

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### ***Micronesian Leaders Join Growing Pacific Island Opposition to President Bush's Proposed Marianas Trench Marine Monument***

Palikir, Pohnpei, FSM (27 November 2008) Island leaders in the Pacific region concluded the two-day 10<sup>th</sup> Chief Executives Summit in Palikir, Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) last week with the signing of a joint letter asking President George W. Bush to “*refrain from designating any National Marine Monument in the CNMI [Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands] against the wishes of the indigenous peoples of these islands.*”

The letter to Bush was signed by FSM President Emanuel Mori, Palau President Tommy E. Remengesau, Jr., Republic of Marshall Islands President Litokwa Tomeing, Gov. Felix P. Camacho of Guam, Gov. Benigno R. Fitial of the CNMI, Gov. Sebastian Anefal of Yap State (FSM), Gov. John Ehsa of Pohnpei State (FSM), Gov. Robert Weilbacher of Kosrae State (FSM) and Gov. Wesley Simina of Chuuk State (FSM).

The Micronesian national, state and territorial leaders expressed their “*support for the Government of CNMI in their opposition to the implementation of a National Marine Monument in the CNMI, comprised of the far northern islands: Maug, Asuncion and Uracus, through the Antiquities Act,*” and stated that “*while the merits of the specific designation are debatable, the process is unacceptable to our people.*”

Leaders from the Mariana Archipelago (the CNMI and Guam) who have previously sent the Bush Administration opposition letters and resolutions include the CNMI Governor, all of the CNMI island mayors (i.e., the Northern Islands, Saipan, Tinian and Rota), the CNMI Speaker of the House and Senate President, Concerned Citizens of the CNMI, the Manamko Council, the Carolinian Affairs Advisory Committee, Congresswoman Madeleine Z. Bordallo of Guam, the Guam Governor, the Guam's Fishermen's Cooperative Association, Guam Senator Ben C. Pangelinan, and Dr. Judith P. Guthertz, Assistant Majority Leader, Guam Legislature (see [www.marianasconservation.org](http://www.marianasconservation.org)).

These letters were written in response to President Bush's Aug. 25, 2008, announcement directing his Administration to consider protecting a number of very large ocean areas, including the waters surrounding the three northern islands of CNMI. Corporate non-government environmental organizations publicly stated their support and high expectations that Bush would move forward with protecting these areas by fall. The Pew Environment Group (Pew Charitable Trusts) has been actively

campaigning for the past 10 months in the CNMI for a Marianas Trench Marine Monument as part of Bush's environmental '*blue legacy*'.

According to National Public Radio (May 23, 2008, /All Things Considered/) a small number of ocean advocates had been invited by the President's Council on Environmental Quality to an unusual, closed door meeting last year to identify areas within the US exclusive economic zone for Bush to consider. They took the invitation seriously based on Bush's use of the Antiquities Act to establish the nation's first-ever marine national monument in 2006. The Act allows the president to act unilaterally to designate a national monument without Congressional approval or a public review process. The marine monument in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI), which was thus designated, is the largest marine protected area in the US and spans more acres than all the national monuments, parks and sanctuaries combined. Bush's executive order creating the NWHI marine monument shuts down all commercial and recreational fishing in the area and prohibits indigenous fishermen from taking fish and other traditionally harvested resources out of the monument area. Everyone, including indigenous Hawaiians, must now apply and receive a permit to conduct any activity in what were once their ancestral waters.

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