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October 22, 2020

Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council
1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1400
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Chairman Archie Taotasi Soliai and Director Kitty Simonds:

We, the undersigned, write to express our strong opposition to the Western Pacific Fisheries Management Council's (WESPAC) proposal to open our Pacific Marine National Monuments -- Papahānaumokuākea, Pacific Remote Islands, Marianas Trench, and Rose Atoll -- to commercial fishing.

From the deepest canyon on Earth, to the most pristine atolls and healthiest and oldest corals in U.S. waters, Pacific Monuments safeguard treasured places with unparalleled natural and scientific significance. They protect habitats home to thousands of marine species, including some found nowhere else on Earth, and scientists continue to discover new species on nearly every new expedition. The monuments provide critical habitat to sea birds, endangered and threatened turtles, sharks and rays, the rare Hawaiian monk seals, and migrating whales.

For years, WESPAC leadership has asserted that the monuments' protections are harming fisheries. There is no evidence suggesting the monument designations harm commercial fisheries. In fact, according to a recent study in *Nature*, the Hawaii longlining fleet's catch and its catch per unit effort **increased** since the monuments' designations. These findings demonstrate that fishermen benefit from the spillover of healthy fish populations protected by the monuments. WESPAC is acting against the interests of the fishers who it represents by continuing to provide inaccurate information about the impacts of marine monuments on commercial fishing and demanding the rollback of regulations that support long-term sustainable fisheries. We agree with the State of Hawaii's opposition to your actions. As the Department of Land and Natural Resources' Chair wrote: "[fishing restrictions] are a key component of the proper care and management" of thousands of protected species."

Opening our Pacific Marine National Monuments to fishing will not provide economic relief to commercial fishers face during the pandemic. Supply is not the problem, it is market demand. To bolster our nation's fishermen in this challenging time, we must invest in meaningful solutions, including direct relief and strategies to help combat the effects of climate change and protect biodiversity. Opening our monuments will not address the lack of market demand. It will be destructive to the unique species and habitats found in these treasured places as well as the fish stocks that benefit from marine protected areas.

The marine national monuments are national treasures that preserve the cultural, historic and natural resources found in American waters. The Pacific Marine Monuments were created based on science, and ongoing research demonstrates even greater reason to continue their protection. It is time to put science first and join the majority of the public calling for the continued protection of our Pacific Marine National Monuments, which belong to all of us and future generations. Our marine national monuments are crucial to the health of our global ocean and help ensure the sustainability of our fisheries. We must ensure their continued protection.