



Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary

June 11, 2007

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Citizen-At-Large

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NON-VOTING

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'Aulani Wilhelm
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Dan Basta

Director, National Marine Sanctuary Program

1305 East-West Highway, N/ORM-6

Silver Spring, MD 20910

RE: Request for Increased Funding for the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary

Aloha Mr. Basta,

We are concerned by news of significant funding cuts to the National Marine Sanctuary Program and the potential impacts these cuts will have on critical program efforts of the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary to protect endangered humpback whales.

The Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council (council), which is made up of 31 volunteers representing a wide variety of geographical and public/private interests, was formed to advise the Secretary of Commerce and the sanctuary management in implementing the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary (sanctuary) management plan. The council has determined that the sanctuary's current annual operating budget is clearly inadequate to successfully carry out critical research, education, and resource protections outlined in the sanctuary's management plan. The council requests increased federal support for this sanctuary and the entire National Marine Sanctuary Program.

As you are aware, the sanctuary was established to protect endangered humpback whales and their habitat in Hawai'i. The sanctuary has made significant accomplishments during the last five years including:

- Education:
 - development of marine science curriculum for grades K-12
 - development of marine education learning center in Maui
 - development of education cruises to pilot an at sea classroom
- Research:
 - Coordination of and participation in SPLASH (Structure of Populations, Levels of Abundance, and Status of Humpbacks), the largest international cooperative study of any whale species
 - Support of research projects to study threats to humpback whales on their wintering grounds, residency characteristics of humpbacks, historical trends in vessel collisions with humpback whales, communication in humpback whales
- Conservation:
 - Successful intervention and release of entangled humpback whales
 - Sponsorship of a workshop on ship strikes on humpback whales
 - development of new whale avoidance signs and brochures that warn recreational boaters to take measures to avoid collisions with humpback whales, a growing threat to the whales

As you also know, the sanctuary's budget has been significantly decreased by 25% over the last three years. Without continued federal support, many of the sanctuary's efforts in Hawai'i may be impacted over the next several years.

While all National Marine Sanctuaries are extremely valuable sites and deserve increased funding, we are especially concerned with the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary. This sanctuary is one of prominent national and international importance in terms of its expertise on whale disentanglement and research shared at the International Whaling Commission, the number of people reached and long range educational initiatives such as the curriculum development, the strategic partnerships for resource management and community involvement, motivated staff, and unique value of the sanctuary not just to humpbacks but to residents and visitors, and to the State of Hawaii as an important economic resource.

We have the opportunity to reach millions of people with messages about the importance of protection and stewardship of our oceans through the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary in the main Hawaiian Islands. Hawaii has had increased media coverage and frequent visits of government leaders due to the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. It is important to recognize, that the sanctuary is located in an area that is a showcase for NOAA and the National Marine Sanctuary Program and supporting the program's funding needs should be made a priority.

It is crucial to maintain the current programs that the Sanctuary has in place and to seek opportunities for expansion of these programs through adequate funding. We request that you continue to do all you can to increase the Hawaiian Islands National Marine Sanctuary program's budget including sharing this correspondence with NOAA leadership, DOC leadership, and members of Congress.

Sincerely,



Terry O'Halloran
Chair
Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale
National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council

cc: HIHW SAC