



A REGIONAL FORUM FOR OCEANIA
ON MARINE MANAGED AREAS
AND WORLD HERITAGE

29 JANUARY – 2 FEBRUARY, 2007
HONOLULU, HAWAII

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
23 January 2007

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International Forum on Oceania to be Held in Honolulu

HONOLULU - Our Sea of Islands, A Regional Forum for Oceania on Marine Managed Areas and World Heritage will be held at the East-West Center, January 29 - February 2, 2007. A public event on Thursday, February 1 at 7:00 pm will highlight Forum accomplishments, and efforts to conserve marine resources in island communities in Hawaii and the Pacific. With the exception of the free public event from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m. on February 1, Forum participation is limited to invited participants.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) World Heritage Centre and Apia Office, together with the Department of the Interior and their partners, are working with community leaders to improve management of marine areas in the Pacific.

Participants from over 20 Pacific nations and States, including Hawaii'i, Solomon Islands, Cook Islands, Fiji, Tonga, and Micronesia, will come together to share knowledge and experience in customary marine management, marine managed areas, conservation science and finance, remote surveillance and enforcement, and the UNESCO World Heritage site nomination process.

A public event and reception will feature the presentation of Forum outcomes by conference co-chairs T. 'Aulani Wilhelm, NOAA Superintendent, Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument, and Salamat Ali Tabbasum of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Presentations on efforts to protect important marine areas and cultural heritage will be given by Sol Kaho'ohalahala, Executive Director of the Kaho'olawe Island Reserve; William Atu, Project Manager of The Nature Conservancy Solomon Islands Program; and William Kostka, Executive Director of the Micronesia Conservation Trust, Pohnpei.

"We share many marine issues in common with our Pacific Island neighbors and look forward to this Forum to build important relationships and strengthen our capacity to address the unique heritage and resource management needs of Oceania", said Wilhelm.



The UNESCO World Heritage Centre's Tabbasum adds, "This Forum provides an unprecedented opportunity to bring together Pacific Island representatives. With less than a half percent of marine areas worldwide under any form of protection, urgent actions are needed to establish a globally comprehensive network of representative and ecologically important marine protected areas".

Stephen Morris, Chief, Office of International Affairs, National Park Service, emphasized the strong support of the U.S. government for the World Heritage Convention over many years, made evident most recently by its successful election to a new term on the World Heritage Committee. Mr. Morris is enthusiastic about the role of World Heritage Sites and their contribution to conservation, "Hawaii Volcanoes National Park was named a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1987 in recognition of its outstanding universal value, and this status has enhanced awareness and conservation efforts for this park. We are excited about the prospect of developing a new tentative list of candidate sites for future U.S. nomination to the World Heritage list and hope to be able to include marine areas in the new U.S. tentative list."

UNESCO's World Heritage status and nomination process supports regional action on marine issues, an opportunity the Monument plans to take full advantage of. "The State of Hawai'i is working hard to ensure the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands is nominated by the United States Federal government to be considered for World Heritage designation, a deserving distinction for our own global island treasure" said Peter Young, Chairperson Board of Land and Natural Resources.

The UNESCO World Heritage Centre mission is to safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage. By assisting nations with the nomination and effective management of sites, the Centre helps to ensure these precious areas will be maintained and thrive for generations to come. Areas of "outstanding universal value" will be inscribed as World Heritage, leading to a better protection of the area. World Heritage sites will be exemplary models of effective and results-based management benefiting communities around the world.

NOAA's support for the Forum comes from three program areas. The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument was designated by Presidential Proclamation in June 2006 and is co-managed by NOAA, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the State of Hawai'i. At nearly 140,000 square miles, the Monument is the largest fully protected marine area in the United States. NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program supports effective management and sound science to preserve, sustain and restore valuable coral reef ecosystems. NOAA's International Program mission is to build and sustain capacities for global coastal and marine stewardship through effective international partnerships. In 2007 NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, celebrates 200 years of science and service to the nation.

All sessions will be held in Keoni Auditorium, Imin Conference Center, with parking available on the University of Hawai'i, Mānoa Campus. Biographies will be available in press packets prior to the event. For further information or other interview opportunities please contact Keeley Belva at 808.294.0932 or keeley.belva@noaa.gov.

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