



PAPAHĀNAUMOKUĀKEA
Marine National Monument

NEWS RELEASE
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NEWS RELEASE

EXPERTS TACKLE CHALLENGE OF RESPONDING TO CORAL BLEACHING IN THE NORTHWESTERN HAWAIIAN ISLANDS

(Honolulu, HI) Climate change, marine debris, and invasive species are the three biggest threats facing the ecosystems of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI). One of the most short-term and immediate manifestations of climate change is coral bleaching, an event which occurs when unusually high sea temperatures stress corals causing them to appear white or “bleached.” March 8-10, 2011, an interdisciplinary group of managers, scientists, and cultural practitioners are developing ways Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument can respond when bleaching events occur.

Coral reefs play a significant role in native Hawaiian culture and mythology, being the place where all living things evolved from. Corals are also part of the foundation of Northwestern Hawaiian ecosystems, with their health having follow-on effects for the condition of fish, birds, monk seals, and turtles. Working collaboratively, the experts are developing strategies for predicting and monitoring bleaching events that will enable understanding some of the important ways climate change will shape the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands into the future. Preliminary workshop results will be delivered to management partners during a discussion session on Thursday, March 10, 2011 at the Monument’s Hawaii Kai office.

Randy Kosaki, Deputy Superintendent for Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument said, “This collaborative forum is helping us establish a Response Plan that develops an integrated approach to bleaching events allowing us to understand the impacts of these events in coming years, and will inform our management decisions for how to best support the resilience of the NWHI in the face of climate change.”

In addition to representatives from Papahānaumokuākea’s Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, workshop participants include experts from NOAA’s Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, Monument co-trustee, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, NOAA’s Coral Reef Watch, the Monument’s Cultural Heritage Working Group, University of Hawai’i at Hilo, Hawai’i Community College, NOAA’s Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Laboratory, Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whales National Marine Sanctuary, NOAA’s Pacific Climate Information Service,





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Office of National Marine Sanctuaries Pacific Region, and NOAA Fisheries Habitat Conservation Division, as well as researchers from the New England Aquarium,

Papahānaumokuākea Research Coordinator Heidi Schuttenberg explained that the development of monitoring protocols will help answer key management questions about bleaching extent and severity, identify trends in temperature-driven diseases, and facilitate assessment of ecosystem resilience.

A minor coral bleaching event in Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in late-2010, as well as previous bleaching, reminded scientists and managers, that future coral bleaching in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands could be much more severe. The prediction and monitoring of coral bleaching and diseases in Papahānaumokuākea is particularly difficult because of the region's remote and wild nature. Workshop participants will consider this factor in the development of the Response Plan.

Papahānaumokuākea is cooperatively managed to ensure ecological integrity and achieve strong, long-term protection and perpetuation of Northwestern Hawaiian Island ecosystems, Native Hawaiian culture, and heritage resources for current and future generations. Three co-trustees - the Department of Commerce, Department of the Interior, and State of Hawai'i - joined by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, protect this special place. Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument was inscribed as the first mixed (natural and cultural) UNESCO World Heritage Site in the United States in July 2010. For more information, please visit www.papahanaumokuakea.gov

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