



Protecting Native Hawaiian Traditional and Customary Rights
and Our Fragile Environment

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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. 2626 to designate the Hawaiian monk seal as the state's official mammal.

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 the Hawaiian monk seal as the state mammal 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