



Palau National Marine Sanctuary

Building Palau's future and honoring its past

Caring for the environment has long been an important part of Palau's culture. For centuries, traditional leaders on these Pacific Ocean islands have worked to protect local waters through enactment of a "bul"—a moratorium on catching key species or fishing on certain reefs to protect habitats that are critical to the community's food security.

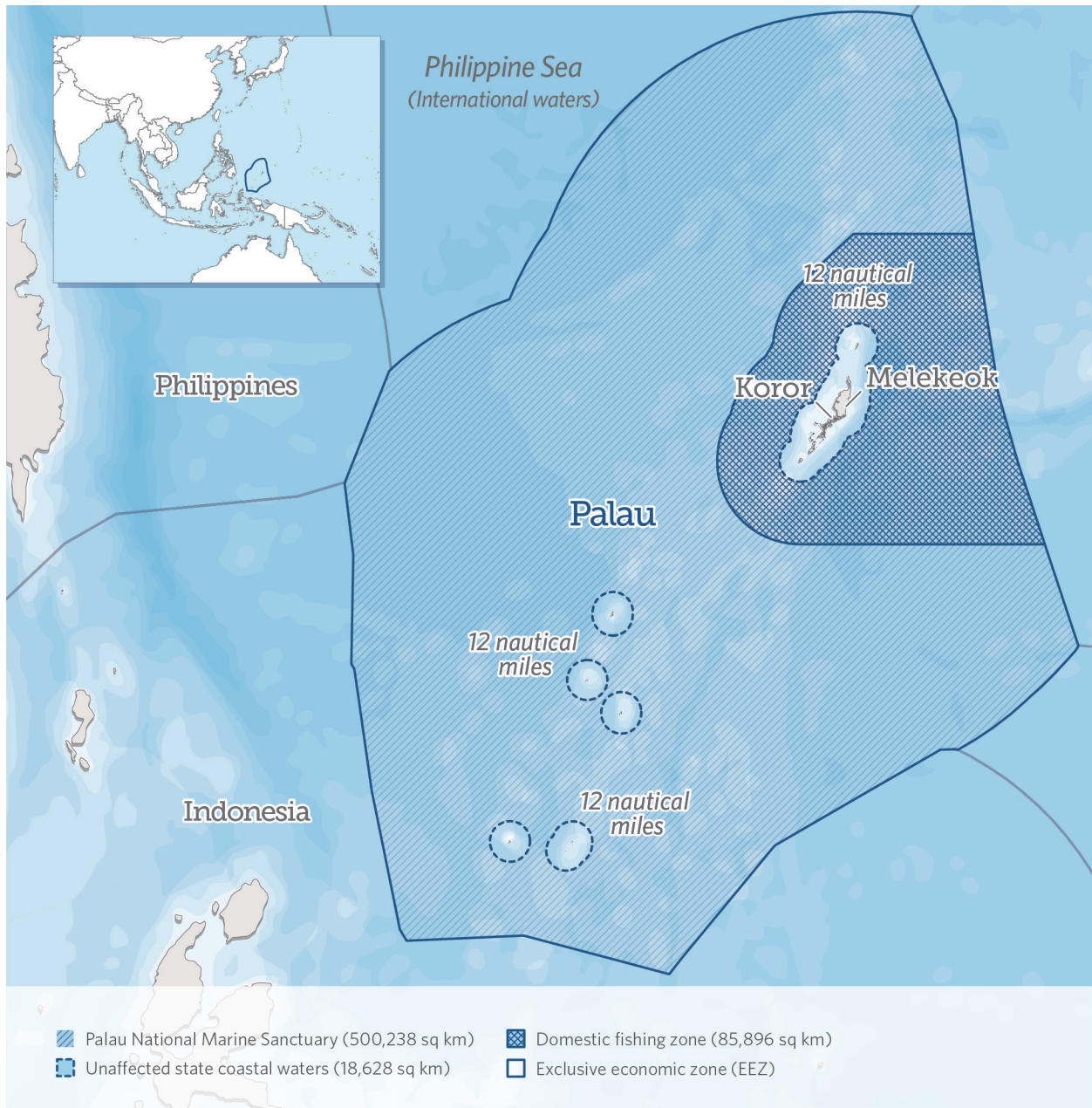
When Palau became an independent nation in 1994, its founders wrote in the constitution about the need for "conservation of a beautiful, healthful, and resourceful natural environment."

Palau's waters are worth protecting. Commonly referred to as one of the seven underwater wonders of the world, they boast ecosystems of remarkable biodiversity, which include:

- More than 1,300 species of fish.
- More than 400 species of hard coral and 300 species of soft coral.
- Seven of the world's nine types of giant clam.
- Lakes that are home to nonstinging jellyfish.
- The most plant and animal species in Micronesia.

Today, Palau is again taking a leading role by moving to create a modern-day bul that puts the marine environment first. On Oct. 28, 2015, after unanimous passage in the National Congress, President Tommy E. Remengesau Jr. signed into law the Palau National Marine Sanctuary Act, establishing one of the world's largest protected areas of ocean.

The sanctuary will fully protect about 80 percent of the nation's maritime territory, a higher percentage than in any other country. Full protection means that no extractive activities, such as fishing or mining, can take place. The reserve will be the sixth-largest on Earth, covering 500,000 square kilometers (193,000 square miles)—an area bigger than the U.S. state of California.





Diving injects about \$90 million a year into Palau's economy.

To ensure the sustainability and feasibility of this massive endeavor, the sanctuary will be phased in over a five-year period. A separate zone reserved for local fishermen and small-scale commercial fisheries with limited exports will cover the remainder of Palau's waters. Coastal waters from shore to 12 nautical miles (22 kilometers) will not be affected and will be managed under current regulations.

Good for the economy

Well-run sanctuaries are scientifically proven to expand fish stocks and, as a result, increase local fishing.¹ The Palau sanctuary will provide fish not only for the local market but also for the growing tourism market. This will redirect to local fishermen and businesses income that once went to importers.

Good for tourism

By maintaining a vibrant marine environment, the sanctuary designation can attract divers and other high-value tourists. Surveys by the Palau Visitors Authority indicate that divers who travel to Palau independently—not as part of package tours—spend around eight times more than other types of tourists. Diving injects about \$90 million a year into the economy, an amount equal to about 40 percent of Palau's gross domestic product.²

Good for the environment

Globally, many fish stocks are in serious decline. Fully protected marine areas are a critical tool for addressing many challenges to ocean health. They provide a broad range of benefits by safeguarding biodiversity, protecting top predators, and maintaining ecosystem balance. The Palau National Marine Sanctuary will also bring benefits to neighboring Pacific ecosystems because healthy species migrate into nearby waters. Highly protected areas have proved to be six times more resilient to the effects of climate change than unprotected areas.³

The sanctuary also will help protect Palau's waters from illegal fishing. Marine surveillance experts from around the world are collaborating with Palauan authorities on a world-class enforcement strategy to monitor the marine zone. The sanctuary will make it easier to identify and stop illegal fishing, because restrictions on commercial activity simplify detection.



In 1994, the same year Palau became independent, it passed the Marine Protection Act, which included a moratorium on fishing for bumphead parrotfish.



Palau's Conservation Milestones

Tradition of the bul continues to protect the nation's environment

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- 1956**
Ngerukewid Islands ("70 Islands") Wildlife Preserve is created.
 - 1994**
Palau becomes an independent nation.
 - 1994**
Passage of the Marine Protection Act, which includes a moratorium on fishing for bumphead parrotfish.
 - 1998**
Regulations protecting sea turtles are put in place.
 - 2003**
Protected Areas Network establishes a framework for protected areas across Palau to get access to technical assistance, monitoring, and funding.
 - 2006**
Palau commits to the Micronesia Challenge, a commitment of Micronesian states to conserve 30 percent of the marine environment and 20 percent of the terrestrial environment by 2020.
 - 2006**
Ban on bottom trawling is enacted.
 - 2009**
Palau establishes the world's first shark sanctuary.
 - 2010**
Palau declares marine mammal sanctuary.
 - 2012**
Rock Islands Southern Lagoon becomes UNESCO World Heritage site.
 - 2013**
Dugong Protection Act is signed into law.
 - 2014**
President Tommy Remengesau Jr. announces his commitment to the Palau National Marine Sanctuary at the United Nations.
 - 2015**
Palau National Marine Sanctuary Act is signed into law.



The Rock Islands, a UNESCO World Heritage site, include 445 uninhabited limestone islands of volcanic origin.



In 2009, Palau created the world's first shark sanctuary.

Conclusion

Palau's growth is deeply tied to its conservation legacy. Tourists from around the world are drawn to these islands in the western Pacific for their unparalleled beauty. By safeguarding marine life through the sanctuary, Palau strengthens its reputation as a sustainable tourism destination, and that brings extensive economic and environmental benefits. The Palau National Marine Sanctuary ensures a vibrant future for the nation's marine life and for its economy for years to come.

“Island communities have been among the hardest hit by the threats facing the ocean. Creating this sanctuary is a bold move that the people of Palau recognize as essential to our survival. We want to lead the way in restoring the health of the ocean for future generations.”

Tommy Remengesau Jr., *president*

Endnotes

- 1 Eric Sala et al., “A General Business Model for Marine Reserves,” *PLOS ONE* 8, no. 4 (2013): e58799, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0058799.
- 2 Gabriel M.S. Vianna et al., *Wanted Dead or Alive? The Relative Value of Reef Sharks as a Fishery and an Ecotourism Asset in Palau* (Perth: Australian Institute of Marine Science and University of Western Australia, 2010), http://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/Assets/2011/05/02/Palau_Shark_Tourism.pdf.
- 3 Peter J. Mumby et al., “Operationalizing the Resilience of Coral Reefs in an Era of Climate Change,” *Conservation Letters* 7, no. 3 (2014): 176–87, doi:10.1111/conl.12047.

For further information, please visit:
globaloceanlegacy.org

Contact: Seth Horstmeyer, director of campaigns, Global Ocean Legacy **Email:** shorstmeyer@pewtrusts.org
Contact: Jennifer Koskelin, consultant and adviser, Global Ocean Legacy—Palau **Email:** jenniferkoskelin@globaloceanlegacy.org

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