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**NOAA SIGNS NEW HAWAIIAN MONK SEAL RECOVERY PLAN**  
*Critically endangered monk seals to benefit*

NOAA Fisheries Service signed and implemented a new Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery Plan in a ceremony held today at the Waikiki Aquarium. This is the first time changes have been made to the plan since it was originally drafted in 1983. The Hawaiian monk seal is one of the world's most endangered species, and this recovery plan is designed to help save the species from extinction.

Sen. Daniel K. Inouye and William T. Hogarth, Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries Service, spoke at the ceremony, while a host of honored guests including volunteers, NOAA staff, and organizations that contribute to monk seal recovery efforts looked on. NOAA Ocean Service's Assistant Administrator John H. Dunnigan attended as well, representing NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary Program which will be involved in future recovery efforts for the monk seal through coordination with the new Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument

Recovery plans are designed to describe the threats facing the species and the actions needed to address those threats, under an Endangered Species Act requirement. Although the monk seal population remained stable in the 1990s, the Hawaiian monk seal is in crisis because the population is now declining at a rate of about 4percent per year. Biologists estimate the current population at about 1,200 individuals. Biologists' models predict the species' population will fall below 1000 animals within the next three to four years. This places the Hawaiian monk seal among the world's most endangered species.

"The Hawaiian monk seal is a treasure to be preserved for future generations," said Hogarth. "This new recovery plan is a positive step to save them from possible extinction."

For more than two decades, NOAA scientists have worked to manage and study the population. Although their numbers would be much lower if nothing had been done, significant and potential threats continue to threaten this species. Most importantly, very low survival of juvenile animals, believed to be principally related to food limitation, has persisted for many years across much of the population. Unless the numbers of young females increase, biologists fear there will not be enough reproductive animals in the population for recovery to occur.

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This new version of the recovery plan is significant since it addresses these and other threats, and details the management and research needed to give monk seals the best chance for survival. Although most of the monk seal population is found in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, now part of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument; the new plan also addresses the growing population in the main Hawaiian Islands.

Senator Daniel K. Inouye said, “The Hawaiian Monk Seal is the only species of seal in the world whose natural habitat is entirely contained within the borders of a single nation—the United States of America. As a nation, therefore, we bear a grave responsibility—a responsibility that falls most directly on us, here in Hawaii, who are closest to this most cherished of marine mammals. I am pleased to report to you that in my estimation, we have risen to meet the challenge. For over ten years, we have studied and intervened on the Monk Seal’s behalf. From direct observation and protection of Monk Seal populations, to careful surveys of their habitat, to the development of management principles to preserve their environment, the plan we announce today rests securely on a history of intense dedication and commitment.”

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America’s scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation’s coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation’s living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries Service, please visit: [www.nmfs.noaa.gov](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov).

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NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries Service: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

NOAA’s Pacific Islands Regional Office: <http://www.fpir.noaa.gov>

NOAA’s Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center: <http://www.pifsc.noaa.gov>