

Pacific islands paradise now protected

March 29 2006

Kiribati, a small Pacific Islands nation, announced Tuesday it is creating the third largest marine protected area in the world.

With eight atolls and two submerged reef systems, the nearly uninhabited Phoenix Islands Protected Area is the largest such area in the Pacific Islands at 73,800 square miles, twice the size of Portugal. It is the first marine protected area in the region with deep-sea habitat, including underwater mountains.

Located in the central Pacific between Hawaii and Fiji, the Phoenix Islands form an archipelago several hundred miles long. They are part of the Republic of Kiribati, which is comprised of 33 islands, making it the largest atoll nation in the world.

Kiribati President Anote Tong said establishing the protected area ensures the people of Kiribati can always benefit from the rich ocean life of their home.

"If the coral and reefs are protected, then the fish will thrive and grow and bring us benefit," Tong said. "In this way all species of fish can be protected so none become depleted or extinct."

The Republic of Kiribati and the New England Aquarium jointly developed the project with funding and technical assistance from the Global Conservation Fund.

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