

# Republic of Kiribati

## Phoenix Islands Protected Area

[www.phoenixislands.org](http://www.phoenixislands.org)

The Republic of Kiribati has taken the remarkable step of designating the Phoenix Islands archipelago and surrounding waters, an area approximately the size of California (408,250 square kilometers, 157,626 square miles), as the Phoenix Islands Protected Area (PIPA). It is one of the largest marine protected areas in the world today. The Phoenix Islands group is one of 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 been subjected to very limited human exploitation due to its extremely remote location. With recent advances in the fishing industry and the 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), is committed to the protection of the Phoenix Islands and their surrounding waters. The Phoenix Islands Protected Area was inscribed on the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites in 2010 for its "pristine nature and importance as a migration route and reservoir."

### 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 408,250 square kilometers, occupying a large portion of Kiribati's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) around these islands. The Phoenix Islands themselves are composed 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 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 PIPA will be financed through an endowment system that will compensate the Republic of Kiribati for its 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.

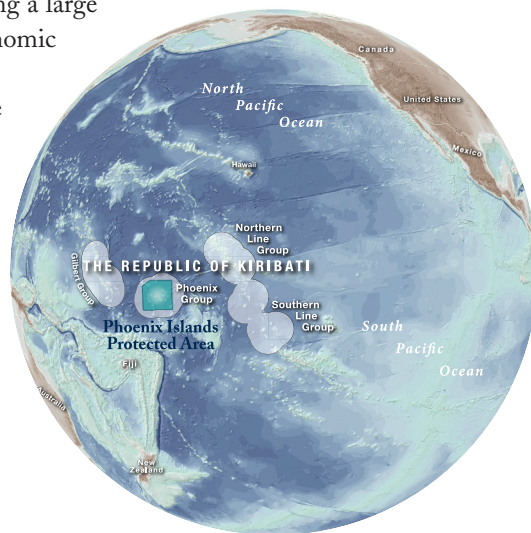


PHOENIX ISLANDS PROTECTED AREA



### Key Facts: PIPA

- largest Marine Protected Area (MPA) in the Pacific today
- covers 408,250 square kilometers, about the size of California
- largest marine UNESCO World Heritage Site
- 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



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

New England Aquarium/Republic of Kiribati research expeditions have highlighted 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 the disease or predation that threaten 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 by the Government and People of Kiribati to the Convention of Biological Diversity's 2010/12 Protected Area goals and the Island Biodiversity Program of Work.**



Ministry of Environment, Lands and Agricultural Development  
Tarawa, Republic of Kiribati



Central Wharf  
Boston, MA 02110, USA  
(617) 226-2196

2011 Crystal Drive, Suite 500  
Arlington, VA 22202, USA  
(703) 341-2400



## Contacts

### Tukabu Teroroko

PIPA Director  
Ministry of Environment, Lands and  
Agricultural Development (Kiribati)  
686-29762 voice  
686-28334 fax  
tteroroko@phoenixislands.org

### Regen Jamieson

Conservation Projects Coordinator  
New England Aquarium  
Central Wharf Boston, MA 02110 USA  
617-226-2221 voice  
617-973-0242 fax  
rjamieson@neaq.org

### Sue Miller Taei

Pacific Islands Marine Director  
Conservation International  
685-21593 voice  
685-28570 fax  
s.taei@conservation.org

Photos: **Cat Holloway, NAI'A**

Map: **Kerry Lagueux**

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