



Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
Sixteenth Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature

Pete P. Reyes
Senate President

Arnold I. Palacios
Speaker of the House

August 6, 2008

President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

Re: Proposed Marianas Trench National Marine Monument

Dear President Bush:

We, the presiding officers of the Sixteenth Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature, write in opposition to the proposed Marianas Trench National Marine Monument. A plan now being proposed and circulated by the Pew Charitable Trusts would create a marine monument in the area of the three northernmost islands of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. We join Governor Benigno R. Fitial, many fellow legislators, and mayors of island municipalities in expressing our opposition.

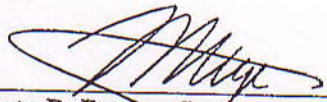
As policy-makers and representatives of the people of the Commonwealth, we must take issue with some of the publicity generated by Pew and other groups and individuals in support of the proposed monument. We feel that the very media savvy and internet capable Pew campaign and its supporters may have created an impression that most residents of the Commonwealth are in support of the monument. In point of fact, a substantial number of local residents, many of whom are not equipped to disseminate their views through websites, blogs, or other mass media, oppose the creation of a monument. Particularly for indigenous residents of the Marianas, the loss of local control over such a vast area of land and water is an assault on the traditions and culture of the islands and on the concept of local self-government enshrined in the 'Covenant to Establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in Political Union with the United States of America' (48 U.S.C. §1801). We feel obliged to report the sentiment of this important, if often overlooked, group.

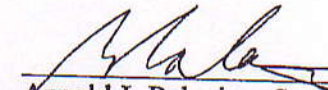
A monument, if modeled after the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in Hawaii, would severely restrict fishing and mineral exploration in the protected area. In light of the continuing economic crisis in the Commonwealth, we would like to have the ability, if feasible, to develop sustainable local economic activity

and not rely on assistance from the federal government. The creation of a monument takes at least one development possibility off the table. Furthermore, the islands at the center of the Pew proposal are remote and already protected under the Constitution of the Northern Mariana Islands. Anecdotal evidence in the form of eyewitness reports and underwater photography suggests that the area remains a pristine marine environment. Based on this evidence, we suggest that current preservation measures are adequate and federal involvement is unnecessary.

We hope that you, through the chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality, will share our concerns with those involved in any decision to create a Marianas Trench National Marine Monument. We fear that the creation of a marine monument is not only unnecessary, but also conflicts with both traditional and potentially beneficial uses of the waters surrounding our islands, and interferes with the principle of self-government so precious to our island community.

Sincerely,


Pete P. Reyes, Senate President


Arnold I. Palacios, Speaker
of the House

Cc: James L. Connaughton, Chairman, Council on Environmental Quality