

Testimony given by Linda M. Paul, NWHI Coral Reef Ecosystem Advisory Council

Good morning. My name is Linda Paul and I am Vice Chair of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve Advisory Council, otherwise known as the RAC. Although the new Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument does not have a citizen advisory body as yet, the RAC still exists, but can only advise NOAA. At our June 25-26, 2008 meeting, the RAC discussed the Draft Monument Management Plan and in particular, the Constituency Building and Outreach Action Plan Activity that proposes to establish an Alliance for the purpose of engaging constituents to provide recommendations and information on specific management issues on a regular basis.

The RAC found the constituent action plan as it is presently outlined vague and undefined. In an attempt to put some flesh on it, the RAC discussed some of the various advisory council and community support group models in existence, including the National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC) model and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Services' Friends-of-the-Refuge model and assessed their strengths and weaknesses.

Ultimately the RAC concluded that the advantages of an advisory council (AC) model outweigh those of the Friends model. The RAC identified seven advantages of the AC model:

- An AC ensures that a broad range of stakeholders are represented because they are specifically selected to represent particular interest groups.
- An AC ensures the participation of stakeholders who are not independently wealthy by providing travel support when needed, which is absolutely essential in an island state like Hawaii.
- AC members appointed for multiple-year terms will be more familiar with the issues, develop institutional memories and will not need to be brought up to speed from scratch at every meeting. This is likely to result in stakeholder input that is more informed and therefore more valuable, and will also save staff time.
- AC members have to listen to briefings, respond to questions that involve their expertise, and document the basis for their decisions and recommendations.
- The AC model ensures the production of consensus advice hashed out in a public venue.
- AC's provide more powerful, reliable stakeholder recommendations than those from individuals and individual organizations.
- ACs are a common model in the U.S. and used globally with every issue group.
- Therefore, the RAC recommended that the Monument Co-trustees establish a 13-member Monument Advisory Council. We believe the advisory council model will help further the long-term vision, mission, management principles and goals of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. However, we urge the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force to take on the role of a mediator on the issue of exactly how the three co-trustees will incorporate stake holder input into the ongoing management of the Monument.

On an entirely different subject, I would like to announce that the Fifth State Hawaii Aquatics Conference will be held on Kauai November 1-2, 2008. These very locally-based conferences have proven to be a very useful and rewarding educational tool and good preparation of the public that may be interested or impacted by the aquatic issues that may be addressed by the legislature. In the 2009 legislative session we are preparing for bills prohibiting spear fishing using rebreathers and authorizing monitoring and regulation of the coral reef species aquarium and live fish trade.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify.

Linda M. Paul  
RAC Vice Chair