

# NEWS

**For Immediate Release**  
**August 25, 2008**



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## **OCEAN CONSERVATIONISTS LAUD PRESIDENT BUSH'S PROPOSAL TO PROTECT VAST PACIFIC CORAL REEF AREAS**

**Washington DC:** Prominent ocean conservationists are encouraged by President Bush's announcement today directing his Administration to consider protecting a number of very large, ecologically important ocean areas. However, they are concerned that the proposal could allow for multiple use practices that would harm the species and ecosystems in these areas. The sites are remote reef-cloaked US possessions and their surrounding waters in the Central Pacific, and the world's smallest atoll in American Samoa.

Marine Conservation Biology Institute (**MCBI**) and Environmental Defense Fund (**EDF**) have worked together for nearly two years to encourage the Bush Administration to protect these areas from industrial fishing and other threats to ocean life.

"People everywhere should praise this visionary idea," said Marine Conservation Biology Institute Board member Dr. Sylvia A. Earle "if President Bush does what no world leader has ever done before: fully protect these colossal areas of shallow and deep coral reefs, seamounts and other vulnerable marine ecosystems in the Pacific Ocean, now and forever," she said.

Dr. Earle, perhaps the world's most famous ocean explorer, served as Chief Scientist of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration under President George H.W. Bush. She is also Chairman of Deep Ocean Exploration and Research and Explorer-in-Residence at the National Geographic Society.

"Two years ago, President Bush shook the world when he made the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands a Marine National Monument and what was then the world's largest no-take marine reserve," said MCBI Board member James C. Greenwood. "He gifted Americans and the world by protecting life in an incredible area of ocean 1,200 miles long and 100 miles wide," said The Honorable Mr. Greenwood, a Republican who served six terms as a US Representative from Pennsylvania and was a founder of the House Oceans Caucus before leaving Congress and becoming President of the Biotechnology Industry Organization.

### **Marine Conservation Biology Institute**

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“If the President ultimately acts to protect these amazing areas of ocean to the fullest extent,” said Mr. Greenwood, “his conservation legacy will rival that of President Teddy Roosevelt. Leadership in protecting our planet can and must come from Republicans and Democrats alike,” he continued. “The fate of our oceans is far more important than partisan politics.”

Large fish species, corals and vulnerable marine ecosystems are disappearing around the world. In the last several decades, 90% of big fishes including bluefin tunas, blue marlin and large groupers, have been wiped out. A growing number of marine scientists around the world believe that fully protected no-take marine reserves are the most powerful way to counter these losses.

Dr. Earle, Mr. Greenwood, and MCBI and EDF staff members met repeatedly with high-level Bush Administration officials, encouraging them to safeguard the waters surrounding various Central Pacific islands and Rose Atoll in American Samoa, among other sites.

“The President’s announcement is highly encouraging” said William J. Chandler, Vice President for Government Affairs at Marine Conservation Biology Institute. “By using his presidential powers under the Antiquities Act and other statutes to fully protect ocean areas like he did in Hawaii, President Bush could write a new chapter in the history of conservation.”

“This could be the best thing ever for ocean conservation. These vast Pacific areas are nearly three times the size of Texas,” said Dr. Elliott A. Norse, founder and President of Marine Conservation Biology Institute. “Indeed, they’re bigger than Mexico. Countless seabirds, dolphins, fishes, corals and tiny things as yet undiscovered could survive as a result, free of the threats that are eliminating them elsewhere, *if* the President gives full protection to these areas. I am thrilled that President Bush is considering this,” said Dr. Norse.

The world’s coral reefs and coral species are in trouble. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration recently reported that nearly half of US coral reefs are in poor to fair condition. And a large group of international scientists recently reported that one-third of reef-building corals face elevated extinction risk from climate change and local impacts.

The areas being considered are coral islands, atolls and reefs that are US territories and possessions in the Central Pacific Ocean, including Baker, Howland, Jarvis, Johnston, Kingman, Palmyra, Wake and Rose. Dr. Earle, Dr. Norse and 192 other American marine scientists recently called upon President Bush to give strong permanent protection to these reefs and their surroundings. The Governor of American Samoa, Togiola T.A. Tulafono has requested the President designate Rose Atoll in American Samoa as a national monument.

**Marine Conservation Biology Institute** is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing the science of marine conservation biology and securing protection for the world’s marine ecosystems. Founded in 1996, MCBI is headquartered in Bellevue WA, and has offices in Honolulu HI, Glen Ellen CA and Washington DC.

Go to [www.mcbi.org](http://www.mcbi.org), then click “Journalists,” for images and more information on these areas.

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