

8-12-14

Dear President Obama:

As a collective of scientists that have been conducting research throughout the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument (PRIMNM) for over a decade we are writing to strongly commend and add our support to your proposal to expand the Monument to the 200-mile extent of U.S. sovereignty. This is a visionary action that will make the United States a leader in marine conservation and will establish a lasting legacy of protection for some of our country's most important ocean biodiversity.

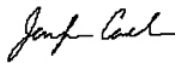
The undersigned scientists represent six major research institutions and are all members of the Palmyra Atoll Research Consortium (PARC; <http://www.palmyraresearch.org/research>), a group focused on understanding more about the biodiversity and ecology contained within Palmyra Atoll and other core sites in the PRIMNM. **[A list of the Pacific Remote Islands research can be found attached as Exhibit 1.]** Since 2001, when The Nature Conservancy purchased Palmyra Atoll and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service established the National Wildlife Refuge, we have dedicated our time and resources to increasing our understanding of this 'jewel' in the ocean – one of the last remaining intact marine ecosystems in the entire Pacific. Based on the results of years of research and observation we fervently believe the entire Exclusive Economic Zones of the atolls in the Monument should be preserved for the benefit of science and future generations. The proposed expansion would do an immense amount to preserve the ecological integrity of the valuable marine biodiversity in this area. We submit for your consideration three major benefits of that would be conferred by an expansion of PRIMNM:

1. Many of the most valuable and unique marine species in PRIMNM move beyond the current 50-mile border of the Monument and as such remain in peril. This includes PRIMNM's flagship species: sharks, sea turtles, seabirds, marine mammals, and manta rays. Many of these species are either endangered, threatened, or are commercially over-exploited. Members of our consortium have tracked species in each of these groups and conclusively determined that they move more than 50 miles from some of the atolls of PRIMNM and that this proposed expansion would substantially improve their protection.
2. The pristineness of the ecosystems in PRIMNM arguably make it America's most valuable natural marine laboratory. This is one of the last sites in the world where researchers can learn how marine ecosystems functioned prior to human disturbance. The study of uniquely intact systems like this is absolutely essential to determining how to more effectively manage and recover more impacted marine ecosystems in the US.
3. This proposed expansion would ensure vital sources of ecological connectivity that tie the habitats and species of PRIMNM together. These connections have been well studied by our group and are known to extend beyond the current 50-mile limit of protection. This includes connections between blue water pelagic ecosystems and coral reefs, between seabirds and tropical forests, and between PRIMNMs deep ocean/seamounts and coral reefs.

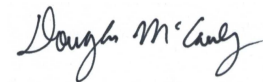
We understand and applaud your desire to hear from local communities that might be impacted by a monument designation or expansion. We consider our consortium scientists and NGO partners as the only non-governmental, “local” residents of the Monument. As residents in PRIMNM our consortium of scientists and NGO partners are major local stakeholders in this decision and we appreciate the consideration given to our position.

PRIMNM is a truly unique and special place, of global significance for conservation. It contains some of the last pristine tropical ecosystems that remain intact and undisturbed by humans. Our years of research in this area suggest that the significance of increased protection for the marine biodiversity in this area cannot be underestimated. There are only a handful of other places in the world, such as Chagos Island in the Indian Ocean, where this type of protection currently occurs. Just as the establishment of Yellowstone National Park was an ambitious action in its time that created a legacy of protection for wide-ranging terrestrial species like bison, grizzly bear, and elk – so will the establishment of PRIMNM serve as a lasting monument for protecting America’s sharks, marine mammals, sea turtles, manta rays, tuna – and many more.

Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to comment on this historic proposal to create the largest marine protected area in the world. As scientists who are directly and significantly impacted by the proposal – for the better – we strongly support expanding the protections to the fullest extent. We believe it is in the best interest of science and future generations of the American public to preserve this unique and pristine ecosystem forever.



Jennifer Caselle, PhD
Research Biologist and PARC Director
University of California Santa Barbara
PARC affiliation: UCSB



Douglas McCauley, PhD
Assistant Professor
University of California Santa Barbara
PARC affiliation: UCSB



Suzanne D. Case
The Nature Conservancy
Executive Director, Hawai’i/Palmyra Program



Robert Dunbar, PhD
W.M. Keck Professor of Earth Science
Stanford University
PARC affiliation: Stanford



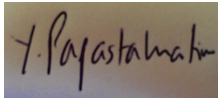
Stephen Monismith, PhD
Professor and Chair Dept. of Civil & Env. Eng.
Stanford University
PARC affiliation: Stanford



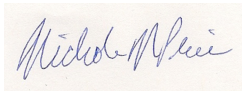
Fiorenza Micheli, PhD
Professor
Hopkins Marine Station of Stanford University
PARC affiliation: Stanford



Jennifer E. Smith, PhD
Associate Professor
Center for Marine Biodiversity and Conservation
Scripps Institution of Oceanography
PARC affiliation: SIO



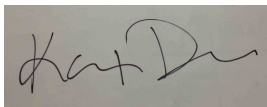
Yannis Papastamatiou, PhD
Research Fellow
University of St Andrews
PARC affiliation: UCSB



Nichole Price, PhD
Senior Research Scientist
Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences
PARC affiliation: SIO



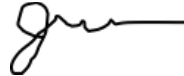
Darcy Bradley
PhD Student
University of California Santa Barbara
PARC affiliation: UCSB



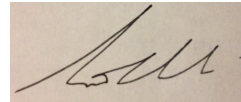
Kathryn Davis
Graduate Student
University of California Santa Barbara
PARC affiliation: UCSB



Hillary Young, PhD
Assistant Professor
University of California Santa Barbara
PARC affiliation: UCSB



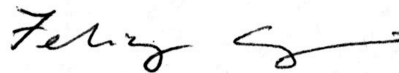
Jonathan Gardner, PhD
Professor of Marine Biology
Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand
PARC affiliation: VUW



Stuart Sandin, PhD
Associate Professor
Center for Marine Biodiversity and Conservation
Scripps Institution of Oceanography
PARC affiliation: SIO



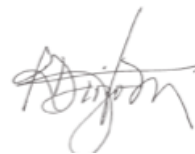
Eleanor Sterling
Chief Conservation Scientist
Center for Biodiversity and Conservation
American Museum of Natural History
PARC affiliation: AMNH



Felicity Arengo
Associate Director
Center for Biodiversity and Conservation
American Museum of Natural History
PARC affiliation: AMNH



Alex Wegmann, PhD
Program Manager
Island Conservation
PARC affiliation: Island Conservation



Rodolfo Dirzo, PhD
Professor
Stanford University
PARC affiliation: Stanford



Ana Sofia Guerra
Researcher
Stanford University
PARC affiliation: Stanford



Chelsea L. Wood, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
University of Michigan
PARC affiliation: Stanford