

editorial: Oppose the Marianas Monument

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0 Comments and 0 Reactions

We are for the protection of marine resources. We are against plundering of the ocean

and irresponsible fishing. But we are not in favor of designating

this part of the Pacific into a scientific laboratory for oceanologists. The ocean is a source of life for island people.

That being said, we are in support of the CNMI government's protest against President Bush's proposed Marianas Trench Marine National Monument in the CNMI, which would declare several Pacific atolls and reefs as marine sanctuaries and keep fishermen out of the area.

The proposed monument would cover the Mariana Trench, the deepest part of the planet, and the waters around Rose Atoll in American Samoa and various islands and reefs in the central Pacific that are under U.S. jurisdiction.

The proposed monument area covers the southern Guam waters, where, according to Guam Fisherman's Co-Op president Manny Duenas, fishermen harvest 50,000 tons of fish a year. This area is therefore a rich source of our marine diet.

According to marine biologist Jeremy B.C. Jackson, the remote Central Pacific is the only place in the world where live coral cover still averages

50 percent or more over large areas of reef.

That should mean that the water is very much capable of reproducing a lifetime supply of marine resources and the 50,000 tons of fish that fishermen harvest a year won't deplete the ocean, especially if one would take into consideration the fact that island fishermen only use small boats

and are not involved in major commercial fishing.

The potential problems of overfishing and illegal fishing by foreign large vessels are something that the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council must deal with. The agency is tasked to monitor and regulate industrialized fishing.

For centuries, fishing has been part of the island life, history and heritage. But if the White House wants to dismiss this romantic aspect of fishing, it should at least consider the pragmatic side of this activity.

For practical reasons, fishing must continue to be part of these islands, which depend on the ocean for immediate sustenance. Otherwise, Guam and the CNMI will have to rely on more imported food items, as we do now. This is too costly for island residents to afford.

The Bush administration's proposed marine monuments also included two other candidates—a stretch of deep-water corals off the coast of the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida and areas especially rich in marine life in the Gulf of Mexico. Both of them were knocked out of consideration because of opposition

from the fishing and oil and gas industries.

If these jurisdictions managed to block the proposed monuments in their areas, the CNMI and Guam should assert their resistance, as well.