



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE  
Office of National Marine Sanctuaries  
1305 East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

AUG 14 2019

William Aila, Jr.  
Chair, Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Ecosystem Reserve  
Reserve Advisory Council  
1845 Wasp Blvd., Bldg 176  
Honolulu, HI 96816

Dear Mr. Aila:

*William*

Thank you for your letter dated June 17, 2019, regarding maintaining vessel access to Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument (PMNM) and the need for more days at sea for management operations and research. As you note, the *Hi 'ialakai* has been dedicated to conducting coral reef ecosystem mapping, assessment and monitoring in the U.S. Pacific Island areas, and the loss of this asset is significant. We are working on several fronts to address this impact.

This year, we worked closely with many offices in NOAA, including the Office of Marine and Aviation Operations, to configure the *Rainier* so it could support operations necessary for PMNM management and reprioritized the mission schedule for 2019 to sail the *Rainier* in the Pacific islands region. Further, we are working with academic, private, and non-profit partners to bring other assets to the region in support of PMNM needs as well as those of our partners in the region. We hope to make progress on those fronts in the early months of FY2020. Lastly, we are working with the ONMS Small Boat Program to evaluate needs in the Pacific Islands Region for platforms that support day operations (primarily "readiness" dive training) in and around Hawaii for the PMNM dive team, with the intention to use these same platforms as deployable assets from larger vessels conducting operations in the PMNM.

ONMS understands how important the *Hi 'ialakai* has been to the resources, region, and your efforts. We will continue to work to offset the impacts of the decommissioning of the *Hi 'ialakai*, as well as look to the future needs and requirements to ensure we are building the necessary capacity for the PMNM and its many partners.

I appreciate your input on this and other important ONMS efforts and thank you for your interest in and support for the PMNM.

Sincerely,

  
John Armor  
Director

cc: Rebecca R. Holyoke, Ph.D., ONMS Deputy Director  
Athline Clark, PMNM Superintendent  
Kristina Kekeuwa, ONMS Pacific Islands Regional Director

