



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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GCC professor lobbies in DC for trench sanctuary

Jonita Kerr, associate professor of science at Guam Community College, was part of a determined delegation of Mariana Islands residents that traveled to Washington D.C. November 28 – December 2, 2016, to lobby for the marine sanctuary designation of the Mariana Trench Marine Monument. Kerr joined Senator Paul A. Manglona of Rota; Saipan resident Ignacio ‘Ike’ Cabrera, Chair of the Friends of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument; and Harry Blalock, owner of Axe Murderer Dive Tours in Saipan, in hand-delivering a petition signed by 1500 people from the CNMI and Guam, along with letters of support from elected officials and nonprofit organizations, for the sanctuary designation.

The group met with White House officials on the Council of Environmental Quality, and with representatives of the Department of Insular Affairs, Department of the Interior, NOAA Sanctuaries, NOAA Fisheries, and the Department of Commerce. They also met with Matt Herman, Chief of Staff for Guam Delegate Madeleine Bordallo, and Congressman Gregorio Kilili Sablan of the CNMI. At the end of a busy week, the group submitted an official nomination for sanctuary designation, which Kerr reports was accepted the following week. This could lead to President Obama’s approval before he leaves office, she noted.

Kerr, who serves as advisor of the GCC Ecowarriors student organization and is an environmental activist, helped author a position paper making the scientific and cultural justification for designating the Mariana Trench a marine sanctuary.

“I was honored to be a part of this group of passionate ocean protection advocates,” said Kerr. “A national marine sanctuary would provide the means to deliver outreach and education to showcase the wonders of the monument. It would also provide research and climate change mitigation opportunities, as well as protect the sea floor from mineral extraction for generations to come,” she said.

The sanctuary designation would also provide funding for a visitors’ center on Rota, and protection and management of the Monument.

The Pew Charitable Trust Global Ocean Legacy Project supported the delegation’s trip to D.C. Angelo Villagomez, who was born on Guam and raised on Saipan, was instrumental in forming the Mariana Island group to argue for sanctuary designation; Seth Horstmeyer and Matt Rand, Directors of the Global Ocean Legacy Project, coordinated meetings and offered guidance.

Declared in an executive order by President George W. Bush just before he left office in January 2009, the Mariana Trench Marine National Monument protects 95,000 square miles of water and submerged lands divided into three units. The Islands unit includes the water and submerged lands surrounding the Northern Mariana Islands of Farallon de Pajaros or Uracas, Maug, and Asuncion. The Trench unit, lying within the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) to the east of the Mariana Islands, extends from north of Uracas to south of Guam. The Volcanic unit includes 21 submarine volcanoes and seamounts dotting the sea floor along the island archipelago.

“As President Obama gets ready to leave office, we hope that he will approve the national marine sanctuary designation and begin the process that will benefit the residents of the CNMI, Guam and the world,” said Kerr.

Suggested photo caption:

Group lobbies for Marianas Trench Marine Monument designation

From left: Sen. Paul Manglona, CNMI Legislature, Rota; Matt Rand, Director, Pew Global Ocean Legacy Project; Joni Kerr, GCC Associate Professor; Harry Blalok, owner, Axe Murderer Tours, Saipan; Ignacio V. Cabrera, chairman, Friends of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, Saipan; and Angelo Villagomez, Officer, Pew Global Ocean Legacy Project, stand in front of the White House during their trip to Washington D.C. to lobby for the marine sanctuary designation of the Mariana Trench Marine Monument.

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