

**SUSTAINABLE OCEAN TOURISM:
THREATS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND NEEDS;
A PRISTINE ENVIRONMENT MAKES GOOD BUSINESS SENSE
OR
IF OUR ENVIRONMENT AIN'T HAPPY AIN'T NOBODY HAPPY**

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INTRODUCTION:

Hawaii is unique among the United States in its tropical and remote location, idyllic physical attributes, the most endangered species of any State, a rich indigenous culture, and a mystique that has drawn visitors to the Islands since Capt. Cook first made contact. Tourism has seen dramatic development since Statehood in 1959. An important component of this has been the Ocean Tourism Industry which has been growing at a faster rate than tourism the past twenty years. This gives us a four-decade perspective to assess what Hawaii has done correctly and where it has failed to encourage sustainable Ocean Tourism while preserving and protecting the marine and coastal environment. "Of particular consequence, is the competing dualism which is fundamental to many of the issues identified and wherein some issue objective seem to favor environmental over business interests. However, it is precisely because the natural resources are vital to the success of these industries that we find ocean resources restoration and preservation to be critical factors for further ocean resources tourism development." (Mac Donald, 1988)

The Ocean Tourism Industry is highly segmented and dynamic. The kinds of marine activities generating expenditures include: tour boats and inter-island cruise ships, submarines, dive shops, ocean activity product manufacture and sales, charter boat fishing, recreational fishing, personal boating, major yacht races, wind, board, and body surfing events, jet skiing, parasailing, (kite boarding), and ocean kayaking. Total direct revenues were \$560 million and total employment was about 5,850 in 1992. This had grown to an estimated \$797 million in 1998 with total employment at about 7,000. The OCEAN TOURISM INDUSTRY is one of the fastest growing

sectors in Hawaii's economy. (MacDonald et.al. 1995) Hawaii's Maritime Industries overall generated an estimated \$3.8 billion in 1998 and employed 20,000. By comparison, revenues for all agricultural production (farm-gate values) over this same period have varied little ranging between about \$500-600 million annually (Hawaii Agricultural Statistics Service, annual). If this trend continues, which appears likely, ocean recreation and marine tourism revenues will continue to exceed agricultural production revenues in the future. This likelihood reflects a major restructuring of Hawaii's economy away from traditional mainstays such as agriculture to more service-oriented industries, especially related to tourism. (MacDonald 1996)

“Ocean recreation interests represent a rapidly growing ocean constituency that needs and deserves to be recognized as such. Policies that would manage nearshore ocean resources principally for fishing are too narrow in purpose and are no longer sufficient in and of themselves to provide for optimal economic and social benefits being realized from the broader mix of activities that now occur.” (MacDonald 1988)

How can one balance a sustainable ocean tourism growth model without making some adjustments in how we are doing things? Conflicts will arise and resource management and enforcement capabilities become strained as the mix of users diversifies. If left unaddressed, the net result will destroy the very dynamics which make Hawaii such a successful model for ocean tourism. It will also change forever the magic that attracts the visitor and is so loved by those of us who are privileged to make Hawaii our home.

THREATS:

I. Federal Marine Mammal Approach Regulations:

One of the paramount threats perceived by the commercial ocean user community, is Federal marine mammal and protected species approach regulations. Currently, there are approach regulations for Humpback Whales. **There is no provision in current regulations to accommodate any “innocent passage” or demonstrate some “intent to harass” as was in the original regulations.**

NMFS is currently promulgating approach regulations for several other protected species. If these should also be adopted it is hoped that some provision would be made for “innocent passage”. It could have a serious negative impact on shipping, ocean transportation, and ocean tourism, if these new approach regulations are passed without some right of “innocent passage”.

It is currently opined that if the current approach regulations were strictly enforced, shipping and ocean tourism in Hawaii would come to a standstill. Much of the initial support for the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary (HIHWNMS) from the boating community came with a commitment to re-visit the approach regulations and support some sort of relief for innocent vessel passage. As of this moment, that support has not yet materialized. Well over 95% of Hawaii’s freight is via ocean transportation. While the fines can be substantial outside the Sanctuary, they are several times heavier within Sanctuary waters, waters that encompass significant portions of navigable waters of the State.

There are some opportunities available to address these issues: The HIHWNMS is facilitating a Vessel Strike Workshop within the next year. The sanctuary is doing very good things and is a positive asset to Hawaii. The Humpback Whale population continues to recover at a 7% compounded growth rate. If this rate continues, pre-whaling population projections will be reached within the next twenty years. It is expected by many ocean users that this approach issue will continue to heat up with the increase of the whale population until “right of innocent ship passage” is restored.

II. Degradation of Habitat:

Loss of nearshore resources, along with native wildlife, due to increasing development and commercial operations, and government regulations, leads to lost recreational opportunities for residents and tourists. A number of problems indicate less than optimum management of these resources.

Lack of coordination between the various jurisdictions and agencies results in incremental, disjointed management. Greater coordination is needed to reverse any damage that already has occurred and to prevent future deterioration.

Create an Ocean Resources Inventory and determine carrying capacities for each resource and site. The necessary infrastructure must be provided where needed. Expand the Day-use-mooring system statewide, and limit the number of ocean tourism business allowed to operate in a given area at a given time.

III. Poor Communication and Planning by State and Federal Agencies:

To have sustainable ocean tourism, there needs to be, not only a better dialogue between the commercial ocean user and the State and Federal government, but a synergy of working towards clear and obtainable objectives. Private industry needs to partner with government to meet the financial objectives and conservation goals of all parties. There must be a balance among commerce, community, culture, and the environment. Only when this balance is maintained can ocean tourism thrive in Hawaii.

The vitality of the Ocean Tourism Industry depends on a government that is responsive and sensitive to the needs of commercial boaters. What the State currently lacks in adequate rules and legislation must be made up with sensible leadership and a partnership with the ocean tourism industry.

OPPORTUNITIES:

Ocean Tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors in the State's economy. In addition to the Aloha spirit, Hawaii has always promoted its tourism industry on the basis of the islands' natural beauty. This is especially true of Hawaii's coastal areas, beaches, and nearshore ocean waters. Recreational use of these resources is high and caters to the needs of nearly seven Million visitors and a million residents each year.

Overall growth of the ocean tourism industry has been dramatic, averaging revenue increases of 16% per year. "As this industry matures, for

it to be sustainable, it will be more important than ever to address the inadequate infrastructure and facilities, user conflicts, access and allocation issues, resource overuse and degradation... These factors are significant and far-reaching and are expected ultimately to trigger regulatory and public policy changes of considerable consequence, especially to the ocean recreation industry but affecting tourism as well.” (MacDonald 1988)

The Ocean Resources Management Plan is in the process of being updated. An Ocean Summit will be held May 2003. From the pre and post summit meetings as well as the Ocean Summit, the necessary material will be gathered to do a comprehensive revision of the ORMP. It is hoped that this revision will articulate a management philosophy that will guide State decision makers to a sustainable ocean tourism policy.

NEEDS:

The ocean tourism industry is dependent on and flourishes with a healthy environment. “The natural beauty of Hawaii’s coastal areas, beaches, and nearshore ocean waters must be preserved, restored, or enhanced for the promotion and development of the ocean recreation and ocean tourism industry. This may seem contradictory to some, i.e. preserving resources in order to promote industry development; we believe it is axiomatic in this case. It is quite evident to us that these resources will continue to support these industries only as long as the resources remain attractive to the users.” (MacDonald 1988)

The Ocean Tourism industry must be managed, but it also needs nurturing. The natural resources of our coastal areas are recognized as being fragile and ultimately finite. Continued, increased usage without proper coordination and planning is certain to result in their diminished value both as recreational opportunities for residents and important attractions for visitors. It will be necessary to build upon and improve the dialogue started among these stakeholders.

The ocean tourism industry needs a business friendly environmentally focused government. Government needs to realize that the best protection comes from an informed user group. The ocean tourism industry plays a major role in educating the users and demonstrating responsible stewardship for our precious resources. Through naturalists enhancing the whale watching experience or dive and snorkel instructors sharing the “take only

pictures and leave only bubbles” philosophy, the visitor becomes more supportive of environmental issues and needs. It is enlightened self-interest on the part of small business, even though it was the love for and desire to protect this environment that attracted many of the operators to begin with. Time has shown that it is the ocean tourism industry that has been the very proactive in fomenting change that would preserve and protect this resource. Hawaii’s day-use mooring project is a classic example. Get the drift and bag it! is another. There are many other areas ripe for partnership.

“Artificial reefs are a proven means for concentrating fishery resources for either consumptive or non-consumptive uses. For example, the “Mahi” wreck off the Waianae coast is the most popular dive site on Oahu.” (Governor’s Ocean Resources Tourism Development Task Force) The 100,000 divers who visit Hawaii each year contribute substantially to tourism. The possibility of wreck diving as State sanctioned non-consumptive use exists. There is a need for the Government to create new diving attractions as natural reefs decline in quality for diving experiences. Dr. Craig MacDonald developed a white paper suggesting that such a program would not only pay for itself, but also put substantial monies back into the States coffers. The State’s overall artificial reef development plans should incorporate durable, productive, and attractive artificial reefs that are designed for specific purposes.

It is time for the maritime industry to put aside their parochial bias and come together to support changes that will help both our economy and our environment. It is also time for the leadership of our State and our Nation to reject any dysfunctional status quo and make the proactive and innovative decisions necessary to serve the sustainable growth needs of our maritime and ocean tourism industry into the foreseeable future. Together we can formulate and help implement policy that will protect and enhance our environment for generations to come.

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