FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FIRST THINK TANK TO EXAMINE HUMAN DIMENSIONS OF LARGE-SCALE MARINE PROTECTED AREAS TO BE HELD IN HONOLULU, FEBRUARY 8-10

125 Participants from 15 Countries to identify Approaches to Overcoming Social/Political/Economic/Challenges

(HONOLULU, HI, Feb.1, 2016) -- The first large-scale marine protected area (LSMPA), Hawaii’s own Papahanaumokuakea Marine National Monument, was established 10 years ago. In response to the growing recognition that our oceans are in trouble, 14 other LSMPAS have since been established with another 10 currently proposed by governments or NGOs. The Think Tank will be held Feb. 8-10 at the Outrigger Ala Moana Hotel in Honolulu. The meeting is open to the press.

These protected areas, driven largely by science, are in various stages of growth and success. The first Think Tank, convened by the peer learning network, Big Ocean, will concentrate on the human dimension of managing these areas: the complex socio-political realities, the distinct local cultural perspectives and economic needs of LSMPAs.

“This meeting is in response to what we have learned over the years. Science and regulations are not enough. To reverse the trend of what is happening to our oceans, people have to be front and center in both decision-making and design of what conservation means and looks like,” said Aulani Wilhelm, founder of Big Ocean. “To be successful, communities have to be supportive, engaged and have trust. Otherwise, it just won’t work.”
"We don't manage the fish, we manage the people, and yet we know very little about how people perceive the ocean and what they desire from ocean conservation efforts," said Dr. Patrick Christie, a leading scholar in this field. "That's what we are here to explore together."

Spurred by various factors such as declining fish populations and warming seas, ocean conservation is becoming as important as more traditional land conservation. A well-publicized incident when the nation of Palau burned Vietnamese fishing boats caught illegally fishing in the country’s waters, underscores the point.

Organized by Big Ocean, NOAA’s Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, the University of Washington, University of Guelph, University of British Columbia, Colorado State University and the University of Victoria, the overarching goal of this collaboration is to be proactive in identifying approaches to overcome human dimension challenges of LSMPAs and to develop practical recommendations and best practices around human dimension considerations.

Results of this meeting will be put into recommendations to be presented at the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)’s World Conservation Congress to be held in Honolulu in September. IUCN is the primary advisor to the United Nations on the environment, and most of the IUCN’s LSMP Taskforce will participate in the Think Tank. The taskforce will discuss ways to bring the recommendations forward and work with Big Ocean to draft international guidelines.

The three-day Think Tank is sponsored by NOAA, The Pew Charitable Trusts, National Geographic Pristine Seas Program, Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council of Canada and Conservation International, with additional support from the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, Office of Hawaii Affairs, Great Barrier Reef Foundation, Oceana and Center for Ocean Solutions, Stanford University.

About Big Ocean: Founded in 2010, Big Ocean is an international peer learning network of the world’s LSMPAs created to increase global best practice and set professional standards. (www.bigoceanmanagers.org). Big Ocean engages 15 countries and nearly 20 established and proposed LSMPA sites.

###

Contact: Piia Aarma, Pineapple Tweed PR & Marketing - 808.221.2102 (m) or 808.737.1904 (o) or piia@pineappletweed.com