



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE
Office of National Marine Sanctuaries

Pacific Islands Region
NOAA IRC
1845 Wasp Blvd, Building 176
Honolulu, Hawaii 96818

August 4, 2022

Simon Kinneen
Council Chair
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
1007 W. 3rd Avenue, Suite 400, Anchorage, AK 99501
Via email: simon@nsedc.com

Dear Mr. Kinneen,

Thank you for the North Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council's (Council) letter dated July 7th, 2022 regarding the nomination of Alaġum Kanuuġ as a national marine sanctuary and your interest in understanding the possible designation process and opportunities for the Council to provide input.

As you already know, NOAA reviewed the Alaġum Kanuuġ nomination in accordance with the National Marine Sanctuary Nomination Process (79 FR 33851), and determined that the nomination successfully met the national significance criteria and management considerations and subsequently added the site to the inventory of successful nominations. Now that the nomination has been added to the inventory of successful nominations, NOAA may consider the area for future designation as a national marine sanctuary. At this time, NOAA has not committed to any further action on the nomination beyond adding it to the inventory of successful nominations. In determining if a proposal on the inventory should move into the designation process, NOAA prioritizes nominated sites using a number of factors, including the complexity of the area being considered for designation, the need for resource management, and community and stakeholder support.

We concur with the importance of a deliberate public process, and note that sanctuary designation is a separate public process that, by law, is highly public and participatory, and often takes several years to complete. Proposed boundaries, regulations, and operational details of a proposed sanctuary would not be published until after an initial public scoping process.

NOAA recognizes the role of the Council in fisheries management under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), and recognizes the Council's authority for fishery management. Any sanctuary designation process in the region will account for the Council's continued role in fisheries management. We also note that the Alaġum Kanuuġ nomination highlighted that the intent for sanctuary designation is for fisheries management by the Council to be acknowledged and does not intend to supersede the Council's management authorities. We understand the complexity of the Council's role in these actions, and that additional time to provide fishery regulation recommendations may be needed. We are committed to working together throughout this process to achieve our objective on a manageable timeline.

The process for designating a new national marine sanctuary has four main steps, described below.

During each phase, we have added clarifications for some or your more specific questions.

1. Scoping: NOAA would announce its intent to designate a new national marine sanctuary and ask the public for input on potential boundaries, resources that could be protected, issues NOAA should consider and any information that should be included in the resource analysis. Under section 304(a)(5) of the NMSA (NMSA, 16 U.S.C. § 1434(a)(5)) NOAA will provide the Council with the opportunity to prepare draft fishing regulations for the proposed sanctuary.
2. Sanctuary Proposal: NOAA would consider input received during the initial scoping period and in response would prepare draft designation documents, including a draft management plan and a draft environmental impact statement that analyzes a range of alternatives, including proposed regulations and proposed boundaries. NOAA will work with the Council with regards to regulations and proposed boundaries as it pertains to fishery management. NOAA may also form an advisory council to help inform the proposal and focus stakeholder participation.
3. Public Review: The public, agency partners, tribes, the Council, and stakeholders would provide input on the draft documents described above, including on proposed boundary alternatives. NOAA would consider all input and determine appropriate changes to the designation documents.
4. Sanctuary Designation: NOAA would make a final decision on whether to designate the site as a national marine sanctuary and, if so, prepare the final documents. Before the designation becomes effective, the Governor of the state or territory and Congress review the final documents.

We recognize the Council's interest in understanding how decisions are made to move a proposal on the inventory of successful nominations into the designation process, as well as opportunities for Council and public engagement prior to an initial scoping period. NOAA remains committed to coordinating with the Council as well as the public on any actions pertaining to Alaġum Kanuuġ as our partners and other stakeholders are foundational to the mission and goals of NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuary.

I appreciate your interest in the nomination of Alaġum Kanuuġ as a national marine sanctuary. If you have further questions, please contact me at kristina.kekuewa@noaa.gov.

Sincerely,

Kristina Kekuewa
Regional Director
NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries