

Republic of Kiribati

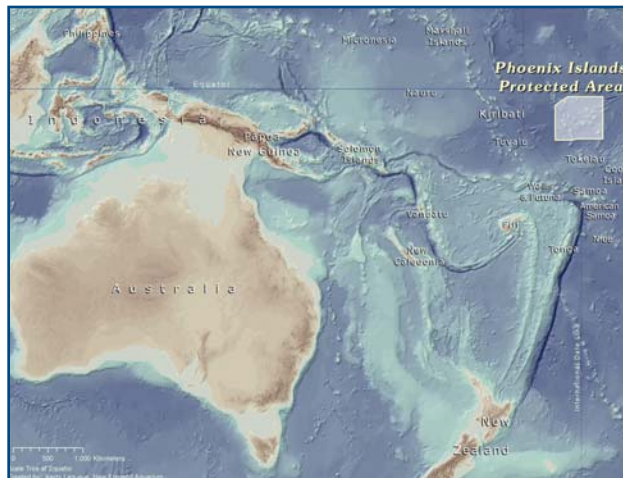
Phoenix Islands Protected Area

www.phoenixislands.org

The Republic of Kiribati has taken the remarkable step of declaring the Phoenix Islands archipelago and surrounding waters, an area of 410,500 sq. km., as the Phoenix Islands Protected Area (PIPA). It is the largest marine protected area in the world today. The Phoenix Islands group is one of the Earth's last intact oceanic coral archipelago ecosystems. The coral reefs and bird populations of the islands are unique and virtually untouched by man. Since the beginning of human settlement of the Pacific Islands, the Phoenix Islands have represented a marine wilderness area that has had very limited human exploitation due to their extremely remote location. With recent advances in the fishing industry and impacts of global climate change, isolation can no longer be relied on to conserve these atolls. The Republic of Kiribati, in partnership with the New England Aquarium and Conservation International (CI), has committed to the protection of the Phoenix Islands and their surrounding waters. The Phoenix Islands Protected Area has also been nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site due to its unique biological, cultural and historical significance.

Phoenix Islands

The Phoenix Islands are located near the equator in the Central Pacific, about mid-way between Hawaii and Fiji. The total management area of the PIPA is 410,500 sq. km., occupying a large portion of Kiribati's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) around these islands. The Phoenix Islands themselves are comprised of 11 square miles of low-lying land, in many cases rising no more than two meters above sea level. Though the islands have experienced sporadic human settlement over the last 150 years, only one atoll, Kanton, is currently inhabited by an administrative population of less than 50 people.



Management

Management planning for the PIPA is well underway. The Republic of Kiribati, the New England Aquarium and CI are working together on the development and implementation of a management plan. The management and enforcement of the PIPA will be financed through an endowment system that will compensate the Republic of Kiribati for their lost fishing license revenues and increased management costs. In the face of multiple threats to marine biodiversity, this represents one of the few market-based sustainable ways to finance such a protection scheme. Implementation of this plan will require significant additional resources.



PHOENIX ISLANDS PROTECTED AREA



Key Facts: PIPA

- largest MPA in the world today
- covers 410,500 sq. km
- nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site
- represents 16% of the global area of MPAs currently designated worldwide
- first Pacific Island MPA to contain significant deep-sea habitat, includes all eight atolls and two submerged reef systems
- atolls are home to globally important seabird populations
- likely the only protected coral archipelago in the world

The Global Conservation Fund at CI is financing the implementation phase and will begin the capitalization of the endowment. PIPA has also received great support from philanthropic partners and regional governments.

Ecological Values

Three New England Aquarium/Republic of Kiribati research expeditions highlight the uniqueness and rare undisturbed values of the Phoenix Islands, including:

- Coral reefs in the Phoenix Islands show prolific growth forms and interesting atoll community assemblages that have developed without anthropogenic influences.
- Over 120 species of coral and 514 species of reef fish have been identified (including several new species), with unique assemblages reflecting the islands' remoteness in the Central Pacific.
- Reefs were free of bleaching until 2003 and are now recovering, free of disease or predation, which are threatening other reefs in the Pacific. Resilience and recovery of the island ecosystems will be enhanced by effective protection.
- Fish populations are abundant, indicating a healthy, pristine ecosystem with intact macropredator populations on many of the islands, such as humphead wrasse, groupers, snapper, tunas, sharks and oceanic mackerels.
- Sea turtles and dolphins were observed at many of the islands, and evidence of turtle nesting was found on many of the beaches.
- Massive aggregations of seabirds indicate suitable conditions for continued nesting and feeding in surrounding waters and the critical importance of these islands in migratory routes across the Central Pacific.
- The islands may also be stepping stone habitats for dispersing larvae of shallow-water species such as reef corals and fish; they form part of the series of islands along the equatorial Pacific connecting the eastern Pacific to the western Pacific by the South Equatorial Current and North Equatorial Counter Current.

Kiribati Values

President Anote Tong summarizes the vision for the Phoenix Islands:

"In connection with protecting our marine resources, we should also know the importance of the oceans, for example, coral and reefs. If these are protected then the fish will thrive and grow and bring us benefit.... We all know the story of how Noah was given responsibility to look after all species - in this way all species of fish can be protected so none become depleted or extinct. It is right that they should remain as the Creator meant them to be."

The Phoenix Islands Protected Area is a significant contribution to the CBD's 2010/12 Protected Area goals and Island Biodiversity Program of Work by the Government and people of Kiribati.



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Please visit

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