



DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES

News Release

LINDA LINGLE
GOVERNOR

PETER T. YOUNG, CHAIRPERSON
Phone: (808) 587-0401
Fax: (808) 587-0390
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**State, Federal Agencies Remind Public:
Please Do Not Feed or Interact with Hawaiian Monk Seals**

LIHUE — The Department of Land and Natural Resources and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries, U. S. Department of Commerce) are reminding boaters, fishermen, swimmers and others, that it is against state and federal laws to feed or harass endangered Hawaiian monk seals. It is harmful to the animals and dangerous to people.

"They are an endangered species, and they can be dangerous. We need to do our part to contribute to their survival by allowing them to live a wild existence, independent from most human activities or interventions," said Peter Young, DLNR Chairperson.

"It is important that people remember to be extremely cautious around wild marine mammals such as monk seals," said Young.

Recently, there have been reports of people feeding a Hawaiian monk seal at Port Allen and Nawiliwili Harbor, Kaua'i. It was reported that the seal follows boats in the harbor and well-intentioned people may have been feeding the seal.

However, the consequences of habituating the seal to free handouts can be dangerous for both the seal and humans. The seal may become aggressive while begging for food and may bite someone.

If the seal becomes aggressive or too attached to humans, it may have to be relocated. In a recent case, a young monk seal at Kealakekua Bay, Hawai'i was relocated to an undisclosed, less populated area.

Changing the natural behavior of the seal by feeding it may decrease its ability to survive on its own. It does more harm than good.

An in-depth review conducted by NOAA Fisheries biologists, non-governmental marine mammal experts, and the Marine Mammal Commission, determined that feeding and otherwise closely interacting with marine mammals in the wild alters their natural behavior in ways that place them at increased risk of injury and death.

Repeated exposure to humans and human activities has been correlated with placing these animals at greater risk of incidental interactions with vessels and fishing activities, vandalism, and ingestion of inappropriate or contaminated food items. In addition, feeding may impact their ability or willingness to forage for food, which is of particular concern for young animals who need to learn foraging skills.

People may tend to forget that marine mammals are just like other wild animals and can be aggressive. One of the best ways that people can help protect the health and welfare of Hawaiian monk seals is to observe the animals at a respectful distance of at least 50 yards and to refrain from swimming with or feeding them.

If an injured seal is observed, please call DLNR - Enforcement on Kaua'i at 274-3521, or after hours call the Operator and ask for Enterprise 5469. Or call NOAA Fisheries at 1- 888-256-9840, a 24-hour reporting number for marine mammal emergencies.

NOAA Fisheries has developed recommended viewing guidelines for admiring wild marine mammals. For additional information and guidelines for viewing marine mammals in the wild: http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot_res/MMViewing.html

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For more information, contact:

Jeff Walters

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary

Phone: (808) 587-0106, cell 282-0155

Protected Resources Division

NOAA Fisheries

Phone: (808) 973-2935 x 210