

The Hawaii Association for Marine Education and Research, Inc.



PMB#175
5095 Napilihau St. 109B
Lahaina, HI, 96761
USA

Phone: 808-280-6448
Fax: 866-594-1896

Email: mdeakos@hamerinhawaii.org
www.hamerinhawaii.org

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Deny HCR 88 Authorizing Olowalu Shoreline Armoring and demand from HDOT a cost-benefit analysis for realigning the highway compared with shoreline armoring

Dear Senate Committee on Ways and Means:

Public beach access and sandy beach shorelines are rapidly becoming an endangered species in urbanizing Hawaii. In Maui, sea level rise is encroaching on our West Maui Honoapiilani Highway that runs from Lahaina to Ukumehame along some of the most beautiful stretch of coastline and beaches. Over two decades ago, the Hawaii Department of Transportation (HDOT) began discussions of moving the highway mauka since no infrastructure prevented the move and the shoreline could be preserved. Maui County has long been on board with the realignment project having purchased necessary lands over the past 10 years. Up to 75 million dollars was allocated to the move in the 2014 STIP and a committee was formed to discuss the realignment.

However, in recent years the plan to move the highway appears to have been abandoned with the committee being dissolved and no funds allocated to the realignment in the current STIP. When asked about the plan, a frequent answer is too expensive and likely 20 years away.

Instead, DOT has found a new mechanism to deal with the highway by declaring “emergency disaster declarations” for portions of the highway to gain access to federal and state emergency funds to be used for destructive seawalls and for getting exemptions from environmental review and avoid permits. The result has been quick access to large

sums of tax-payer money for short-term contracts to build destructive seawalls.

Seawalls result in:

1. Destroying our coastline
2. Eliminating our beach access
3. Accelerating erosion by modifying the natural hydrology of the shoreline
4. Increasing the wave energy impacting the seawall creating waves that crash over and onto the highway
5. Causing increased turbidity offshore of the seawall killing precious coral reefs (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BxqtkUv9NBc>).

Since 2012, DOT has added at least 3 seawalls along this beautiful coastline, each time moving the road inland to complete the project, only to move the road back into harms way once completed. By simply leaving the road inland, HDOT has gained 10 – 15 years of time to focus energy and resources on the realignment project.

The \$7,000,000 Ukumehame seawall in 2012 resulted in mud smothering and killing the reef for months and waves now crash over the seawall putting drivers even more into harms way. A fatality is imminent. As many as 11 more seawalls are slated for the near future along this highway, including a \$30,000,000 seawall proposed for Olowalu, along one of Maui's most popular shoreline snorkeling spots (milemarker 14), and adjacent to Maui's most precious reef (Olowalu Reef). This seawall is also guised under an "emergency disaster declaration", bypassing environmental review.

Unfortunately multiple attempts at open discussions with HDOT on alternatives (landowners and the County of Maui offering land for permanent or temporary realignment) have fallen on deaf ears. The often quoted HDOT cost of \$800,000,000 refers to tunneling a new highway through the Pali but the realignment to preserve the coastline only needs to go to Ukumehame. The cost of this portion of the realignment would be significantly less and likely quite feasible if tax payer funds were instead allocated to the realignment instead of seawalls.

Living on Oahu, I'm sure you understand how precious shoreline access, beaches and healthy reefs are. I encourage you to request from HDOT to do a cost-benefit analysis on realigning the Honoapiilani Highway from Puamana to Ukumehame compared to the destructive practice of seawalls. Lahaina has been rated one of the most vulnerable communities in the United State because a two-lane highway is the only means to get sufficient supplies in and out of the west side. Should the highway be compromised, there is no harbor or airport large enough to receive sufficient emergency supplies.

Please deny HCR 88 authorizing Olowalu shoreline armoring and demand that HDOT prepare a cost-benefit analysis on the Honoapiilani Highway realignment prior to continuing with any more seawalls or shoreline armoring projects along this shoreline.

Thank you for your commitment to serving the people of Hawaii,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Deakos', written in a cursive style.

Mark Deakos, *Ph.D.*
Executive Director, Chief Scientist



Ukumehame Seawall Persistent Mudplume in 2012