

February 7, 2008

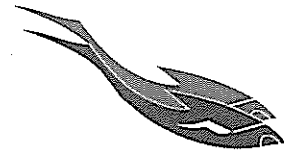
President George Bush
The White House
Washington, DC 20001

Dear President Bush,

As President of the Ocean Futures Society, member of the board of directors of the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation and one who has dedicated his life to educating the public about the marine environment and working to ensure its health, thank you for your efforts on behalf of our oceans. Your administration has been both diligent and successful in focusing attention on the sea and your visionary action to protect the northwestern Hawaiian Islands – Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument – will stand as an enduring legacy.

Today, I am writing to you about another marine conservation opportunity in one of the most far flung corners of the U.S. territorial sea. Lying near the island of Iwo Jima, site of one of the hardest fought battles of World War II, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in the far western Pacific is America's only Asian possession. (See Map) The waters of the Commonwealth lie entirely within US jurisdiction, and, as the name implies, sit astride a portion of the deepest ocean canyon on the planet, the famed Mariana Trench. Its depth is so great that if Mt. Everest were dropped into the nearly 36,000 foot deep Challenger Deep it would be covered by over a mile of water. To one steeped in marine lore from an early age, it seems remarkable to me that this most significant global geologic feature has not been previously recognized or protected. The Mariana Trench, more than nine times as deep as the Grand Canyon, deserves recognition as part of our global marine heritage and deserves to be managed within the U.S. National Marine Sanctuary Program.

Although the deepest point of the Mariana Trench lies outside U.S. territory, a fine representative sample of the northern portion of the Trench along with several adjacent islands within the Commonwealth would make a spectacular new marine monument – and in fact, depending upon the final boundaries, would be the second largest protected area in the world exceeded only by the Papahānaumokuākea MNM. Such a monument would promote for education and research, and protect one of the premier ocean features on the planet. Ranging from tropical coral reefs to the deepest depths in the sea, along with underwater volcanoes and vents, this monument would embrace a truly spectacular diversity of habitats and living marine resources. Although little research has been done in this region due to its remoteness and the great depth, future work almost certainly will demonstrate that it contains a wealth of rare and unique creatures.



For more than 30 years, the three uninhabited and active volcanic islands within the proposed monument have been protected under the Commonwealth constitution as nature reserves. However, the adjacent ocean is under U.S. federal jurisdiction so Commonwealth protection now stops at the water's edge. Only action by you or the Congress can protect the nearby sea.

Economic activity within the proposed monument is virtually nonexistent but the benefits to the Commonwealth from designation of a world-class monument would be significant. The global attention that presidential action will generate will enhance interest in local tourism, the primary economic driver in Saipan and the Commonwealth. Opportunities for deep ocean research and education would open additional avenues for local benefit.

As you consider your opportunities to further benefit America's marine heritage over the next year, I respectfully ask you to take a serious look at the potential for designating a world-class Marina Trench Marine National Monument.

Thank you on behalf of humanity and our oceans.

Sincerely,

Jean-Michel Cousteau

cc: James Connaughton, Chair, Council on Environmental Quality
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Director of Ocean and Coastal Policy, Washington, D.C.
VADM Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Undersecretary of Oceans and Atmosphere,
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Jack Dunnigan, NOAA Assistant Administrator, National Ocean Service
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