



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

30 March 2010

Senator Mike Gabbard, Chair
Senate Committee on Energy and Environment
Hawaii State Capitol
415 Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

Senator Clarence K. Nishihara, Chair
Senate Committee on Tourism

Dear Senators Gabbard and Nishihara:

The Marine Mammal Commission, an independent federal agency with oversight responsibilities for marine mammal research and conservation, strongly supports the adoption of Senate Congressional Resolution 151. The resolution calls for the development of public service announcements for use on commercial passenger flights to Hawaii. Such announcements would focus on the importance of protecting the state's unique and fragile ecosystems and wildlife. In part, the resolution requests that the Hawaii Tourism Authority, in consultation with the Department of Transportation, develop public service announcements that specifically include information on Hawaiian monk seals and how people should behave around them.

Hawaiian monk seals are the most endangered seal in the United States, and their conservation represents one of the nation's most pressing marine mammal conservation issues. Reoccupation of the main Hawaiian Islands by the seals is vital if the species is to avoid extinction. This reoccupation may be undermined by unintended harassment by well-meaning, but uninformed people using public beaches on which seals haul out. People who do not expect to find seals resting on beaches are likely to approach them too closely. Such disturbance could disrupt essential behaviors, such as resting, molting, and pupping, and expose people to the risk of being bitten. A public service announcement on all arriving flights would ensure that visitors have the information necessary to avoid such disturbance and possible injuries. For that reason, the Marine Mammal Commission strongly supports adoption of Senate Congressional Resolution 151.

The National Marine Fisheries Service, in partnership with the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources, has lead responsibility for the conservation and recovery of Hawaiian monk seals. To ensure that visitors are given appropriate advice on how to behave if they encounter seals, the Commission suggests that the proposed resolution be modified to direct the Hawaii Tourism Authority to consult with those two agencies when developing the public service announcements.

This resolution is a very important and constructive action, and we hope that it will be approved. Please do not hesitate to call if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Timothy J. Ragen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Timothy J. Ragen, Ph.D.
Executive Director