

HO'OKAHI NO KA 'AINA A ME NA KANAKA



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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### **Final Management Plan for Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument Released, Meets Strong Criticism from Conservation Community**

*Honolulu - December 29, 2008* - The long-awaited Management Plan for the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands was released to the public over the Christmas holiday, outlining 15 years of actions for marine conservation in one of the last large-scale reef ecosystems on the planet. Despite two years of work, and thousands of public letters and comments calling for a stronger, more protective plan, the new version of this plan has changed little from weak, earlier drafts.

"In light of all the effort that has been put forth by the public, this plan is a real disappointment," said Marti Townsend, Program Director of local conservation group KAHEA: The Hawaiian-Environmental Alliance. KAHEA is a founding member of the "NWHI hui," a coalition of Native Hawaiian and conservation groups advocating strong protections for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands since 2000.

While revised vision, mission, and goals now commit to conservation as the purpose of the Monument, implementation actions remain largely unimproved. The plan lifts a previous prohibition on bioprospecting, fails to define enforcement protocols, and abandons entirely the "precautionary principle," a hallmark of previous protections that required biological, cultural and historic resource integrity be favored when the impacts of any proposed activity were uncertain.

Over 50% of the proposed 355 million-dollar budget is for government operations and research, while a mere 12% goes to reducing existing threats, like clean-up of marine debris and legacy military contamination. The plan also fails to allocate sufficient resources for Native Hawaiian involvement in Monument decision-making, and leaves decision-making to a closed-door Monument Management Board.

The National Wildlife Federation, the Center for Biological Diversity and more than a dozen other organizations--representing over 5 million people--joined KAHEA in strongly criticizing the management plan during the public review process.

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"This is conservation on paper, but not in practice. They have reshuffled the goals to say 'full conservation' but their proposed actions speak louder than their words. They are exempting increased military exercises proposed for this extremely delicate ocean habitat from management. They are proposing increased tourism, new construction, and extractive research without adequate public oversight and Native Hawaiian consultation," said Townsend.

The Monument was established in 2006 to protect the resources of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, a network of coral reefs, islands, atolls, and shoals that arches through the Pacific for 1,200 miles northwest of the Main Hawaiian Islands. Celebrated in stories of creation as the place where Hawai'i began, these ancient islands are often described as the kupuna, or ancestors, of the Main Hawaiian Islands. Survival of one of the earth's last remaining large-scale coral reef ecosystems is a critical issue for the Pacific region and the world. The NWHI ecosystem contains over 3.5 million acres of some of the world's oldest living coral colonies, which are home to 7,000 marine species. It is the primary habitat for millions of rare seabirds, the nursery for the majority of the world's Green sea turtles, and home to 95% of the highly endangered Hawaiian monk seals.

**About KAHEA:** KAHEA: The Hawaiian-Environmental Alliance represents a broad alliance of Native Hawaiians, local residents, and concerned individuals world-wide concerned with protecting Hawai'i's fragile environment and unique culture. A grassroots non-profit 501(c)3 working out of offices in the heart of Honolulu's Chinatown, KAHEA is committed to securing the strongest possible protections for Hawai'i's most ecologically unique and culturally sacred places.

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