

## **“Coastal Resource Management and Sustainable Tourism”**

Testimony of  
**David W. Blane, AICP,**  
**Director, Office of Planning**  
**Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism**  
**State of Hawaii**

to the  
**U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy**  
**Hawaii and Pacific Islands Regional Meeting**  
**May 14, 2002**

### **Introduction:**

Good morning, Chair Watkins and Members of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy:

Thank you for this opportunity to share with you some of the results and lessons learned from Hawaii's CZM program. I hope these observations will be helpful as your commission evaluates and proposes new national policies.

My presentation today is titled “Coastal Resource Management & Sustainable Tourism.” First, I will describe the critical role that coastal management plays in promoting a sustainable visitor economy. Then, based on Hawaii's experience, I will offer some specific recommendations for programs and policies at the national level.

### **I. Sustainable Tourism:**

My theme rests on the fact that tourism is not **part** of Hawaii's economy, it **is** our economy. Tourism here is an 11 billion dollar a year industry, with 7 million annual visitors, generating approximately 190,000 direct and indirect jobs. It is larger than all other economic sectors combined, including agriculture, and military spending. Although, there are increased efforts to attract hi-tech companies and to develop diversified agriculture, for the foreseeable future we have all our eggs in one, albeit fragile, basket.

Hawaii's visitors are not drawn by the art and architecture of great cities, or by the rush of gambling and theme parks. They are drawn by our natural environment, specifically- the climate, the imposing volcanic peaks, and most importantly, our ocean beaches. Hawaii's "Signature Allure" namely, our competitive advantage in a global tourism industry, is her coastal and ocean environment.

These unique resources are not merely amenities; they are the very foundations of our economic well being. If we lose or degrade our coastal resources, the impact on our economy would be swift and painful. Our mantra is clear, "our economy is the environment, and our environment is the economy" and vice versa. While "sustainable tourism" is the new buzzword worldwide, it has long been a reality in Hawaii.

Likewise, we cannot focus solely on the quality of the visitor's experience. We firmly believe a healthy visitor industry cannot exist in the midst of an unhealthy society. Tourism is a highly symbiotic industry that must be integrated with the quality of life of the local residents. The profits of tourism must be used to improve local schools, housing, health, and infrastructure. If the local population sees itself as merely raw material for the visitor industry, the results will be a growing resentment, crime and even violence.

## **II. Threats to our Coastal Resources:**

Given this vital importance, our CZM program concentrates on identifying and responding to continual threats to these resources. These major threats are summarized as follows:

1. **Erosion:** Hawaii continues to lose its sandy beaches, including world famous Waikiki Beach, at an alarming rate. The primary causes are coastal armoring, the disruption of natural sand migration, and sea level rise. It is estimated that

25% of Oahu beaches (over 17 miles) have been narrowed or lost over the past 70 years.

2. **Pollution:** The quality of our offshore waters, streams and estuaries continues to decline. The primary culprits are agricultural run-off, sedimentation due to the loss of natural ground cover, poorly treated wastewater, and urban drainage systems.
3. **Coral Reef Loss:** Coral reefs buffer our shores against wave damage, sustain marine ecosystems, produce white sand for beaches, provide ocean activities and food. Hawaii's reefs are rapidly being degraded through bleaching from global warming, the introduction of alien species, polluted run-off, vessel groundings, and marine debris.
4. **Poor Land Use Planning:** Marginal land developments in the coastal zone have resulted in visual blight, restricted shoreline access, pollution, and erosion. We have also built most of our transportation links, sewage treatment plants and other vital infrastructure in the coastal zone.
5. **Natural Hazards:** The damage and dollar loss from natural disasters grows exponentially with each event. The island of Kauai has still not recovered from the impacts from Hurricane Iniki in 1992. Besides hurricanes, other coastal threats include lava flows from volcanic eruptions, local flooding, and tsunamis.
6. **Cultural alienation:** The heavy influx of foreign and mainland visitors has had a major impact on the traditional Hawaiian culture. Increasingly, Native Hawaiians are turning to the courts for redress of issues like the rights of shoreline access for traditional cultural practices, and for the resolution of

long standing land ownership disputes. On the plus side, there is an increasing interest by the modern tourist to learn from, and share in, the cultural heritage of the Hawaiian people.

#### **IV. Hawaii's Challenge and Response:**

Through many cooperative efforts, Hawaii has become increasingly successful in responding to these threats. Some of these initiatives include:

1. **Better Marketing, Education and Outreach:** A successful CZM program rests on the general awareness and support of the public. Therefore, we have accelerated our outreach and education programs to promote a better understanding of the importance of our coastal resources. These efforts include community workshops, programs for elementary schools, public service ads and citizens advisory councils.
2. **Hazard Mitigation:** Using both state and FEMA resources, Hawaii has greatly improved its efforts to predict and respond to hurricane threats. A national pilot program was developed on the County of Maui using its GIS system to better coordinate response efforts. Mitigative planning continues to improve through the safer siting of infrastructure, better building codes, stricter shoreline setbacks, and preserving natural buffers.
3. **Better Economic Analysis:** For a coastal state, we have done a poor job of quantifying the economic contributions of coastal resources. While we are making a concerted catch-up effort in this discipline we still lag behind other states, especially Florida and California. While putting a dollar value on clean beaches and other environmental assets is difficult; it is far easier to ask for funding if we show these expenditures as a return on investment rather than a sunk cost.

4. **Regulatory Efforts:** We are trying to promote the concept that environmental protection is good for business. While partially successful, these efforts must go hand in hand with a sensible regulatory environment. We are working towards more consistent and user friendly regulations regarding drainage, building setbacks, sea walls, design standards, and vessel discharge. Unfortunately, we have done little to change the incentive side of this equation by using modern planning tools such as the transfer and purchase of development rights, tax incentives and conservation easements.

#### **V. Recommendations to the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy:**

Using the same outline, Hawaii's CZM program would like to make the following recommendations to the Commission:

1. **Marketing, Education, and Outreach:** We encourage the federal administration to expand public information efforts on coastal and ocean stewardship. We would also ask for more Federal cooperation in the education and development of a cadre of professional coastal zone managers, both at home and abroad. Programs such as scholarships, grants, internships and foreign exchange programs would help improve professionalism worldwide.
2. **Hazard Mitigation:** One of the more successful Federal initiatives has been in the area of hazard mitigation, especially since it crosses the jurisdictional lines of so many Federal agencies. We urge continued support for these efforts to prevent beach and dune loss, curb vessel spills and discharge, resist alien species, and improve coastal land use planning.
3. **Economic Analysis:** We need a much better picture of the nationwide impacts and economic contributions of coastal related activities. Better data

will be invaluable in prioritizing federal spending, calculating loss and damages, and evaluating the effectiveness of complex and often conflicting federal programs.

4. **Regulatory Environment:** While most Americans support state's rights and local controls, coastal resource management demands a strong Federal presence. Oceans, rivers and watersheds know no state, territorial or national boundaries. We need cohesive national standards for shoreline setbacks, coastal armoring, public access and ownership, jurisdictional boundaries, dune protection, and floodplain and coastal development.

Likewise, most Americans would not support the expansion or creation of a new Federal Bureaucracy. Yet the current cat's cradle of conflicting and overlapping Federal programs cannot continue. Therefore, we advocate the creation of a separate Federal agency charged with the administration of key coastal programs. The agency would assemble ocean and coastal programs from NOAA, Departments of Interior and Agriculture, the EPA, and even the Coast Guard. Rather than expanding the federal bureaucracy, we think this will actually streamline it by reducing duplication, improving efficiency and consolidating staffing.

## **VI. Conclusion:**

In closing, I hope that illustrating both the successes and shortcomings of the Hawaii CZM program will provide some insights that will help in your efforts to develop new national policies.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts with you, and for your kind attention. On behalf of my entire staff, I hope you enjoy your stay in our beautiful islands. Aloha