



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Honored as "Papahānaumokuākea Marine Monument" But Risks to the Cultural and Natural Wonder on the Rise

#### Illegal fishing, research "gold rush", bio-safety protocol violations and lack of enforcement

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Protecting

Native Hawaiian

Traditional and

Customary Rights

and Our

Fragile Environment

Honolulu, Hawai'i March 2, 2007. The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine Monument was honored in a Native Hawaiian naming ceremony this morning. "Papahānaumokuākea" refers to the ancient creation stories of Papa (earth mother) and Wakea (sky father) and the hanau moku (birth of islands). The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands are considered the ancestors or kūpuna of the main Hawaiian Islands. "The cultural significance of these islands cannot be overstated," said Marti Townsend of KAHEA: The Hawaiian-Environmental Alliance, "which is one reason why they deserve the greatest possible protection. Unfortunately, it seems that currently there is a serious lack of protection for this unique cultural and natural wonder."

A significant increase in NWHI traffic, serious violations and illegal activity in the fragile coral reef ecosystem are sparking concerns that publicity about the NWHI is generating potentially damaging impacts. This month, for example, an advertisement was posted on-line for an illegal two-week fishing expedition in the NWHI, (enclosed). The NWHI hui which has been closely monitoring permitting and governance in the NWHI, is concerned that the NWHI ecosystem is increasingly at risk.

- Last year permits were issued to allow over 340 people to carry out activities in state waters of the NWHI, including significant collection and extraction expeditions; some had all the markings of a bio-prospecting expedition with thousands of samples of micro-organisms and coral extracted. An "extreme sport" paddling contest was allowed and their behavior apparently generated a warning letter from the state. Alarmingly, in the first quarter of 2007, the number of permit applications already surpasses the number for all of last year. To date, there has been no assessment of the cumulative impacts from more than 380 activities that took place in state waters, alone, last year. There has been no public reporting, at all, on activities occurring outside of state waters.
- In 2006, permit violations included apparently illegal coral harvesting, bacteria cultivation and waste dumping by coral disease researchers on a federally-funded cruise. Also under investigation is illegal fishing by a long-liner associated with Honolulu's influential Fish Auction caught fishing inside protected areas which have been closed to longlining for well over a decade.

#### Massive Amounts of Research Projects Without a Plan

Federal authorities have failed to prioritize research needs for conservation, instead allowing a wide range of extractive activities, many of which could have been carried out in less protected waters elsewhere. Permits should not be approved until there are established management priorities for conservation based on an objective scientific assessment. Federal and state protections for the NWHI have as the primary goal the protection of the ecosystem its natural character. Instead, with the flood of traffic and the lack of monitoring and enforcement, the natural character of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands may well be altered forever in the wake of national and international publicity.

#### Behind Closed Doors

There has been no public oversight of the new NWHI Monument, since it was designated in June 2005. Unlike the NWHI Reserve established in 2000 requiring a public Reserve Advisory Council and public meetings, and the State's Land board process, federal Monument management decisions are now being carried out behind closed doors, with potentially disastrous results.

#### The Threats of Disease Transmission

Deep concerns have been expressed by NGOs and scientists about the potential for transmission of diseases by researchers and others throughout the NWHI, yet nationally accepted bio-safety standards are still not

required on NOAA's research vessels. The illegal harvest of live coral and cultivation of bacteria by researchers on-board a NOAA research vessel in 2006 has served to heighten these concerns. In documents made public last month, NOAA's NWHI Science Coordinator cited researcher claims that the lab on the agency's research vessel was a "bacteria cesspool" and that scientists had dumped waste from illegally maintained live corals directly overboard.<sup>1</sup> These vessels had, until recently, apparently been dumping untreated sewage into protected waters of the NWHI.

### **Increased Traffic, Lack of Protection**

In theory, and on paper, the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands are one of the most highly protected areas on earth. However, monitoring and enforcement are not properly implemented.

"We aren't going to have second and third chances at preventing pending disaster if existing activities are allowed to continue," said KAHEA's Marti Townsend. "The resource is too fragile. It cannot recover from the pounding that is being allowed."

Townsend noted, "There is a growing movement for a moratorium on activities in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands until such time as research priorities based on conservation needs are clearly identified, a monitoring, observer and enforcement system is in place, and there is formal mechanism for public oversight of the management of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands."

Concerns about the need for a moratorium surfaced last year when the NWHI hui identified substantial violations of the National Environmental Policy Act during the 2006 research permitting process.

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The following advertisement was posted on Craigslist on February 7. Shortly thereafter the violation was reported to federal authorities. It is unknown what, if any steps have been taken. The advertisement specifies that the individual will be delivering supplies to Midway, which appears to indicate the likelihood that this was posted by a government contractor. The ad remains online.

- It is a violation of the Lacey Act to offer unauthorized extractive tours in exchange for payment in a refuge. Monument rules prohibit commercial fishing.
- Recreational activities may not be carried out from a vessel where one has paid for passage.
- Most forms of fishing are illegal in state NWHI waters.

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### ***Leaving for fishing trip to Midway..2 weeks!!***

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Reply to: [comm-274940719@craigslist.org](mailto:comm-274940719@craigslist.org)

Date: 2007-02-07, 10:31AM HST

looking for fishermen wanting to go with.. costs just share fuel.. and a few days on Midway..65 foot boat.. 4 people only, plus captain and one other.Check out Midway.. very pristine and wonderful..about \$1,800 should cover two weeks.. adventure of lifetime!! not a hire deal.. just come with me as i deliver supplies to Midway..leaving late Feb, Early March.. exact date open until we get 4 People ready to go...Physically healthy only please!!!

- Location: Honolulu -Midway Isl
- it's NOT ok to contact this poster with services or other commercial interests

PostingID: 274940719

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<sup>1</sup> Testimony of Randall Kosaki, NOAA Research Coordinator, presented in documentation for State Board of Land and Natural Resources hearing regarding violations carried out by Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology researcher(s), January, 2007. Posted online at (Jan 12, 2007 Board Submittal):<http://www.hawaii.gov/dlnr/chair/meetings/submittals/20070112/dar/F%20-%20Aquatic%20Resources%20-%20F4-Submittals.pdf>