

PAPAHĀNAUMOKUĀKEA



PRESS RELEASE

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DEEP SEA SUBMERSIBLES FIND NEW SPECIES IN NORTHWESTERN HAWAIIAN ISLANDS

Submersibles operated by the Hawaii Undersea Research Laboratory (HURL) and supported by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration have again uncovered new and dramatic species of corals and sponges during deep sea dives in Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. During the early part of December and operating off the University of Hawaii research vessel *Ka'imikai-o-Kanaloa*, scientists conducted dives off Middle Bank and Twin Banks near Nihoa Island, just within the monument's eastern boundary. The dives were to depths of nearly one mile.

Dr. Christopher Kelley, the Program Biologist for HURL said at the Middle Bank dive sites researchers found sponges that “were absolutely bizarre.” During radio transmissions between the submersible *Pisces IV* and the support ship, one observer remarks when first seeing these sponges, “it looks like something out of Dr. Seuss!” Kelley will be working with other scientists to identify the sponges and he said: “There are lots of things down there that are just brand new. We don't know what they are and this is a fantastic opportunity to try and help the monument and determine what some of the deep water resources are.” Other participants on the cruise included Dr. Jeff Drazen and Dr. Les Watling, both of whom observed corals and fishes that are potentially new to science.

This was also the first time the HURL program used High Definition (HD) video cameras to capture images of their deep ocean work. The quality of the HD video is so good, scientists expect to be able to identify some animals from the video alone, rather than having to collect actual specimens. Kelley said HD is a fabulous research tool and provides such outstanding detail that you can see individual polyps on corals. In addition to its research value, HD video brings the deep sea experience to people. Kelley said, “It's really the type of quality we see out the windows of the submersible; people are going to be seeing what we're seeing. People are going to see why we're so excited about these deep water environments, because these animals are spectacular.”

The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries funded the dives within Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. Additional dives near Ni'ihau were conducted by NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service and focused on fish movement patterns and undersea geology.

PLEASE CONTACT



Dan Dennison
NOAA
808.694-3939

Barbara Maxfield
USFWS
808.792.9531

Cori Kane
State-DLNR
808.397-2660
. 239

