



Protecting Native Hawaiian Traditional and Customary Rights  
and Our Fragile Environment

P.O. BOX 270112 HONOLULU, HAWAII 96827

February 8, 2008 8:30 a.m.

Aloha Chair Ito and Representatives of the Water, Land, Ocean Resources, and Hawaiian Affairs Committee,

We support H.B. 2625 to designate April 19<sup>th</sup> as "Hawaiian Monk Seal Day."

The Hawaiian monk seal is in crisis. Decades of uncontrolled fishing, mismanaged development, and increased marine pollution has decimated the traditional food sources and natural habitat of this uniquely Hawaiian animal. With less than 1,200 Hawaiian monk seals left in the world, it is likely that this rare Hawaiian mammal will be extinct in 50 years. Unfortunately, the loss of this species will be just another in the long list of native Hawaiian plants and animals that have been destroyed by human excesses.

But if emergency action is taken, this species has a chance at recovering. Naming April 19<sup>th</sup> as "Hawaiian Monk Seal Day" will raise the public's awareness about the dire need to protect this species. This increased awareness, we hope, will spur broad support for more drastic and direct preservation efforts to rescue this species from the brink of extinction, like designating critical habitat at La'au Point on Molokai where half a dozen Hawaiian monk seals regularly visit, dedicating state and federal funding for programs to feed young monk seal pups in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, and establishing captive breeding programs at appropriate facilities in Hawai'i.

It is imperative that we do all that we can to bring the Hawaiian monk seal back from the edge of extinction. For, protecting the Hawaiian monk seal is a crucial element of preserving and perpetuating Hawai'i's unique native culture. Like the honeycreepers, sandal wood, and tree snails that have long passed, the Hawaiian monk seal shares a common history with the Native Hawaiian people. This history is reflected in the mo'olelo, mele, and oli of the past and present. Every endemic plant and animal lost in Hawai'i means the loss of the traditional cultural practices associated with them. For Hawaiians, the loss of the monk seal not only means the ocean loses a species, but also that the Hawaiian people lose a part of their culture.

KAHEA: The Hawaiian-Environmental Alliance is an islands-wide network of Native Hawaiian cultural practitioners, conservationists, and concerned community members that work to protect Hawai'i's unique natural and cultural resources. We have over 2,000 members in the islands and 3,000 total around the world.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marti Townsend". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marti Townsend  
Program Director

February 8, 2008

Representative Ken Ito, Chair and Committee Members  
Hawaii State House Committee on Water, Land & Hawaiian Affairs  
Hawaii State Capitol  
415 South Beretania St.  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813  
[reito@capitol.hawaii.gov](mailto:reito@capitol.hawaii.gov)  
February 8, 2008 W&L Committee Hearing @8:30 Rm 312

Testimony in support of HB 2625 & HB 2626

**HB 1615 Relating to the designation of April 19 as "Hawaiian Monk Seal Day"**  
**HB 2626 Relating to the designation of the Hawaiian Monk Seal, the State Mammal**

Aloha Chair Ito and Members of the Committee on Water, Land & Hawaiian Affairs:

My name is Keiko Bonk, and I am the Program Director for the Marine Conservation Biology Institute, Hawaii. MCBI is a non-profit conservation organization that protects ocean life through science and policy development.

Thank you very much for hearing HB's 2625 and 2626, introduced by Representative Pine, relating to naming the Hawaiian Monk Seal, Ilio-holo-kauaua or "Dog Running Through Rough Waters" the state mammal & dedicating April 19<sup>th</sup> as an awareness day for this endemic species. The Hawaiian monk seal is a 13 million year old Hawaiian species in need of your help. This ancient Hawaiian mammal is in critical danger of going extinct. There are less than 1200 monk seals left in Hawaii and the population is rapidly declining. I heard from our science experts yesterday that if we do not start to take more action to recover this seal, the population will decline faster in the next 5 years and once that happens, it will not look good for these mammals.

The reasons for the monk seal's decline are numerous and most threats are related to human impacts:

1. Low survival rate of juveniles & sub-adults due to starvation
2. Entanglement of seals in marine debris
3. Predation of juvenile seals by Galapagos sharks
4. Fishery interactions (over fishing)
5. Mother-pup disturbance on the beaches
6. Pupping beaches lost to erosion (climate change)
7. Potential disease outbreaks

I come here today to alert you to the plight of our Hawaiian seals. I hope you are motivated to take a step for the State of Hawaii to save this grand old creature. The monk seal thrived in our Hawaii home millions of years before our youngest islands were born, long before our species arrived. This mammal is worthy of respect and should be treated as an ancient "elder". This animal is also an icon of the 21<sup>st</sup> century because its decline reflects man's negligence and lack of respect for our natural world. I look forward to the

day when we can redeem ourselves as a species by allowing this beautiful species and other endangered species the right to thrive without our assistance. But until that day this animal needs our day-to-day help.

This mammal lives both on Hawaii's land and sea and exemplifies all the wonder, beauty and environmental fragility of our archipelago. The seal a sympathetic "poster child" and would serve to develop the needed attention for all of Hawaii's endangered flora and fauna. This animal instills the charm of a faithful dog and human beings have been connected to dogs as part of our society for a thousands of years. Yes this animal emotes "cute and cuddly".

The Hawaiian Monk Seal was placed on the endangered species list in 1976. Last year, 31 years after these seals were officially designated a prioritized at-risk animal, the Federal Recovery Plan (attached Recovery Plan Summary) was signed. At this public signing last August, U.S. Senator Daniel Inouye endorsed this recovery plan and said he would do everything in his power to protect this animal and ensure generations of Hawaii's children the opportunity to live with healthy numbers of this magnificent Hawaiian mammal. Please take Senator Inouye's promise to heart and do the things necessary to make his vision a reality.

Presently, the State of Hawaii has no official monk seal program or a companion to the federal monk seal recovery plan. DAR incorporates seal response coordination into the State Humpback Whale Sanctuary Program. The State of Hawaii is presently not in compliance with the monk seal protection as required by state and federal Endangered Species and Marine Mammal laws. We need to begin to take responsibility for our natural world in Hawaii and start by caring for our wildlife.

Last year we unfortunately lost seal pups to net entanglements right here on the island of Oahu. A couple weeks ago we lost a female pup on Molokai. We need to develop the adequate response & public awareness to protect our seals or we will lose more seals in 2008. With less than 1200, we cannot afford to lose one more pup.

The NMFS Monk Seal Recovery Team met at the Ala Moana Hotel this week. A dedicated group of scientists, policy makers and seal coordinators worked diligently on the implementation programs to save our seals. Your support for these 2 initiatives bring the awareness and education needed for residents and our visitors to respect and care for our Hawaiian Monk Seal. Please take this step to bring this species back to healthy numbers. Please take action and name the state mammal the Ilio-holo-kauaua, the Hawaiian Monk Seal. And please do not stop here, but do everything in your power to ensure that generations will live in harmony with this auspicious Hawaiian mammal. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Aloha nui loa,  
Keiko Bonk  
808-734-4234; [keiko.bonk@mcbi.org](mailto:keiko.bonk@mcbi.org)