



Society for Conservation Biology

A global community of conservation professionals

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26 September 2008

James Connaughton
Chairman
Council on Environmental Quality
722 Jackson Place, N.W.
Washington D.C. 20503

Re: President Bush's Memorandum for Pacific Marine Conservation Assessment (8/25/08)

Dear Mr. Chairman:

We are very excited about the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for marine conservation afforded by the Pacific Marine Conservation Area recently proposed by President Bush. Fulfilling this proposal would create an unprecedentedly large and important marine conservation area, raising the profile of the United States as an international leader in conscientious marine management.

The remote islands and atolls of the US Pacific slated for protection by this proposal represent some of the healthiest marine environments in the world's oceans. Recent academic and federal reports have highlighted the unique biological assets found in these areas. Research groups led by Scripps Institution of Oceanography and Stanford University have documented fish communities on Palmyra and Kingman atolls that are larger than any previously described (Stevenson et al., 2007, Sandin et al. 2008). Similarly massive fish communities have been documented by NOAA scientists on the other uninhabited islands and atolls under consideration for protection (Brainard et al., 2005). Importantly, these fish communities are dominated by large-bodied predatory fishes, like sharks, snappers, and groupers (DeMartini et al., 2008). Because of the large areas of coral reef needed to support viable populations of large, wide-ranging predators, the island-wide protection proposed here will be invaluable.

Furthermore, the coral reefs of these islands support abundant coral growth, with surprisingly low prevalence of disease and disease-causing bacteria (Dinsdale et al., 2008, Sandin et al., 2008). Recent studies in the region have suggested that the intact structure of the food web (due to the lack of local fishing) may help to confer this resistance to environmental stress (Jackson 2008). Protection of these remote island areas will provide marine researchers and managers with natural laboratories to understand better the many benefits of effective fisheries

management for the fish community and the essential habitat-building corals themselves (Knowlton and Jackson, 2008).

The Pacific Marine Conservation proposal capitalizes on a tremendous chance to dramatically alter the seascape of conservation in the United States and across the globe. We applaud President Bush's initiative to conserve this invaluable national resource.

Sincerely,

Ellen Hines
President
Marine Section
Society for Conservation Biology

Chris Parsons
Chair
Policy Committee
Marine Section
Society for Conservation Biology

On behalf of the Marine Section, Society for Conservation Biology

Note: References appended, page 3.

Cc: John Fitzgerald
Policy Director
Society for Conservation Biology

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