

Obama vastly expands Pacific reserve

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Coral at Jarvis Island National Wildlife Refuge

US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

US President Barack Obama has vastly increased marine protection in the

Pacific by declaring 1 million square kilometres of ocean part of a giant marine reserve.

Obama's [declaration](#) on 25 September increased from 210,000 square kilometres to 1.3 million km² the size of the protected area around a group of small islands in the central Pacific, stretching from Wake Atoll to Jarvis Island. This makes the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument (PRINM), originally created by George W. Bush, one of the largest marine protected areas (MPAs) in the world. Thousands of sea birds, turtles, sharks and other marine life will now be fully protected from commercial, if not from recreational, fishing over this extended area.

The expansion was not as large as some researchers and conservationists were hoping. It had been suggested that [the reserve could have been expanded by 1.8 million km²](#), and the scale-down appears to be a concession to the tuna fishing industry, which is active in the region.

Still, the expansion still means Obama has put more of the planet under protection than any other world leader ever, says Elliott Norse, chief scientist at the Marine Conservation Institute, an NGO based in Seattle, Washington, that has played a central role in the creation and expansion of PRIMNM.

"We have been working to make this happen for nearly a decade," says Norse. "We're thrilled that President Obama has done this."

Norse says the expansion should act as a trigger to nations which have been less progressive in protected their own waters, such as China, Russia, and France, saying, "We would love to see these and other nations take their cue from this action."