It's taken six years since its inception, but the Waikīkī Aquarium is ready to open a major exhibit featuring the very special and rare marine life of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. On Thursday, August 18, O‘ahu visitors will get their first glimpse of a living reef ecosystem similar to that found in the world's most isolated islands.

"This is a monumental experience for our visitors," says Dr. Andrew Rossiter, director of the Waikīkī Aquarium. "The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands are so special because they serve as a home to over 7,000 marine species, a quarter of which are found nowhere else on Earth. The public will finally get to see live fish from coral specimens that until now have been privy only to scientists conducting research in the Northwestern Islands. The exhibit is an unprecedented opportunity to see abundant marine life from one of the most remote areas on the planet!"

In 2010, the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument was designated as a United Nations World Heritage site, one of only 28 mixed status UNESCO World Heritage sites in the world, recognized for outstanding natural and cultural values. It is the only mixed status site in the U.S.

"We are so appreciative of the support we have had and continue to receive from various organizations. In the last year or so, we have relied heavily on the dedicated work of Richard Klubochar, our coral biologist; Randy Kossak, Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument Deputy Superintendent of research and field operations and Richard Pyle, Bishop Museum senior scientist to physically bring unique fish and coral from the remote islands," said Dr. Rossiter.

The process of acquiring the fishes is not an easy one. After obtaining the proper permits, the team boards an expedition ship that departs from Honolulu to begin the shipping at other atolls along the way to conduct their dives. Because many of the fishes needed for this exhibit are found at depths of 200-220 feet, the collector for this trip, Trip Y, is armed with technical versus recreational scuba techniques, which encompasses the use of mixed gases including helium.

The Waikīkī Aquarium is the nation’s third oldest aquarium, yet it retains its respected status by remaining on the cutting-edge of conservation and education. In 1904, the Waikīkī Aquarium opened with 35 tanks and 400 marine organisms. One hundred and seven years later, with over 3,500 marine organisms on display, the Waikīkī Aquarium opened with 35 tanks and 400 marine organisms. One hundred and seven years later, with over 3,500 marine organisms on display, the Waikīkī Aquarium opened with 35 tanks and 400 marine organisms. One hundred and seven years later, with over 3,500 marine organisms on display, the Waikīkī Aquarium opened with 35 tanks and 400 marine organisms. One hundred and seven years later, with over 3,500 marine organisms on display, the Waikīkī Aquarium opened with 35 tanks and 400 marine organisms. One hundred and seven years later, with over 3,500 marine organisms on display, the Waikīkī Aquarium opened with 35 tanks and 400 marine organisms. One hundred and seven years later, with over 3,500 marine organisms on display, the Waikīkī Aquarium opened with 35 tanks and 400 marine organisms.

Since becoming the first marine field station in Hawai‘i in 1912, and a part of the University of Hawai‘i in 1919, the Waikīkī Aquarium has fostered awareness and prompted stewardship of the aquatic life of Hawai‘i and the tropical Pacific through research and conservation, especially in the area of coral propagation. Making up one of the most diverse and important habitats on the planet, coral reefs are currently under assault from an array of environmental stresses and human impacts. Research at the Waikīkī Aquarium is helping to uncover the secrets of coral biology; knowledge which will help conserve these threatened habitats. The Waikīkī Aquarium has maintained colonies of living corals since 1978 and now has the oldest and largest collection of living corals in the United States.

Administered by the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, the Waikīkī Aquarium focuses on public exhibits, education programs and research on the unique aquatic life of Hawai‘i and the tropical Pacific. The Aquarium welcomes more than 320,000 visitors annually, and is open daily, from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. except Honolulu Marathon Sunday and Christmas Day. For more information about the Waikīkī Aquarium, including membership, call (808) 923-9741, visit www.waquarium.org or find them on Facebook.
Marine Debris
Every year over 50 tons of marine debris drift into Monument waters. On otherwise pristine and unpopulated beaches, television tubes, bottles, shoes, and every kind of plastic material can be found from countries surrounding the North Pacific.

Monk Seals Foraging in Darkness
Hawaiian monk seals descend into the dark height, more than a thousand feet beneath the surface, to forage among huge branching formations of gold and bamboo precious corals. Monument waters and unpopulated beaches provide a last haven for these critically endangered marine mammals.

Division Between Birth and Afterlife
Papahānaumokuākea is considered a sacred area from which Native Hawaiians believe life springs and to which spirits return after death. It is also a place for Native Hawaiian cultural practitioners of today to deepen their spirits return after death. It is also a place for Native Hawaiians to forage among huge branching formations of gold and bamboo precious corals.

Unique in Twilight
Below recreational scuba depths of 90 feet lies one of the last exploited marine habitats on the planet, the mesophotic zone. In this area of fading light many undocumented species are thought to exist. Recent explorations in the Monument have shown that the vast majority of the fish in these habitats are unique to the region.

Green Turtle Sanctuary
More than 90% of Hawai‘i’s Green Turtles breed and nest in the Monument’s protected waters. Monitoring of this species for the last 30 years, since its protection under the Endangered Species Act in 1978, has shown a steady recovery.

Atolls
The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands contain the only coral atolls in the United States. Atolls are unique geological features produced as volcanic islands erode and collapse back into the sea. In tropical and subtropical areas they feature coral rings surrounding a central lagoon where a volcano once existed.

Predator-dominated Coral Reefs
The Monument protects one of the world’s last apex predator-dominated coral reef ecosystems. More than half the weight (biomass) of all fish on its coral reefs consists of apex predators like sharks and jacks. In the main Hawaiian Islands only three percent of the biomass is contributed by these large fish.

Acropora Table Corals
Fifty seven species of stony corals have been documented within the Monument. Many can be seen on main Hawaiian Island reefs. Table corals (acropora) (shown at right) are abundant on reefs surrounding French Frigate Shoals but are nearly absent on main Hawaiian Island reefs.