

GOVERNMENT OF KIRIBATI

Phoenix Islands Protected Area

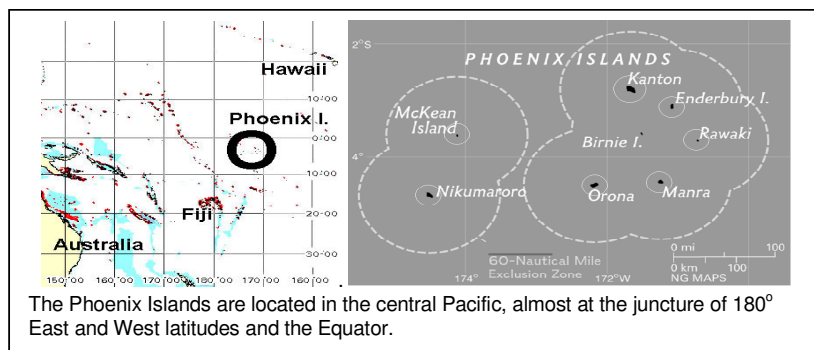


The Phoenix Islands group, in the Republic of Kiribati, is one of Earth's last intact oceanic coral archipelago ecosystems. The coral reefs and bird populations of the islands are unique, virtually untouched by man — a true wilderness of natural beauty. At the Eighth Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biodiversity (Brazil, March 2006) the Honourable Minister of Environment, Lands and Agricultural Development, Martin Tofinga declared, on behalf of the Government of Kiribati, the Phoenix Islands Protected Area (PIPA) — the third largest Marine Protected Area (MPA) in the world today.

Since the beginning of human settlement of the Pacific Islands the Phoenix Islands have represented a marine wilderness area that has undergone very limited human exploitation due to their extreme remoteness. 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 Government of Kiribati, in partnership with the New England Aquarium (NEAq) and Conservation International (CI), is working to conserve the Phoenix Islands. Kiribati is also considering listing these islands as a World Heritage Site.

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 184,700 sq km enclosed by a 60 nautical mile boundary around each atoll. The islands themselves comprise 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 is currently inhabited with an administrative population of less than fifty people.



Management Planning

Management Planning for the PIPA is underway. The Government of Kiribati, NEAq and CI have signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the design that will include a range of protection zones. The management and enforcement of the PIPA will be financed through a endowment system that will compensate the government for their lost

KEY FACTS

The Phoenix Islands Protected Area:

- was declared by the Government of Kiribati - the largest atoll nation in the world,
- covers a Management Area of 184,700 sq km,
- is the third largest MPA in the world today (Great Barrier Reef and NW Hawaiian Islands are larger),
- represents 8% of the global area of MPAs currently designated,
- is the largest MPA/marine managed area in the Pacific Islands region,
- is the first Pacific Island MPA to contain significant deep sea habitat, includes all 8 atolls and two submerged reef systems,
- atolls are home to globally important seabird populations,
- are likely the only protected coral archipelago in the world.



fishing license revenues. 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. The Global Conservation Fund at CI is financing the implementation phase and will begin the capitalization of the endowment.

Ecological Values

Three NEAQ/Government 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 520 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 to global changes 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.
- A variety of ornamental reef fish and important assemblages of mollusks and other invertebrates are present.
- Sea turtles and dolphins were observed at many of the islands, and evidence of turtle nesting was found on most 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.

A fourth expedition to survey the deeper regions around these atolls is planned for 2007.

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 Protected Area goals and Island Biodiversity Program of Work by the Government and people of Kiribati.



HOW TO LEARN MORE

<http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0402/feature3/index.html>,
<http://www.neaq.org/scilearn/conservation/primal.html>,
www.naia.com.fj/phoenix/index.html
Stone, G. 2004. "Phoenix Islands: South Pacific Hideaway," National Geographic Magazine. 205(2): 48-65.

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