

Dear Mr. President,

I write in support of American Samoa Governor Lemanu Mauga in opposition to expansion of the Pacific Remote Islands National Monument and echo his call for further study before any adverse action is taken in this regard.

Under another but still current Presidential Executive Order 13537 — The IGIA shall solicit information and advice from the elected leaders of the U.S. Insular Areas of Guam, American Samoa, the United States Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and make recommendations to the President annually, or as appropriate, on the establishment or implementation of Federal programs concerning these Insular Areas.

Accordingly, it is urgent that you direct the IGIA to convene a meeting with the IGIA Co-Chairs, the Governor, myself, and appropriate NOAA and other representatives of your Administration to address this matter prior to any expansion of the PRIMNM in accordance with Executive Order 13537. This is also in line with Executive Order Executive Order 13985, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities, such as American Samoa which is a prime example of an underserved community with more than 50 % of our residents below the US poverty level.

The IGIA should be directed to solicit advice from the leaders of the Pacific territories, study the matter further and weigh the impact on the jurisdiction most effected, namely American Samoa. American Samoa, 7000 miles from Washington, D.C., is as rural a community can be in the United States and is traditionally built around a fishing-based culture. The Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument (PRIMNM) was expanded by the Obama Administration and removed fishing operations from a U.S. EEZ area that was once the size of California and is now four times that!

Further increasing the PRIMNM by over 50% would destroy our fishing economy. Yet thousands of foreign fishing boats, predominantly Chinese, surround that PRIMNM border and often encroach and illegally fish upon it. The PRIMNM was one of the 6 recommended, and most commonsensically, to be managed under the long existing legal rubric Congress has prescribed under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Management Act. However, actions on other areas including those related to restoration of management and control of the PRIMNM to the Western Pacific Fisheries Management Council (WPFMC) await and the American Samoan fishing community

continues to suffer in the meantime from unfair, subsidized competition by its Pacific neighbors.

Also, why is the WPFMC budget being cut over \$300,000 at a time when we need it increased? And why are we even contemplating removing American Tuna resources from the global food supply at a period of record high inflation? Currently, it makes no sense to entertain removal of a basic American food source with all time high inflation now, particularly food inflation on a core staple and traditionally economical food source for millions, particularly our schoolchildren and military servicemen, who benefit from American sourced tuna from American Samoa.

This Monument was first established by President Bush in 2009, and vastly expanded in 2014 by President Obama to now encompass 495,189 square miles of U.S. waters that were previously among the most productive fishing grounds for the U.S. tuna purse seine fishery. This is a surface fishery that has zero interactions with or impacts on the deep-sea benthic habitats and ecosystems which were the original focus for protection by this Monument. Marine Monuments are not effective for managing wide-ranging highly migratory fish stocks such as tuna because they simply do not respect man made boundaries. Instead, these stocks are sustainably utilized through science-based conservation and management by international fishery management bodies in which the U.S. participates.

A great deal is at stake:

- the closure of U.S. waters within this Marine Monument is one major reason why our fleet is forced to pay as much as \$2M per vessel annually to Pacific Island nations to access the productive tuna fishing grounds within their waters.

- the most heavily impacted part of the U.S. fleet operates out of American Samoa whose people and 80% of its economy depend on the landing and processing of tuna.

- this untenable financial situation recently forced the sale to foreign operators of multiple U.S. purse seine vessels (approximately 20% of the entire U.S. fleet) thereby reducing U.S. tuna production by approximately 70,000 tons and increasing the U.S. seafood trade deficit by up to \$100 million annually.

- Current U.S. policy is destroying U.S. tuna fisheries while providing zero conservation benefit to migratory tuna resources. This loss of U.S. fishing and processing jobs undermines our national security interests in these strategic areas of the globe.

As such I encourage you to hold off on any expansion to the monument without local public input and without fully considering the impact on small Pacific communities. Instead, I hope to work with your administration to find more effective ways to preserve our marine resources without undue impact on the common American fisherman.