

20th U.S. CORAL REEF TASK FORCE MEETING
Keauhou, Hawai'i, August 2008

CNMI TESTIMONY OPPOSING PROPOSAL TO
ESTABLISH A NATIONAL MARINE MONUMENT
IN THE MARIANA ISLANDS

This statement is released by the officially appointed delegation of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) to the 20th U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Meeting, Keauhou, Hawai'i, August, 2008. The statement is opposition testimony on the proposal to convert 115,000 square miles of pristine marine waters in the CNMI to a national marine monument ("Monument").

A stated overarching purpose for the said proposal to place a marine monument in CNMI waters is to urgently help create a "blue legacy" for President Bush prior to his lame duck departure from office in January, 2009. Another purpose heralded for the venture is to reap credence and credibility to the Ocean Legacy Project of the Pew Charitable Trusts.

We, the undersigned, represent the environmental regulatory agencies, residents and community leaders of the CNMI. Our approach toward resource management is based on the hypotheses driven, science-based decision making process, and honoring and respecting the interests of affected stakeholders. We give our voices here in order to raise awareness of the controversy surrounding the vigorous attempt to designate a Monument in our beloved islands.

Unlike either of the other Monument sites presently under consideration by the federal government, the Pew Charitable Trusts (PEW) has actually physically established a presence in the CNMI, solely to advocate for the promotion of the Monument. They have hired local lobbyists, mounted a high profile marketing campaign and opened the doors to a "Marianas Trench Monument" business office on Saipan, the most populous of our fourteen islands.

Pew representatives specifically assured the CNMI that should the introduction of the Monument proposal become an issue, become in any way controversial, or not gain the support of the CNMI government, President Bush and Pew would not follow through with the proposed designation plans. We are here to inform you that the proposal's marketing and advocacy campaigns have indeed become exceedingly controversial. The rhetoric surrounding the proposal has degenerated to callous personal attacks and disreputable name calling in the local blog discussion community, in private gatherings, and in the local media. Despite this, Pew has reneged on its cease and desist "assurances".

The non-partisan unified opposition of the CNMI populace to the Monument proposal is clear. Through oral statements in the CNMI's two native languages of Carolinian and Chamorro, and through written statements in English, CNMI elected leaders have said, "*Eghe*," "*Ahi*," and "No way, Jorge," respectively. What is there about "no" in three different languages that Monument proponents do not understand and refuse to respect?

The following sequence of correspondence (see attached) shows the crescendo of CNMI rejection of the Monument proposal:

1. March 19, 2008 – Rejection letter from CNMI Governor to Pew Trusts;
2. April 22, 2008 – Joint CNMI Senate/House rejection resolution #16-04;
3. April 29, 2008 – Rejection letter from CNMI Governor to President Bush;
4. June 06, 2008 – Rejection letter from Northern Islands Mayor to Pres. Bush;

5. June 09, 2008 – Rejection letter from Saipan Mayor to President Bush;
6. June 12, 2008 – Rejection letter from Tinian Mayor to President Bush;
7. July 15, 2008 – Rejection letter from Rota Mayor to President Bush;
8. August 6, 2008 – Rejection letter from House Speaker and Senate President to President Bush.

Despite this opposition, Pew proponents relentlessly continue undeterred to pursue a skewed, distorted public indoctrination recruitment campaign.

Serious opposition is mirrored also by Senators from Louisiana and Alabama, and U.S. mainland conservation organizations over a proposed Gulf of Mexico “Islands in the Stream” marine monument. Their concerns are akin to those about establishing a Monument in the CNMI. Those mainlanders include Senator David Vitter (LA), Senator Jeff Sessions (AL), Senator Richard Shelby (AL), Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, Coastal Conservation Association, American Sportfishing Association, BASS/ESPN Outdoors, Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation, International Game Fish Association, National Assembly of Sportsmen’s Caucuses, National Marine Manufacturers Association and The Billfish Foundation.

The common denominator shared by the CNMI and these opposition groups is the reality that the designation process is a unilateral, arbitrary presidential action that eschews weighing stakeholder concerns in a fair manner. Furthermore, designation is a permanent action that is unlikely to be reversed by a subsequent U.S. Congress, even if the Monument is later discovered to be ill-designed and non-functional. And, worse yet, the imminent designation of the said Monument merely hinges on an artificial and unrealistic political heritage deadline of January, 2009, not on ecological and marine conservation concerns.

We resolutely ask the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force members to support the unwavering position of the CNMI government to reject the designation of a national marine monument in the Mariana Islands. The present tactics taken by Pew, and *de facto* by the federal government to create this huge 115,000 square miles Monument is counter to the historic indigenous cultural strategies of responsible, sustainable use of CNMI natural resources, and is an affront to the traditional manner of involving affected communities in determining matters of importance to the common good. We would sincerely appreciate it if the USCRTF members would assist the CNMI in routing the CNMI message to the White House, the Council on Environmental Quality, and Pew that the CNMI says, “‘No’ to a national marine monument in the Mariana Islands.”

Respectfully submitted,

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