



PRESS RELEASE
August 23, 2002
For Immediate Release

Board of Land and Natural Resources Approves Public Comment Period for Newly-revised Regulations for State Waters in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands

(August 23, Honolulu) KAHEA: The Hawaiian-Environmental Alliance applauds the state Board of Land and Natural Resources for their decision today to allow public hearings on the Department of Land and Natural Resources' newly-revised regulations for state waters in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

These waters include the shallow lagoons and fragile reefs that support phenomenally rich biodiversity and serve as the very heart of the NWHI ecosystem. These waters hold the majority of vulnerable and abundant biological resources in the 1,200-mile archipelago, also referred to as the "Kupuna Islands".

On Monday, August 19, 2002, DLNR released proposed regulations establishing a Marine Refuge in state waters in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. DLNR's new draft regulations provide strong protection measures for the fragile coral reef ecosystem and reflect most of the concerns outlined in the large number of public comments.

"State waters represent the very heart of the biodiversity on which all species in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands depend. We are very pleased that the public will have the opportunity to thank the DLNR for proposing regulations that guarantee Native Hawaiian cultural access, protect the precious and fragile marine resources. We also look forward to suggesting additional needed changes to the draft." Cha Smith

DLNR presented the regulations before the Board of Land and Natural Resources on Friday, August 23rd and requested the Board to grant public hearings on the newly proposed regulations. In addition to KAHEA, those testifying in support of allowing the regulations to be released for public comment were: Dave Raney, NGO representative of the National Coral Reef Taskforce, Linda Paul, and UH Professor Emeritus Marion Kelly. William Aila, Stephanie Fried, Mark Glick, the Sierra Club and others provided testimony in support, but were unable to attend.

Background: President Clinton's Executive Order of December 2000 established the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve and outlined basic protections and management principles. However, these protections do not apply to state waters, which extend for three miles around each island and atoll. In February 2002, DLNR proposed regulations that opened a "fishery management area" in state waters in the middle of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve. The surrounding federal waters in the region were already protected by the Executive Order, (re-affirmed by the Bush Administration in March, 2002). DLNR's proposal to open the fragile lagoons and reefs to a wide range of extractive activities in the middle of the coral reserve lead to a massive public outcry. As a result, DLNR in accordance with the law, has revised regulations which reflect public comments and complement the existing protections in adjacent federal waters.

It is possible that state waters may be incorporated into a proposed federal Sanctuary for the NWHI (if current protection measures can be maintained). However this process may take several years. In the meantime, these vulnerable waters must be protected against aquarium fish collection, coral harvesting, cruise ship excursions, over-fishing, and other potentially destructive activities.

End.