



**Western  
Pacific  
Regional  
Fishery  
Management  
Council**

**Testimony of Kitty M. Simonds  
Executive Director of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council**

**Before the US House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife**

**THE STATE OF U.S. FISHERIES**

**Room 1324, Longworth House Office Building, Washington, DC  
May 1, 2019, at 2:00 p.m.**

Chairman Huffman and Committee Members:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on the State of U.S. Fisheries. My name is Kitty Simonds, and, for the last 36 years, I have served as the Executive Director of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council. Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, the Council has authority over fisheries seaward of state/territory waters of Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and eight remote Pacific island possessions of the United States. Approximately one half of the U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) waters are in this region. Whereas the nation as a whole depends on foreign imports for more than 90 percent of the seafood it consumes, our U.S. Pacific Island fisheries provide half of the fish consumed locally as well as 80 percent of the domestic supply of bigeye tuna, 65 percent of the domestic yellowfin tuna and 55 percent of the domestic swordfish to the nation.

The U.S. fleet in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) is comprised of 30 purse-seine vessels targeting skipjack tuna, 144 Hawaii-based longline vessels targeting bigeye tuna and swordfish and 13 American Samoa longline vessels targeting albacore tuna. The U.S. fleet competes in the WCPO against much larger foreign fleets, such as China with 78 purse-seine and 524 longline vessels, Chinese Taipei with 34 purse-seine and 1,009 longline vessels, and Japan with 66 purse-seine and 434 longline vessels. (See figure 1.) With 2,425 longline vessels in the WCPO, foreign fleets comprise 94 percent of the longline vessels in the WCPO.

The U.S. fisheries operating in the WCPO are among the most highly regulated, monitored, and enforced fisheries in the world. Our fisheries adhere to a broad range of regulations compared to other nations. Besides the Magnuson-Stevens Act, they are subject to the Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and Antiquities Act, among others, as well as federal regulations implementing conservation and management decisions of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC).

The U.S. and foreign fleets in the WCPO operate in the same high seas waters up to the boundary of the US EEZ. (See figure 2.) However, the playing field is vastly uneven. For example, under WCPFC measures, longline vessels must have 5 percent observer coverage. Only the U.S. fleet consistently meets this requirement. In fact, the Hawaii longline fishery is subject to 100 percent observer coverage for its shallow-set sector and has had 25 percent observer coverage for its deep-set sector. It must report near real-time and has high levels of monitoring when it lands in port. Additionally, transshipment at sea, which is associated with illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing, is virtually non-existent in the U.S. longline fleet in the WCPO, but common practice in foreign distant water fishing fleets. To address IUU fishing, the United States should rely more on our domestic U.S. fishery production rather than on foreign imports because foreign imports are more likely to involve IUU fishing.

We know the amounts of birds, turtles, marine mammals and sharks with which our fishery incidentally interacts, and the impact of these interactions is negligible. However, the take of these species by foreign fleets is unknown.

The migratory tuna and billfish stocks in the WCPO targeted by U.S. fisheries are healthy, but the status and future of the U.S. fleet are threatened by the cumulative impacts of international and federal regulation. For example, except for striped marlin, the billfish caught by the Hawaii-based longline fishery are not overfished or subject to overfishing. However, the amended Billfish Conservation Act prohibits their commercial sale to the U.S. mainland despite the required Certificate of Eligibility that provides details about the source of the catch.

Globally, the Hawaii fishery is considered the gold standard for sustainable pelagic longline fishing and the federal regulations under which it operates provide the blueprint for many WCPFC conservation and management measures. Despite this recognition, the national bigeye tuna quotas for longline fisheries developed by the WCPFC provide the United States with a quota that is not optimal to our fleet's capacity and local market demand. The U.S. quota of 3,554 metric tons represents less than 5 percent of the total WCPO longline bigeye tuna quota of nearly 74,355 metric tons, which does not include the Small Island Developing States, as they are not subject to a quota. The U.S. quota is dwarfed by Japan's 17,765 metric tons, Korea's 13,942 metric tons, Chinese Taipei's 10,481 metric tons and China's 8,724 metric tons. Even Indonesia, which has one registered longline vessel and claimed only 13 metric tons of bigeye catch in 2017, is provided a quota of 5,889 metric tons of longline caught bigeye tuna. (See figure 3.)

On the federal side, a major impediment to U.S. fisheries in the WCPO is the reduced access to fishing grounds in the U.S. EEZ due to the fishing prohibitions established by Marine National Monument designations. These prohibitions have forced our fishermen out of more than half of the U.S. EEZ in the WCPO and onto the high seas, where they are forced to compete with foreign fleets on the fishing grounds. Because of limited data, the full impact of the expansion of the marine monuments in 2016 is yet to be fully understood. We do know that U.S. fishermen have been displaced from U.S. waters, where they have to travel farther to fishing grounds and compete with foreign fleets. Currently 70 percent of the Hawaii longline effort is on the high seas. We also know, based on expert scientific knowledge, that forcing U.S. vessels out of U.S. waters has no conservation benefit to tuna and highly migratory stocks or to protected species.

Besides increased foreign competition and added operational costs and travel time to fishing grounds, these monument fishing prohibitions eliminate the ability of our U.S. fleet to detect illegal fishing by foreign vessels in our EEZ. In the past decade, two purse-seine vessels were caught illegally fishing in the U.S. Pacific Remote Islands and two to four foreign vessels were caught illegally longlining in US EEZ around the Northern Mariana Islands. In December 2018, a Japanese longline vessel crew was caught illegally transporting shark fins through Honolulu Airport. The threat from illegal foreign fishing remains and it is not possible for the government to monitor the huge expanse of U.S. waters in the Pacific with conventional air and on-the-water patrol assets.

Our U.S. fishermen are restricted not only from the huge area closures of the U.S. EEZ under the Marine National Monument fishing prohibitions but also from areas closed under the Magnuson-Stevens and Marine Mammal Protection Acts. In Hawaii, bottomfish and groundfish fishing has been prohibited in the northernmost part of the archipelago since 1986 and longlining has been prohibited since the early 1990s in waters out to 50 to 75 miles from shore. South of the main Hawaiian Islands, longline fishing is additionally prohibited in the Southern Exclusion Zone (SEZ) when the fishery interacts with two false killer whales in a manner determined to be a “mortality and serious injury,” which includes any case in which an animal is released alive with gear remaining. When the SEZ is closed, as it is now, the Hawaii longline fleet can operate in only 17 percent of the U.S. EEZ around Hawaii. (See figure 4.)

In American Samoa, the economic impacts from foreign fleets and limited area to fish in the U.S. EEZ, such as the large closure around Rose Atoll to protect a coral reef area with a steep drop-off, have resulted in the continued decline in the local longline fleet from 70 vessels to 13, a decrease in U.S. fish needed for military contracts and school lunch programs, and the closure of one of the two local tuna canneries, which provide the majority of the private-sector jobs in the Territory. The catch rate of the American Samoa longline fleet has declined at a rate of 70 percent, while other foreign fisheries report record catches of South Pacific albacore. In recent years, China’s South Pacific albacore catch has increased to 40 to 50 percent of the total catch for all countries, while the catch by American Samoa has decreased to 2 percent of the total catch.

In addition to these closures in the U.S. EEZ, our fishermen are now confronted with possible closure of 30 percent of the high seas. This effort is being driven by several environmental non-government organizations and supported by a group of Pacific Island Countries that derive a major part of their national incomes from selling licenses that allow foreign fleets to operate within their EEZs. The proposed high seas fishing closures are to be promulgated under the United Nations framework being developed to address Biodiversity beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ). Greenpeace recently released a map that identifies areas for fishery closure, including the high seas adjacent to the U.S. EEZ around the Hawaii archipelago, Alaska, the entire East Coast and most of the West Coast of the United States (See figure 5.) Closing 30 percent of the high seas and 51 percent of the U.S. EEZ by marine monument fishing prohibitions in addition to U.S. EEZ closures through the Magnuson-Stevens and Marine Mammal Acts would devastate the U.S. fisheries in the region.

In closing, I would like to thank the Committee for its time to hear about the state of the U.S. fisheries in the Western Pacific Region and to consider that 80 percent of our local fishery stays in the islands to feed our people. Thank you.

FIGURE 1

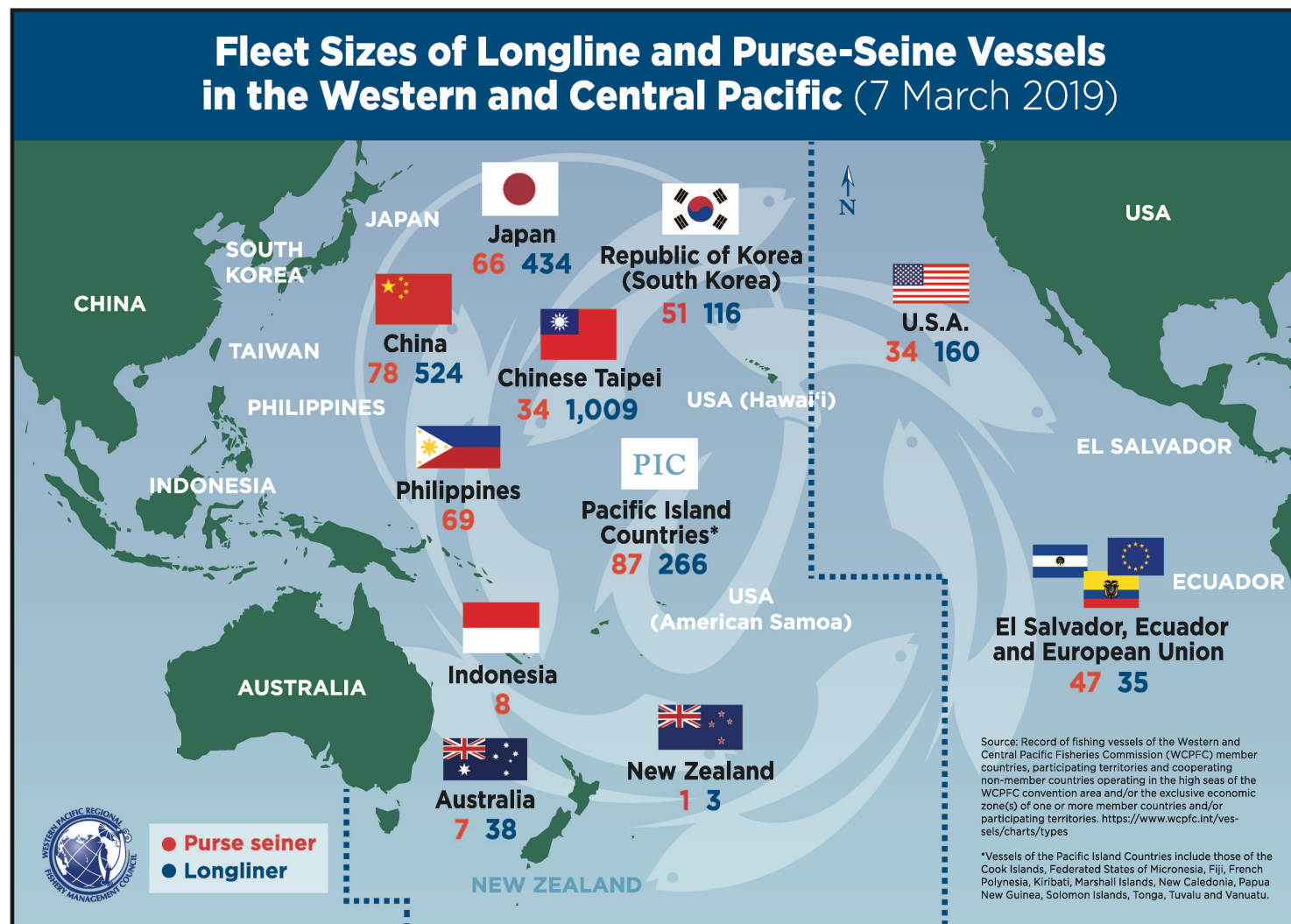
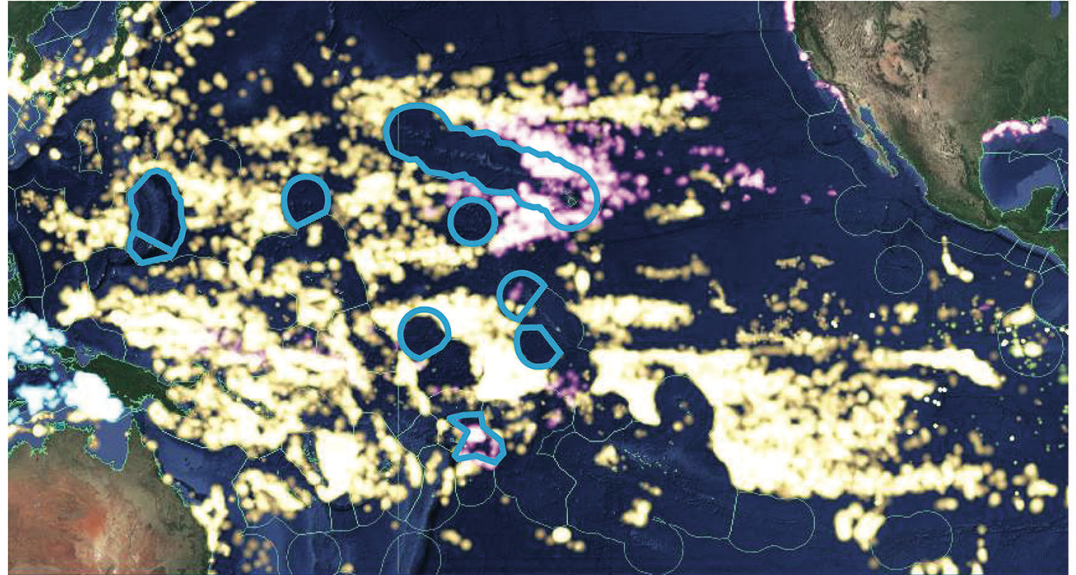




FIGURE 2

## Fishing Effort in the Pacific Ocean

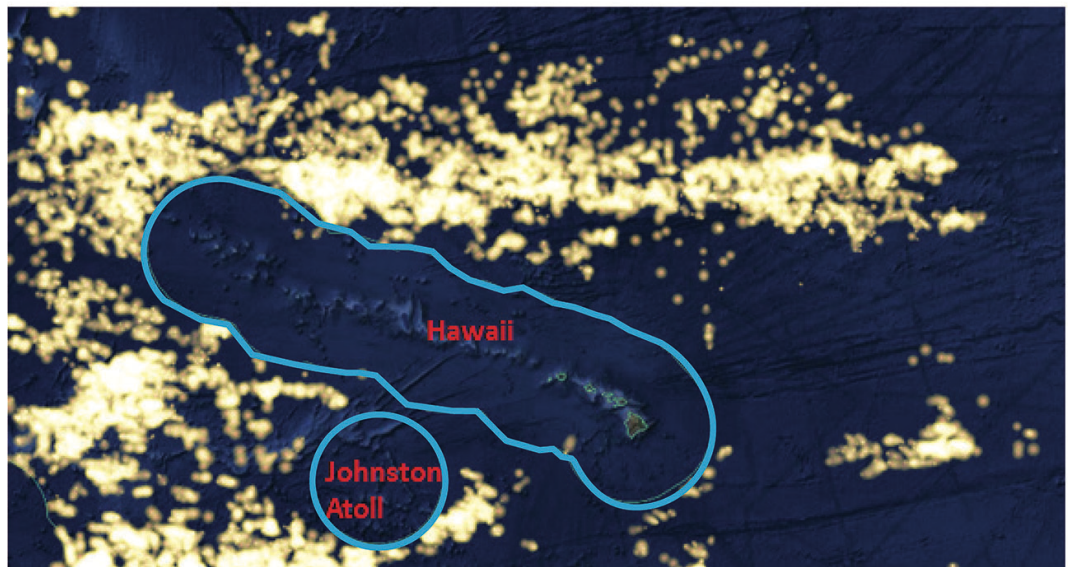


**Three months fishing effort (November 9, 2018–February 9, 2019)**

Data source: Global Fishing Watch

● Foreign fishing vessels ● U.S. fishing vessels ● U.S. exclusive economic zone

Vessels are predominately purse seine, longline, and pole and line vessels targeting tuna and swordfish.



**Three months foreign fishing effort (November 9, 2018–February 9, 2019)**

Data source: Global Fishing Watch

Yellow areas represent foreign flagged vessels from Japan, China, Korea, Chinese Taipei and Vanuatu. Vessels are predominately longline vessels targeting tuna and swordfish.

FIGURE 3

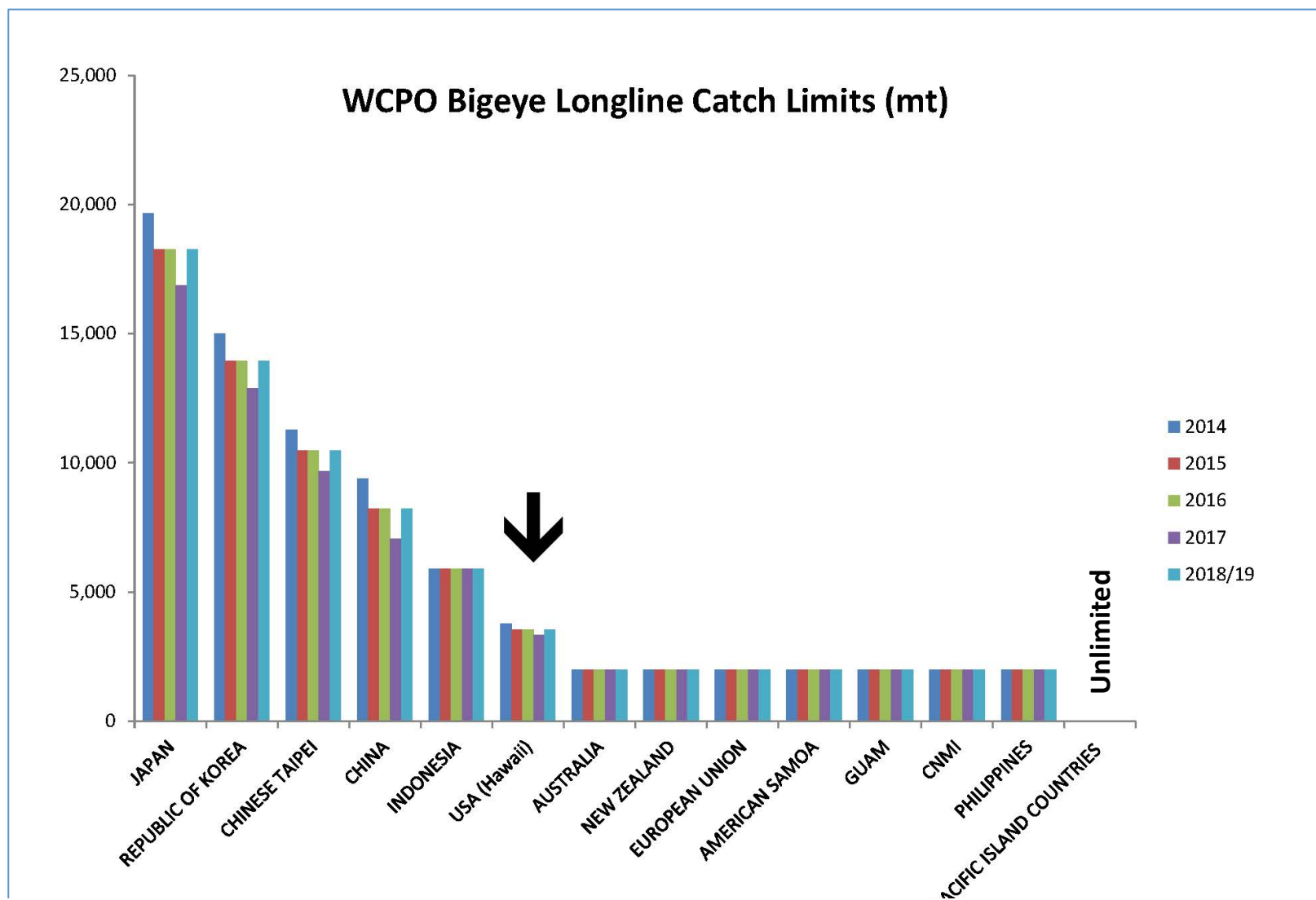
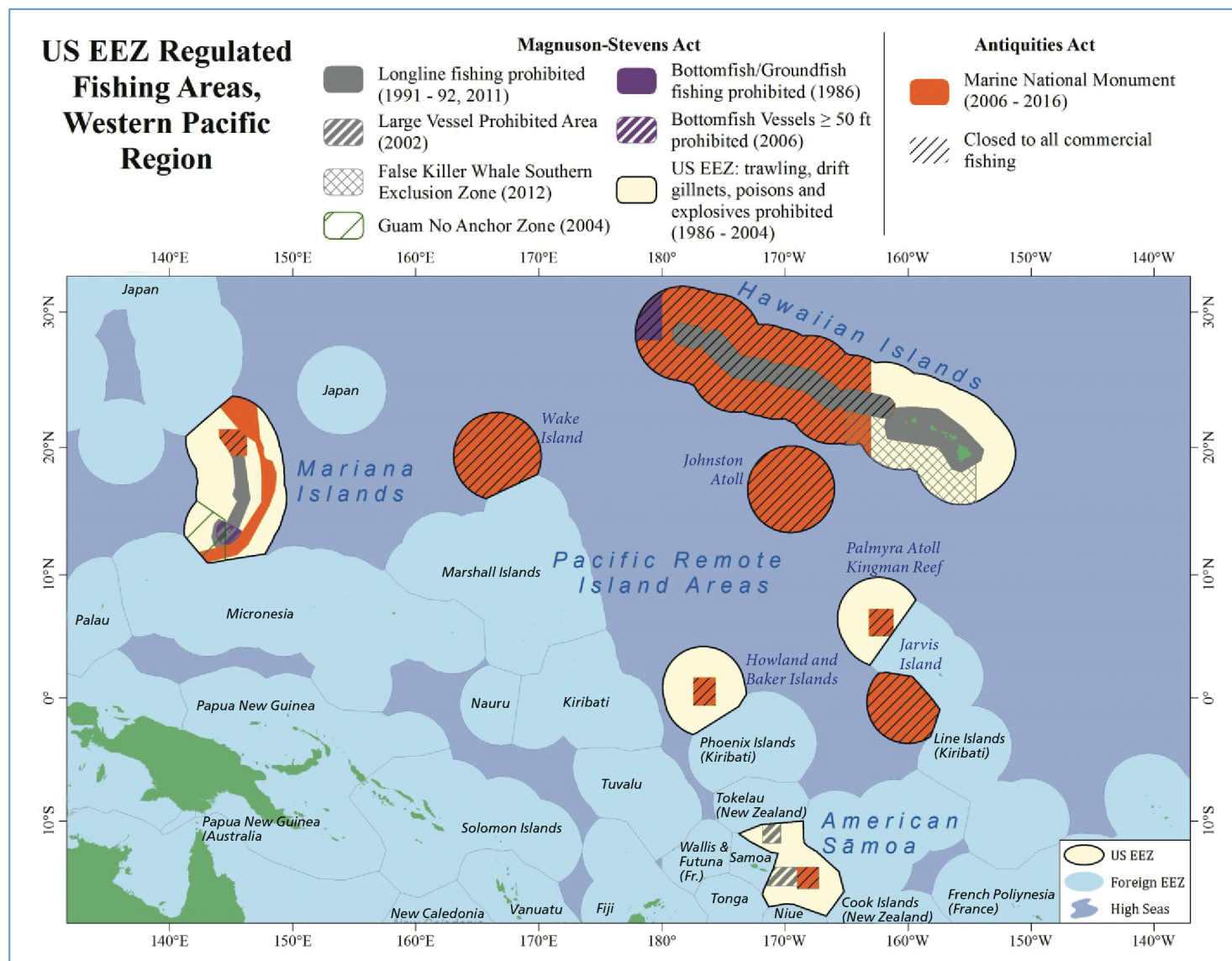
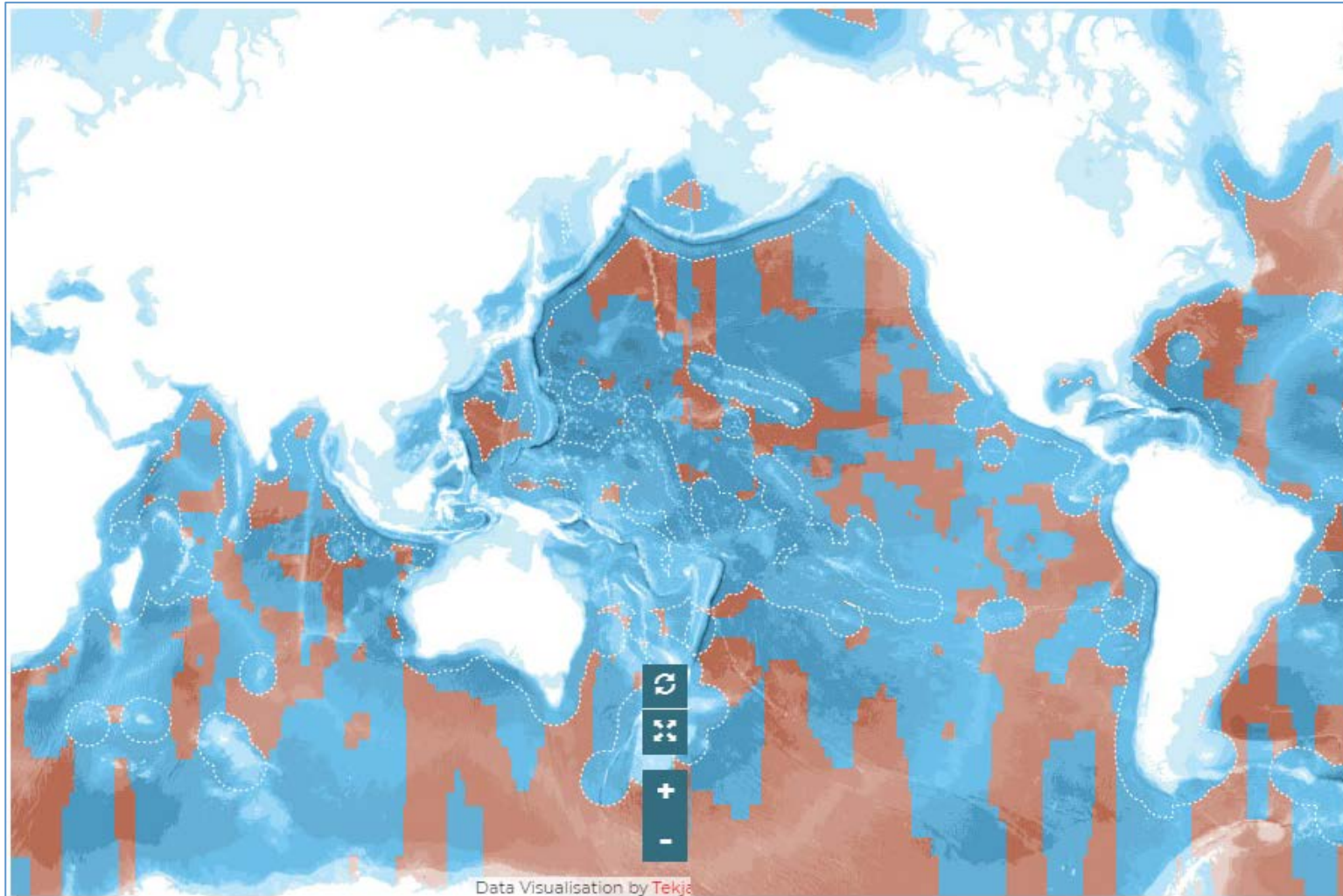


FIGURE 4





**FIGURE 5**



The orange shaded areas represent a design for a global network of ocean sanctuaries to protect 30% of all 458 different features in the Greenpeace 30x30 A Blueprint for Ocean Protection study. Dotted areas represent national waters. Source: <https://www.greenpeaceoceanblueprint.org/>