June 16, 2008

President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush:

On behalf of the 95 member institutions of the Consortium for Ocean Leadership, I am writing to encourage you to preserve access for scientific research and monitoring for any National Monuments that you may designate during the remainder of your Presidency. The Consortium for Ocean Leadership supported your designation of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, but this action has had unintended consequences of severely restricting scientific research that would further elaborate and guide conservation and management efforts for the monument. On several occasions, researchers from the Census of Marine Life, an international program that engages more than 2,000 scientists from 80 countries, and that has discovered more than 5,300 new marine animals since 2003, has been severely hampered in its efforts to secure the necessary research permits to conduct Census projects within the monument.

It has come to our attention that you may be considering possibly designating the islands and surrounding reefs and atolls of Baker, Howland, Jarvis, Johnston, Kingman, Palmyra, Rose and Wake as National Monuments. These Central Pacific Islands contain some of the most intact, pristine, and biologically diverse coral reef ecosystems in the Pacific. They provide important habitats for resident and migratory fish and wildlife, nesting and breeding habitats for millions of birds, sanctuary for threatened and endangered species, such as green and hawksbill sea turtles and the Hawaiian monk seal. Nevertheless, if scientists are denied access to these National Monuments, the much needed research to monitor the health of the coral reef ecosystem and its ability to adapt to an ever-changing climate and ocean chemistry will be lost. Scientists and managers will lack critical information to set proper restoration, protection, and management targets.

Should you choose to designate any one or all of these islands, or any other marine areas, as National Monuments, we respectfully recommend you explicitly provide open access, with due precautions to avoid negative impacts, to these areas for the purposes of scientific research and monitoring. Management decisions need to be based on the best possible science in order to be sustainable. We firmly believe that a strong nexus between scientific research and conservation management is the best means to ensure the legacy of these national treasures.

Sincerely,

Robert B. Gagosian, Ph.D
President and CEO
Consortium for Ocean Leadership

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