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Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument Designated a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area

The fragile and unique marine ecosystems of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands encompassed by the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument will receive additional protection under a new internationally recognized designation announced today by NOAA.

The designation, which was finalized on Apr. 3 by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), declares the waters of the monument a "Particularly Sensitive Sea Area" (PSSA). The designation puts into effect internationally recognized measures designed to protect marine resources of ecological or cultural significance from damage by ships while helping keep mariners safe.

On May 1, special zones known as "Areas to be Avoided" (ATBAs) will appear on international nautical charts to direct ships away from coral reefs, shipwrecks and other ecologically or culturally sensitive areas in the monument PSSA that may also pose a navigation hazard. These zones, which were recently adopted by the IMO, will expand upon the ATBAs previously established in the area.

An IMO-adopted ship reporting system will also go into effect on May 1. Vessels planning to pass through the monument PSSA on their way to or from a U.S. port or place will be required to notify monument managers by reporting into the system. For other vessels transiting the area, reporting will be voluntary but recommended. The reporting system will provide critical alerts and other information to assist mariners in navigating safely through the area.

"NOAA welcomes this additional layer of protection and international recognition for the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument," said retired Navy Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "This designation will alert international mariners to exercise extreme caution when navigating through the monument."

The monument is the second marine protected area in the United States to receive PSSA designation, the first being Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary in 2002. It joins 10 other PSSAs worldwide, including the Great Barrier Reef and the Galapagos Archipelago.

The PSSA covers all waters of the monument, which includes a 1,200-mile stretch of coral islands, seamounts, banks and shoals. Established in June 2006 by President Bush, the monument is home to more than 7,000 marine species and contains 4,500 square miles of pristine coral reefs.

Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument is managed jointly by three co-trustees — the Department of Commerce, Department of the Interior and the state of Hawaii — and represents a cooperative conservation approach to protecting the entire ecosystem. The monument area includes the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve, the Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge/Battle of Midway National Memorial, the Hawaiian

Islands National Wildlife Refuge, the Hawai'i State Seabird Sanctuary at Kure Atoll, and Northwestern Hawaiian Islands State Marine Refuge.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

On the Web:

NOAA: <http://noaa.gov>

Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument: <http://hawaiireef.noaa.gov/>

International Maritime Organization: <http://www.imo.org/>