

**Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary
Building Dedication & Grand Opening of Sanctuary Learning Center
Kihei, Maui
Jane Lubchenco
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere
April 13, 2009
As Delivered**

Senator Daniel Inouye, Senator Daniel Akaka, Uncle Kimokeo, Laura Theilen, representing Governor Linda Lingle and Kuhea Paracuelles, representing Mayor Charmaine Tavares, it is my great honor to begin by thanking each of you for your presence here today and for your sustained efforts to protect the special natural and cultural treasures of this glorious island State.

Naomi McIntosh and Allen Tom and the entire Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary staff, on behalf of everyone here, I thank you for organizing today's special event.

Good morning and *Aloha!* to everyone.

The Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary is a very special place. It is one of the magic places of the world that sparks our imaginations, delights our senses, and taps into deep reservoirs of appreciation of

nature, culture and heritage. Its existence reflects a deep reverence for life that is not human, but life that enriches human experience and meaning. It is a place that inspires harmony, conversation and conservation. And it is a convening place, one that brings people together to celebrate life and to learn. In leaping above the surface, crashing explosively and disappearing beneath the waves, humpback whales draw us into their world, providing a natural opportunity for learning more about their home.

Here in Hawaii, we are fortunate to have a population of humpback whales that is increasing in number. The key to their continued success depends on measures we take today to ensure healthy populations and ecosystems for tomorrow.

Humpback whales are an integral part of their ecosystem. Their well-being – and ours – depends upon the health of their ecosystems, beneath the waves and here, on the adjacent land.

This fall, the sanctuary will sponsor statewide public scoping meetings as we look to get input on how the sanctuary should be managed in the future. This Management Plan Review is an opportunity for the public to provide comments

on the future direction of the sanctuary. I encourage all of you to get involved in that process.

NOAA works closely with partners and the community in providing stewardship of the special places for which it has responsibility. NOAA co-manages the sanctuary with the State of Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources. I want to extend a special thanks to Laura Theilen, the director of the Department of Land and Natural Resources and Jeff Walters, the sanctuary co-manager for their strong commitment to the sanctuary. This state-federal partnership is a powerful model for other regions.

A key group in helping support the sanctuary is the Sanctuary Advisory Council. This Council is a diverse group of members of the community, businesses, local government and other agencies, and is integral in providing advice to sanctuary management. Because community involvement is necessary to effectively manage any marine protected area, I take this opportunity to highlight the very special work of the many wonderful volunteers and organizations that work to support the sanctuary and help protect the marine environment. Please join me

in thanking the volunteers and Advisory Council members for their important contributions to protecting our Nations' special marine treasures.

I now have the pleasure of inviting you to help me recognize and thank an amazing and unique individual, Kimokeo Kapahulehua for his ongoing support and vision for the education programs and activities that are provided at this site, here in Maui. His dedication and support for perpetuating the Hawaiian culture, and his efforts to restore the ancient Hawaiian fishpond that you see here, are an important part of our efforts to conserve the marine environment in ways that incorporate the wisdom of Native Hawaiians. Our goal to live sustainably, in harmony with nature, requires that we listen to and learn from the ancients, from each other and from nature herself.

The new facility that we dedicate today, the Sanctuary Learning Center, will help NOAA and all its community partners carry out this broader mission by protecting humpback whales and their habitat through expanded education programs, research, and resource protection activities. The long-dreamed of vision to adequately host and expand opportunities for students, the community, and visitors to learn about the marine environment, will now become a reality, thanks

to this building. Today, the site features marine focused education programs for visitors and school groups throughout the year. Efforts at the site are assisted by volunteers who work with school groups and help interpret the marine environment.

These local partnerships are enabled and strengthened by champions and visionaries working elsewhere but on your behalf. Hawaii is indeed fortunate to have two distinguished Senators who both support ocean education and conservation. Both recognize the intimate connections between people and ocean ecosystems, in past times as well as today. Both have embraced NOAA's focus on science, services and stewardship.

Since 1990, Senator Daniel K. Akaka has been supportive of the two national marine sanctuary sites in Hawaii as well as the entire National Marine Sanctuary System. His dedicated staff has been a part of many of our functions including our designation ceremony in Kihei in 1998. The Senator himself has always made himself available for Sanctuary staff briefings and every year finds time to take meet and take photos with our Foundation's Volunteer of the Year Nominee. Senator Akaka, from all of us at NOAA, THANK YOU for your support.

This year marks the 15th anniversary of the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary headquarters office in Kihei, Maui. From a beginning full of hope and promise, the sanctuary program has grown to become strong and more effective over the years. Today provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the key role that one person has played throughout this time, one individual who has been a staunch supporter and enabler of the healthy program and facilities you see today.

Please join me in recognizing and offering a special "*Mahalo nui loa*" (thank you very much) to Senator Daniel K. Inouye. Without his support and vision, we would not be standing here today in front of this new building. His efforts to provide the sanctuary with this new learning facility, coupled with a long standing commitment to support the sanctuary programs and unwavering support for protecting Hawaii's marine resources is deserving of the highest recognition.

Senator Inouye, on behalf of NOAA, thank you for all that you do to protect our "One Ocean".

The future of the sanctuary is dependent on the commitment of us all. The completion of the Sanctuary Learning Center is an example of what we can do together to help protect our Ocean. *Mahalo nui* to all who have helped make today possible.