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COURTESY PHOTO

A plan announced yesterday would place three wave energy platforms, similar to this one in Australian waters, off the coast of Maui.

Ocean of energy

3 wave turbines are planned for Maui waters

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Waves near the surfing area known as Jaws, just off Pauwela Point on Maui's northern coast, would be used to generate enough electricity to power about 1,600 homes on the Valley Isle.

The plan was announced yesterday by state officials and executives from Oceanlinx, an Australian renewable energy company.

On the Net:

» www.oceanlinx.com

Billed as the company's "commercially viable wave-energy project," the project would place two wave-powered turbine platforms in the waters near the Pauwela Lighthouse that would generate 2.7 megawatts of power and reduce carbon emissions from traditional power generation by up to 2,000 tons a year, said David Weaver, Oceanlinx chairman and chief executive officer.

The company now is performing preliminary site work, such as environmental assessments, and expects to have the generators in place by 2009.

"Hawaii is high on our priority list," Weaver said at a news conference in Gov. Linda Lingle's office.

The wave turbine platforms -- each about the size of a three-bedroom house -- sit above the water and capture air beneath the structure. As waves flow, air is forced back and forth through a column, powering a turbine generating electricity that can then be sold.

Oceanlinx is in negotiations with Maui Electric Co.

Utility officials say it is too early to say what the rate might be, but Weaver said he expects it to be "competitive."

Lawmakers, Republicans and Democrats, attended yesterday's news conference and urged constituents to support the plan. Members from the Maui delegation applauded the effort, which they say could make Maui energy independent within the next decade.

Sen. J. Kalani English, whose district includes Pauwela Point, said he first had some concerns when he thought the turbines might be a visual blight or encroach on the popular surf spot, but he is satisfied that the plan will do neither, and urged constituents to back the project.

"It's a very small speck in the ocean," said English (D, East Maui-Molokai-Lanai). "It will not affect the view plane, which our people value in Maui.

"It should provide the beginning of some very good and clean energy from the ocean for us."

Lawmakers in both the House and Senate have introduced bills that would provide up to \$20 million in special purpose revenue bonds to help fund the project.

While he is thankful for the support, Weaver said the project has enough financial support to move forward regardless of the whether the legislation is passed.

"We are committed to this project," he said. "This is important to us."

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