



NOAA NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



Contact: Dan Dennison

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

808-397-2660 ext. 239

September 23, 2009

World's Largest Marine Protected Areas Sign Partnership Agreement

HONOLULU – Today two of the world's largest marine protected areas announced a historic alliance to enhance the management and protection of almost 300,000 square miles of marine habitat in the Pacific Ocean.

President Anote Tong of the Republic of Kiribati (pronounced Kee Ree Bass), witnessed the signing of an agreement with the United States that establishes a “sister site” relationship between the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, located in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, and the Phoenix Islands Protected Area near the equator in the Republic of Kiribati. Managers of both sites will meet in November in French Polynesia to formalize the agreement.

Combined, the two sites encompass 25 percent of all marine protected areas on Earth. The partnership links the sites and is designed to enhance management knowledge and practices for these tropical and subtropical marine and terrestrial island ecosystems.

Eileen Sobeck, Department of the Interior deputy assistant secretary, signed the agreement on behalf of the United States. Elizabeth Moore, director of International Sanctuaries, represented NOAA at the signing in New York.

“The United States is very pleased to engage in this marine conservation partnership with the Republic of Kiribati,” said Sobeck. “In the face of challenges like climate change and increasing societal demands on ever scarcer marine resources – challenges that transcend national boundaries and dwarf the ability of any single nation to address – partnerships like this

one are critical to the success of our efforts to preserve this natural heritage for future generations.”

“This agreement represents both the culmination and the start of our work with our colleagues in Kiribati and collaboration between NOAA and our colleagues in the State of Hawaii and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to demonstrate the benefit of collaboration to protect these valuable resources,” said Moore.

When it was established in 2006, Papahānaumokuākea was the largest marine protected area in the world, protecting natural, cultural and historic resources within an area of approximately 140,000 square miles (362,075 square kilometers). The monument’s extensive coral reefs are home to over 7,000 marine species, one quarter of which are found only in the Hawaiian Archipelago.

In 2008, the Phoenix Island Protected Area was founded to protect the archipelago’s terrestrial and marine resources, becoming the largest marine protected area in the world today at approximately 158,500 square miles (410,500 square kilometers). The coral reefs and bird populations of the islands are highly unique and virtually untouched by humans. The protected area also includes underwater seamounts and other deep-sea habitat.

“Our sites are part of a growing trend globally in ocean protection – the establishment of large-scale marine protected areas,” said `Aulani Wilhelm, NOAA’s superintendent for Papahānaumokuākea. “By partnering, we hope to collaborate on innovative initiatives highlighting not only the ecological connections we share, but also Pacific heritage and cultural connections we have as island people across Oceania.”

Removed from most human activity, both areas serve as global “sentinel sites” by providing potential early warning and a comparative baseline of understanding of how natural, less disturbed systems react to changing climate conditions and external influences. Although geographically distant from their respective local population centers, both sites are supported by and rely on involvement of local and indigenous communities to develop successful management regimes.

“Our sites provide ocean insurance for the Pacific against the depletion of marine life that has accelerated across the globe,” said Tukabu Teroroko, director of the Phoenix Island

Protected Area. “Together we can more effectively address the complex challenges of managing such large ocean areas.”

“Within these large seascapes we also have protected islands that provide habitat critical to the survival of both marine and terrestrial wildlife,” said Susan White, Fish and Wildlife superintendent for Papahānaumokuākea. “This agreement will help us manage across the ecosystems by comparing and sharing our efforts with each other, as we face many of the same challenges.”

The Phoenix Islands Protected Area is a unique partnership between the government of Kiribati that owns the Phoenix Islands, non-governmental conservation organizations and regional governments. It is supported through a unique “reverse fishing license” financing program, in which the government of Kiribati is reimbursed for the amount that they would have made from selling fishing licenses. The government of Kiribati and an advisory board, working collaboratively to ensure the long-term sustainability of this remarkable place, administers the trust.

Papahānaumokuākea is cooperatively managed to ensure ecological integrity and achieve strong, long-term protection and perpetuation of Northwestern Hawaiian Island ecosystems, Native Hawaiian culture, and heritage resources for current and future generations. Three co-trustees – the Department of Commerce, Department of the Interior, and State of Hawaii – joined by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, protect this special place.

Both sites were nominated this year by their respective governments as World Heritage Sites, a designation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

###

On the Web:

Photos of Papahānaumokuākea: https://marinelife.noaa.gov/media_lib/index.aspx

Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument: <http://www.papahanaumokuakea.gov>

Photos of Phoenix Islands: <http://www.phoenixislands.org/gallery.html>

Phoenix Islands Protected Area: <http://www.phoenixislands.org>

UN World Heritage sites: <http://whc.unesco.org>