

October 24, 2008

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

Re: Potential Marine Conservation Management Areas in the Mariana Islands

*This letter is to communicate the Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association's strong opposition to the establishment of any potential Marine Conservation Management Areas in the Islands of the Marianas.* The Association is comprised of nearly 200 fishermen and women who practice subsistence, recreational, and commercial fishing. We live and fish in the Marianas and fish on vessels averaging 25 feet. *The marine areas of particular concern are currently being utilized for cultural, social and economic means.* We humbly request that you do not deny us the most unique part of our heritage; most especially one that has been practiced for nearly four thousand years (even by those that have chosen to settle with us in the islands).

It has been implied that the *Antiquities Act* may be used unilaterally and applied to the ocean surrounding the Marianas as promoted by the Pew Charitable Trust, the Ocean Conservancy and other environmental organizations. *In a plea from the Ocean Conservancy to its supporters, the fishermen of the Marianas have been portrayed as an industrialized fishing community to include our recreational sector.* Such a statement lacks knowledge of the actual activities of the region and is considered a major insult to the people of the Marianas.

*The irony is should the Antiquities Act be used; the people of the Marianas should be considered as qualified for full protection under the Act.* The Islands of the Marianas are inhabited by two distinct and closely knit people with long-lived rich cultures; the Chamorros and the Carolinians. These islands have been and continue to be our home, a place where our ancestors traveled from island to island from north to south and even beyond the archipelagic boundaries and where the ocean provides for our sustenance and existence.

*The Spanish arrived in the 1500's and the people of the Marianas were herded like cattle to occupy one island (Guam) where they faced near extinction as a people. Centuries of subjugation went by and both the people and the culture of the islands prevailed. People of the Marianas have maintained their unique identity and the ocean continued to provide for our sustenance and existence.*

The *Spanish-American War* brought a new management regime. Freedom was proclaimed and yet there was no democracy; we became wards of the military with regulations made at the whim of the Naval Governor. Then came the war with Japan and

we became wards of another but again, the ocean still provided for our sustenance and survival.

The *Liberation of the Islands* came, but at a price, the dietary needs changed to canned products such as spam and corned beef. Despite all the influences the two indigenous cultures survived and the technological advances allowed fisheries to evolve. Through the years, many have joined our people and have come to share with us the beauty of the Marianas. Again, the ocean continues to provide for our sustenance and cultural existence. The condemnation of nearly one-third of the Marianas will result in cultural genocide rivaled only by Hitler who not only killed the Jews but also removed them from their communities and livelihood.

*Through the centuries the ocean provided for the communities in these islands which contributed to the richness of our culture. Most of the words spoken in the native languages come from the ocean...the creatures living and once living all serve as a link to the ocean. The rich and unique cultural practices and rituals come from the ocean, the sharing and the cultural requirement to provide dishes from the sea is paramount.*

Many would say that the establishment of a monument would continue for cultural purposes. *The idea that one would travel to the Marine Conservation Area to harvest the resources and be required to consume the harvest prior to leaving the area's boundaries is culturally insensitive and unconscionable, as is the case in the Northwest Hawaiian Islands Monument.* The cultural practice of harvest by all island cultures has been to provide sustenance to the community just as the bison did for the Native Americans and as the cattle to the Texans. *As a matter of fact, the taking of our marine resources may be construed as being no different to rustling cattle.*

The harvesting of the ocean's resources is an important part of modern evolutionary society, most especially in the Marianas. We no longer barter or trade; the basic necessities of life are acquired through having the money to pay for goods and services. One would say that today's fishing is not traditional but tradition is not in the beginning but rather the means to an end. The tradition lies in the bringing to the shores the harvest to share in one form or another with the community. *Today's fisherman must be allowed to maintain access to the resources, detrimental for future growth and development of the fishery; coupled with traditional and modern effective management methods.*

*Creating a closed area is not science-based.* We recall that the proponents of Marine Protected Areas utilize the spill-over effect as the poster child to create no take areas such as the NWHI (in a few years). This was not the case of the Main Hawaii Bottom Fish Fishery; the same argument no longer had merit and effort was limited despite the closing down of the fishery in a much larger adjacent area. The closing of these areas would only benefit foreign industrialized fishing fleets that fish along and at times within the fringes of the US EEZ. There has been no additional security for the NWHI Monument and yet it has been suggested that there will be an increase for the Marianas, we believe the latter would be highly unlikely.

*The militarization of the Marianas is also another significant issue of concern.* The waters surrounding the Mariana Islands have been designated as Military Ranges. These Ranges include areas just south of the Asuncion Island to as far south as the deepest, darkest place on earth. Military activities and the possible use of explosives are allowed under all management areas; again the only people impacted are the people of the Marianas. We have in our possession maps that show training areas which encompass

over half the EEZ waters. The proposed militarization and conservation closures will have a demonstrative impact on the people and further restrict fishing access. We humbly suggest you evaluate the impact of the military build-up in the Marianas before attempting further federalization of the Marianas.

*The whole federalization efforts will serve as a springboard to ensure the cultural genocide of a people. We are saddened that the same policy which led to the demise of our Native American counterparts and the taking of their lands for hundreds of years continues to manifest through the corridors of this Administration. The ocean is considered as the land and resources therein our sustenance. Through the centuries the Federal Government has established a policy of acting without forethought; then generations later offer the impacted a sincere apology. The atrocities in the “Trail of Tears”, “Wounded Knee”, to the incarceration of Americans of Japanese ancestry in WWII and so forth are examples of such action, of course followed by an apology.*

*The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act is not a failure in the Western Pacific Region. The only failure is not providing funding for the much need research and stock assessment. The single specie listed in the over-fished state in the WesPac Region has not been fished in over twenty years (most especially by the Marianas) and cannot be removed until a stock assessment is made. Again a reality check, we spend millions (over six million dollars) in the NWHI Monument to protect something already protected by existing management regimes without fully grasping the Transferred Effect of the action.*

*The Eight Fishery Councils have waited over twenty years for the mandated stock assessments which remain undone due to lack of funding which by the way has been greatly reduced in the last eight years. Diverting funds from something already protected to fund research that provides for the sustainable and the nutritional needs of the citizens should be paramount, most especially because of recent tainted food incidents.*

The fact is the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council implemented the following measures in the Marianas; way before it was fashionable for environmental entities:

- *Banning of Trawl Nets which impacts fish habitat.*
- *Banning of Gill Nets which captures and kills any creature entangled.*
- *Banning Purse Seine fishing which can remove an entire eco-system in one set.*
- *50 mile Closed Area for Longliners around the islands to protect coastal resources.*
- *50 mile Closed Area for Bottom Fishing to restrict the impact to nearby seamount resources.*
- *Prohibiting the Anchoring of Vessels greater than 50 feet in length to prevent damage to Essential Fish Habitat.*
- *Eco-systems Approach to Fishery Management which considers all parts of the ocean and the array of impacts not limited to fishing.*

*You should applaud the management measures implemented by the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council that has ensured the pristine conditions found today in the Marianas (as found in the Northwest Hawaiian Islands). Again, please be cognizant of the fact that there is no industrialized fishing in the Marianas.*

The Pew glossy photographs and comments by scientist should be the reason to continue the current management regime and support it. We the people of the Marianas have been part of a federal management team called Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council under the guidance of *Ms. Kitty Simonds*. We have seen and heard of destructive fishing practices in other jurisdictions and favored the more non-destructive forms in existence today. *As the saying goes "If it ain't broke don't fix it."*

*The obvious is that everyone is in agreement the areas of consideration are in a pristine state. One should ponder how that could ever be possible when everywhere else in the world there seems to be a multitude of problems with fish stocks (except for Alaska where the fishing season is highly monitored). The Fishery Council overseeing the Pacific Islands is comprised of members of these cultures that have a long cultural history with the waters surrounding the islands. This region is blessed because the Fishery Council members live in the communities impacted and have the ability to have one on one discussion with those that utilized the marine resources, again, in a responsible manner.*

The dynamics of fishery management cannot be equated to fish in the pond; the seasonality, the weather, tidal conditions; moon phase and others all come into play in understanding our world in the Marianas. The scientific snap-shot every couple of years does not work. A visitor will always ask where are the fish. The response will be that the fish should be here in April at the last quarter of the moon phase and the second run will be October depending on the ocean currents.

*Coral bleaching, sedimentation, pollution and industrialization (Hotels) of coastal areas have all taken a toll on the homes of our marine life. The communities of the Marianas still have an abundance of marine life which has allowed the people to survive through the centuries when fish was probably more than ninety percent of the daily nutritional diet whereas today it is probably considerably much less but just as equally important. The fishing impact is readily addressed and enforceable regulations easily achievable while the non-fishing impacts remain unmonitored or studied.*

*The native Pacific Islanders and those that chose to make islands a place they call home collectively practice sustainable fishing.* Again, with the exception of an emerging medium scale coastal longline fishery there are no industrialized fishing vessels operating within the US Exclusive Economic Zone of the Marianas. A minor point to your administration to justify the taking of the resources of the People of the Marianas; the US industrialized Purse Seine fleet is returning to nearly four times the number of vessels in a decade ago; adding to increased catch efforts for Highly Migratory Stock. Where is the genuine concern for conservation, could it be somehow displaced? *The bottom line is that the fishermen of the Marianas did not cause the degradation of high seas fish stocks or the rampant destruction of critical marine habitat. This raises the point; the only highly impacted fishing was conducted by Scientist conducting research.*

The marine resources of the archipelago are primarily consumed by the residents of these islands. *This ability to provide for the nutritional needs of these islands without having to employ industrialized and destructive fishing methods should be again recognized as*

good stewardship. Today, this is not the case; The Pew, a well funded charitable organization is allowed to proclaim a new Colonial Doctrine “We know what is good for you Islanders and better yet the World.” *The Pew group continues to insinuate that the resources are under attack by a phantom industrialized fishing fleet scouring the Marianas that commands the need for the immediate implementation protective measures, for the record does not exist.*

The arguments can be lengthy, but *we Islanders as loyal Americans have been very patriotic to the Nation.* More people from the Marianas were killed in Vietnam per capita. More of our soldiers serving in the Active Service, Guard and Reserve have been to the war in the Middle East than any other community of its population. More veterans live on Guam per capita than other place in the Union. The number of servicemen from the Marianas killed or injured in the current conflict per capita may be one of the highest in the nation. In essence, our loyalty to the nation has been because of the respect and equality given to its citizens, we hope and pray that you would continue to afford the people of the Marianas the same by respecting our hopes and aspirations as a people.

*In his frontier thesis, President Theodore Roosevelt wrote about the stressed racial struggle of the Native Americans: "The settler and pioneer have at bottom had justice on their side; this great continent could not have been kept as nothing but a game preserve for squalid savages." After a hundred years, times have not changed; the blatant disregard to protect the islander heritage, protect a way of life and most importantly protect the people of the Marianas from those who would perpetuate exterminating another Native American People to effectuate a draconian philosophy, is at its best, un-American.*

In closing, we hope and pray that your administration honor the wishes of the leaders and people of the Marianas. The numerous requests by the leaders of the Marianas, both Elected and Cultural implore that you reconsider placing the Marianas in your Marine Conservation Area Plan at this time. **Should you feel compelled at the final hour to exercise your Executive Authority through the Antiquities Act; kindly apply it to where it would be most beneficial to the Nation...we beseech you to apply it to the last bastion of native people, the People of the Marianas.** Thank you for your time and attention. Should you or your staff require more insight on the issue please feel free to contact me at the above number or address. Until then, I remain.

Co-operatively yours,

Manuel P. Duenas II  
President

Cc:

Members, United States Senate  
Members, United States Congress  
Native American Tribes / Organizations  
National and International Fishing Organizations  
International Media  
National Media  
Local Media