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Press Release

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January 1, 2020: PNMS Act enters into full force with the start of a new decade

January 1, 2020 is a significant date for Palauans as it marks the moment when the Palau National Marine Sanctuary goes into full effect. More specifically, this is the full closure of 80% (~500,000 km²) of Palau's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) to all forms of extractive activities, including all types of fishing. Translated into Palauan as ***Euotelel a Klingil a Debel Belau***, the PNMS is the second largest marine protected area per capita in the world. This newly implemented no-take zone aims to improve Palau's marine biodiversity, nurture stronger pelagic fisheries for the people of Palau and attract responsible tourism to the country. For instance, in marine conservation, the sanctuary will offer better protection to the nearly 800 different species of animals, nine of which are endangered.

As islanders, the connection to the ocean, both in receiving and in giving, has fostered a reciprocal relationship between Palauans and the ocean. As Palauans benefit from the ocean's many gifts, such as a source of food and an enabler of transportation, communication and economy, Palauans in return must reciprocate. They have done so through various conservation measures, including species, gear, seasonal and spatial restrictions to help protect the ocean's health, marine life and ecosystem function.

In this custom of reciprocity, the PNMS Act is just another way for Palauans to 'return the favor' to the ocean. According to Dr. Yimnang Golbuu, Chief Executive Officer of the Palau International Coral Reef Center (PICRC), which has taken on the role of administrator of the PNMS, "The PNMS is a sanctuary established for the people of Palau, much in the same way our traditional leaders implemented *bul* when resources were scarce. We could say that the PNMS is a contemporary form of *bul* that is looking ahead to secure a future for our people."