

Federal agencies must protect America's Pacific Island monuments from illegal fishing

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Today, Marine Conservation Institute filed a formal petition to the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Commerce, asking them to prohibit commercial fishing in America's sensitive and pristine Pacific Island marine national monuments, a ban that President George W. Bush declared when he established the monuments over three years ago.

In January 2009, President Bush established three marine monuments in the central Pacific and prohibited [commercial fishing](#) in them because they are incredibly rich marine ecosystems that have been damaged by commercial fishing and in the past. Collectively, the monuments cover 193,000 square miles, an area larger than the state of California. These are the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument (a collection of isolated coral island possessions), the Rose Atoll Marine National Monument in American Samoa, and the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument. The three monuments wrap around a number of National Wildlife Refuges, most of which existed prior to the creation of the monuments.

William Chandler, Vice President for Government Affairs at Marine Conservation Institute, said, "When President Bush designated these magnificent areas for preservation, he specifically directed that commercial fishing be prohibited in them immediately. But now, over three years later, the fishing ban and associated penalties for [illegal fishing](#) within the monuments have yet to be put into place. As a result,

and despite evidence of illegal fishing in the monuments, the Coast Guard won't enforce the ban. This is inexplicable. We're just trying to get the Administration to do what the presidential designation documents say. There is simply no justification for delay."

Marine Conservation Institute actively supported the designation of the Pacific Remote Islands National Monument, and remains an advocate for conservation of natural resources within all of the Pacific monuments. Illegal fishing within the monuments threatens these relatively pristine [marine ecosystems](#) and their populations of corals, rare reef [fish](#), overfished tuna, sea turtles, whales, and seabirds.

Chandler said, "It is hard to believe a clear directive of the president has gone unimplemented for so long. The responsible federal agencies have had three years to establish fishing rules that ban commercial fishing and leave recreational and indigenous intact, but they have not yet delivered. Without such a ban, these unique ecosystems with their sensitive populations could be damaged by fishermen or their vessels. The world's largest population of giant clams, nesting sea turtles, and areas of tremendous biological diversity are all at risk."

More information: The full text of the Marine Conservation Institute petition to the Secretaries of the Interior and Commerce is available at: www.marine-conservation.org

Provided by Marine Conservation Biology Institute

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