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**New Vessel Blessed at NOAA's Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary**  
*NOAA Administrator Participates in Ceremony*

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary's new research vessel, R/V *Koholā*, was blessed today during a brief ceremony at U.S. Coast Guard Station Maui. Jane Lubchenco, Ph.D, undersecretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator, participated in the ceremony that included a blessing by sanctuary advisory council member Kimokeo Kapahulehua.

The R/V *Koholā*, named after the Hawaiian word for whale, is based on Maui in the heart of the sanctuary at Mā'alaea Harbor, not far from the sanctuary's facilities in Kīhei. The new 38-foot vessel was built specifically to support whale response and research efforts within Hawai'i.

The vessel is ideally suited for sanctuary operations with features that include built-in storage for a 15-foot rapid deployment inflatable that can be used during an entanglement response, a davit for lifting heavy equipment, and a custom designed upper helm station that provides the boat operator with excellent visibility for safe operation around whales.

The vessel also offers multiple stations for observers and a versatile platform for tagging, observation, health assessment and response to marine mammals in distress. The *Koholā* will be used to support research and monitoring of fish, corals and maritime heritage resources through dive operations by cooperating partners.

The Hawaiian Islands provide critical breeding grounds for endangered humpback whales. Up to 12,000 of the 20,000 humpback whales found in the North Pacific migrate to Hawaiian waters every year to mate, calve, and nurse their young. The sanctuary was Congressionally-designated in 1992 to protect humpback whales and their habitat in the Hawaiian Islands.

One of the primary threats to the species is entanglement in ropes or nets. Research by sanctuary staff estimates that more than 50 percent of humpbacks in some regions have been recently entangled. The sanctuary's staff is noted for its expertise in disentangling whales and the R/V *Koholā* will help support this work.

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary is administered jointly by a partnership of NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources. The sanctuary works to protect humpback whales through research, education, conservation and stewardship.

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**On the Web:**

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary: <http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov>