threatened
- Increase the amount of protected areas
- There should be an increased area of ocean protected given that the current total area of protection is minute
- Management regime needs to ensure protection
- Many proposed areas are already under protection via the CNMI constitution
- Need to provide opportunities for research
- Need to maintain the status of natural laboratories
- Need to maintain pristine ecosystems to allow for further investigation
- Support scientific study and research

- Some areas should be closed to allow for science and research
- Incorporate implications of climate change at all levels
- Immediate protection will allow for ecosystem resistance to climate change
- Develop education and outreach campaigns
- Need more information on this to make protection decisions: What are the current and future threats to these areas? Is additional protection needed? What will these protection measures cost?
- Explicitly identify jurisdictional authority
- Do the proposed protections address the threats? There are higher fines under National Marine Sanctuaries Act than under Antiquities Act. Some threats are large scale (e.g. ocean acidification) and may not be addressed by these protection measures
- Importance of local support. Areas are too remote for sufficient federal support. No funding in the budget for protection/management in FY09 or FY10
- Current public process is not adequate. Need to think about public involvement both in terms of designation and management. Example of National Marine Sanctuaries Act public designation process and the Sanctuary Advisory Councils as a robust public process
- Should take advantage of Presidential interest in these areas – otherwise the opportunity may pass and not arise again for many years
- Conservation of these areas may bring in money (ecotourism, recreational fishing)
- These areas support technology transfer for enforcement and ocean observation
- Consider capacity building and jobs in these areas
- International community has set a 30% goal for protection
- Ensure that our policies are complementary with international policies
- Ensure consistency with international agreements