



**Office of the President**  
**Monaco Blue Initiative**  
**Keynote Speech**

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**REMARKS OF PRESIDENT TOMMY E. REMENGESAU, JR. ON THE  
OCCASION OF THE MONACO BLUE INITIATIVE, JUNE 24, 2013**

Good morning my fellow environmentalists. I would like to begin by thanking His Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco for inviting me to speak at this ongoing environmental initiative that he sponsors.

As I look around this room I see environmentalists from all over the world: Europe, North America, Australia, Africa, and, of course, small nations like mine from a little corner of the world in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Environmentalists are from all over the world because protection of the environment is something that affects all of mankind no matter what little corner of the globe that you come from.

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Prince Albert for recognizing this and putting together the Monaco Blue Initiative as a platform where all of the people of the world, from all of its little corners, may come together to discuss what the appropriate steps are to protect our oceans for generations to come. The oceans do not divide us; the oceans bind us together in a common cause for all of mankind.

For my part, I would like to share with you some of the steps that my little corner of the world has taken to protect our environment and the economic opportunities that our protection policies have provided so that the world may discuss the small steps we each take can be applied collectively on a larger scale.

In Palau, my people have practiced environmental conservation for thousands of years. Palau is a small place, but it has 16 states, and within those states, are many small traditional hamlets. With our small country being broken down into these small areas we have traditionally been accustomed to thinking locally in our conservation efforts.

Before there were NGO's, before powerful international fishing lobbies existed, and even well before most of the world knew Palau existed, a Chief of a small hamlet could impose what we would now call "environmental protection" by enforcing a traditional *bul* that could be as simple as: "You see that Turtle there, stop killing so many of them when they are mating or laying their eggs or else one day they will all be gone."

As time has gone on, Palau's understanding of how connected our larger environment is to its smaller components has, like the rest of the world, developed such that we now know that what happens in one place has a great impact upon the environment in another place. An understanding of this reality has caused Palau to think bigger in our environmental conservation efforts.

Palau now seeks to implement the traditional *bul* on a larger scale. Today, alongside the Chiefs in the little hamlets declaring a *bul* on the local level of conservation, we have State governments declaring large areas of our country to be protected environmental conservation areas and a President who seeks to create the world's largest Marine Sanctuary by banning foreign commercial fishing. But let's come back to that in a moment.

In Palau we face an economic situation that is much different from the economic situation in other parts of the world because our economy is isolated and heavily reliant upon tourism. Our tourism depends heavily upon our environment because that is what tourists come to see: our pristine marine environment. As I am fond of saying: Our economy is our environment and our environment is our economy.

As a result of this economic reality, Palau has focused its environmental protection efforts on developing conservation areas. However, when Palau creates a conservation area it does not lock up the area and then throw away the key; instead, Palau locks up the area and then looks at the key, asking ourselves: "How can we use this key to improve our economic situation?"

Palau's first large scale effort at this sort of approach on the national level began in 2003 when we did two things: First, we developed the "Micronesia Challenge," which is an agreement between Palau, Guam, the Commonwealth of Northern Marianas Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Marshall Islands to preserve 30 percent of our marine environment and 20 percent of our terrestrial environment through the development of a Protected Areas Network. This was the first region wide effort at environmental conservation within Micronesia. Developed with the support of The Nature Conservancy, the Micronesia Challenge simultaneously encourages environmental protection and enhances Palau's economic

situation by marketing our country as an environmentally conscious society and funneling financial resources to the Protected Areas Network in support our conservation efforts.

Second, in recognition of the importance of sharks to the marine environment, in 2003, Palau also signed into law a comprehensive ban on foreign commercial shark fishing and became the first country in the world to ban shark fining. In 2009, Palau took that a step further and declared Palau to be the world's first "Shark Sanctuary." As you all know, sharks are known as "Apex Predators," the protection and economic opportunities of which is the topic of this morning's panel.

An increasing amount of scientific research indicates that Apex Predators are essential to any healthy marine environment. Through a diverse predatory diet Apex Predators regulate and maintain balance in marine ecosystems by switching its prey when a particular prey population low. This sort of natural selection "balance" then results in greater marine biodiversity. Moreover, through predatory intimidation Apex Predators can also affect the distribution of that biodiversity. In short, the protection of Apex Predators generally results in a greater diversity of fish and a broader distribution of healthier fish stocks.

Since the Republic has taken action to protect sharks two things have happened:

First, our marine environment has flourished with more sharks in the environment. Although it will take some time for the science to definitively back this up since we just implemented these measures in recent years, with more sharks present in our marine environment, we are now seeing a greater diversity of fish spread out over a broader area. Our marine life is so abundant and diverse that divers do not fear the presence of sharks that they see because it is obvious to the divers that there are so many other things for the sharks to eat that divers have nothing to worry about.

Second, Palau has created a great marketing opportunity for itself as people around the world have begun to equate Palau with Sharks. Once the divers get to Palau, they find that there are dives in Palau where a diver is almost guaranteed to see not one shark, but 2 or 3 or 5, which causes the marketing effect to feed upon itself as divers spread the word that Palau is the place to see sharks.

The overall result is that Palau has effectively cornered the market as a tourist destination to see sharks, improved its environmental protection policy, and improved its overall tourism product with one sweeping nationwide environmental protection action: protecting sharks.

This is only the beginning of what a focus on protection of Apex Predators can accomplish.

As many of you likely know, some sharks are migratory, which is a part of the challenge in measuring their economic value to one nation. It is difficult for the Republic of Palau to enforce its economic share of a shark that migrates through its waters only to be caught in one area of the Pacific where it is fished, and then transported to be sold as shark fin soup somewhere in Asia. Thankfully, most of the world is catching on to the importance of sharks to the marine environment and the damage that the practice of widespread shark finning poses to our oceans.

However, there is another Apex Predator that is even more migratory than sharks, and far more economically valuable. I am talking about Tuna.

Most people do not think about Tuna as being an Apex Predator at the top of the food chain. That is probably because there is no Stephen Spielberg movie about Tuna eating people off of a beach. The fact of the matter is: Tuna ARE Apex Predators that are capable of providing the same benefits to a marine environment that sharks do. But the benefits to the marine life are only one part of the equation when it comes to protecting Tuna.

When I was growing up, we were able to catch Tuna that was the size of a small pony – 300, 500 pounds. I remember that when I was young my Grandfather once told me that the worst invention to happen to the environment is the Icebox, or a refrigerator, for those too young to remember what an Icebox is. If only my Grandfather were alive today to see all of the fishing technology that is available to fishermen now – the fish aggregating devices; Long-Lining vessels; Purse Seining vessels; satellites that tell you where to fish; and computers that tell you how and when to cast and close your purse seine.

Fishing for Tuna is no longer a part of the art of fishing that is handed down from father to son from generation to generation; it now capitalistic driven blood sport – how much Tuna can you catch, how fast can you catch the Tuna, and how much can you sell the Tuna for on the international market? And that would be fine if it was not the case that it is foreign commercial fishing vessels that come into Palau's waters to catch as much Tuna as they can, as fast as they can, in order to sell Tuna on markets in other countries for top dollar that Palau's people see very little of.

The key issue is that Palau, and other small Pacific island nations, must find a way to harness its economic potential from the Tuna that migrates through its territorial waters. This is our environment and these are our fish, at least when they are in our waters. Palau has the right – and the responsibility to its people – to protect its environment and to maximize its fair share of its resources.

When Prince Albert came to my country earlier this year, I announced an initiative to create the world's largest Marine Sanctuary by closing our Exclusive Economic Zone to foreign commercial fishing. If one half of making Palau a Marine Sanctuary is about environmental protection, then the second half is about maximizing the economic value of our marine life for the people of the Republic of Palau – whether through improved tourism or through increasing the economic value of marine life taken from Palau. When I announced our objective, I recognized two key issues that the Republic would need to resolve in order to accomplish this policy objective.

First, I said that our enforcement capabilities would have to be improved before we would be able to handle enforcing such a policy. Second, I said that Palau would need to find away to offset the inevitable revenue loss from pursuing a policy that would end foreign commercial fishing in the Republic.

As to the first issue, I am proud to say that the Republic has already taken positive steps to develop our enforcement capabilities. We are working with an Australian NGO to bring unmanned aerial drones to patrol our EEZ and we are working with the United States to enhance our joint capability to patrol our waters. Where a traditional *bul* and the will of a traditional Chief once worked to enforce environmental protection in the face of the technological development of the Icebox, technology must evolve for drones to enforce environmental protection in the face of fish aggregation devices and purse seine fishing vessels.

As to the second issue, the Republic is still developing international support for our Marine Sanctuary policy. Palau has already received strong support from the PEW Research Center, The Nature Conservancy, and Conservancy International. I am confident that more international support will develop as time goes on.

In addition, a remaining key economic issue for Palau will be how the Parties to the Nauru Agreement decide to handle Palau's policy objective. Palau sits in the Western most part of the Pacific and it is the farthest West signatory to the Parties to the Nauru Agreement – a major international agreement that governs fishing for Tuna in an area that accounts for over 65% of the Tuna caught in the Pacific.

There is some scientific research that indicates that Bluefin Tuna spawns primarily to the north of Palau's EEZ, and Yellowfin Tuna spawns primarily to the north of Palau's EEZ and in Palau's EEZ. Although it has not been proven to a scientific certainty, it appears that both Bluefin Tuna and Yellowfin Tuna – two of the most valuable species of Tuna – migrate from the western Pacific to the eastern Pacific through Palau's EEZ only during the time shortly after its

spawning. Thus, it is only the youngest Tuna and the most vulnerable Tuna that pass through Palau's EEZ.

At the next meeting of the Parties to the Nauru Agreement, the Parties will continue to discuss the best way to maximize the value of our Tuna. One way to maximize our value may be for the Parties to the Nauru Agreement to support Palau in its quest to develop the world's largest Marine Sanctuary on the theory that, as young Tuna are protected as they migrate from west to east through Palau's EEZ, there will be more Tuna and larger Tuna available to catch in Papua New Guinea, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Marshall Islands, the Republic of Kiribati, the Solomon Islands, and the Republic of Nauru – all of which are Parties to the Nauru Agreement that lie to the east of Palau. More Tuna and larger Tuna available for catch should result in higher economic value per Tuna for the Parties to the Nauru Agreement.

The *bul* was once limited to a little hamlet within a state in Palau. Today, Palau has entire States declaring large protected areas under the umbrella of the Micronesia Challenge and I want to see my entire country to be a Marine Sanctuary free from foreign commercial fishing, but it is organizations like the Parties to the Nauru Agreement that have the potential to implement environmental protection policies that are environmentally sustainable on a global scale that have the capacity to maximize the economic value of our fish. Truly the power of the *bul* is growing.

And now I will cede the floor to our esteemed panel to discuss the protection of Apex Predators and the economic opportunities presented by their protection. I believe that Palau's efforts to protect sharks and tuna – two key Apex Predators of the Ocean – provides a strong starting point for our discussion. The Monaco Blue Initiative began as a part of Prince Albert's effort to promote the protection of an Apex Predator, the Atlantic Bluefin Tuna. The Republic of Palau supports the efforts of Prince Albert to protect the Atlantic Bluefin Tuna and the efforts of my country only serve to supplement the efforts of initiatives like the Monaco Blue Initiative. Let us now discuss what else we can do together in support of Prince Albert's Monaco Blue Initiative.