

July 8th, 2020

The Honorable David Ige
Governor of Hawai'i
Hawai'i State Capitol Building
415 S Beretania St, Honolulu, HI 96813

RE: Molokini Shoal Marine Life Conservation District

Dear Governor Ige,

As a science-based and solutions-oriented nonprofit organization that engages more than 400,000 people on marine conservation issues annually, we urge you to consider alternatives to detonating unexploded ordinances within the Molokini Shoal Marine Life Conservation District (MLCD). Pacific Whale Foundation was founded in 1980 with the goal of saving the world's whales from extinction. We conduct research to identify and quantify the major stressors facing whales and dolphins, with active projects here in Hawai'i, and abroad in Australia, Ecuador, and Chile. Our education staff works to educate and inspire thousands of keiki annually from Maui island, Lana'i and Molokai through a variety of program offerings. Finally, our conservation team uses our cutting-edge science to help support and guide relevant policy that supports the health of our ocean.

The Molokini islet and surrounding waters are a precious gem of Maui Nui. In addition to existing as a geologic wonder of volcanic remains, Molokini is a federally established bird sanctuary, houses a reef habitat home to over 250 species of fish, many endemic to the state, 100 species of algae, and plankton that encourage frequent visitors of sea turtles, manta rays, whale sharks. The area is also known to have marine mammals visit the area such as bottlenose dolphins, humpback whales, and the endangered monk seal. In addition, due to its offshore location, Molokini is not affected by offshore runoff, nor does it have any sandy shores, creating 150 feet of visibility every day of the year. This beauty has attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors to Maui with hopes of exploring this special underwater world.

With the recent discovery of two undetonated ordinances within Molokini MLCD, concern for public safety has forced the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) to evaluate remediation efforts. Although detonation was used as remediation in 1975 and 1984 within Molokini crater, this method left thousands of fish dead, as well as blasted living coral into dust. Coral growth varies across species, however, the corals that dominate the Molokini waters have a very slow growth rate; from the lobe corals that grow around 1 centimeter per year to the branching corals that can grow up to 8 inches per year. Needless to say, a decimating blast would take decades for coral to recover from.

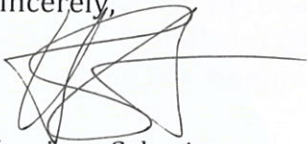


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There has been success in the past, right here in Hawai'i, removing undetonated military munitions that posed a risk to human health if left in place. For example, within the area of Ordnance Reef (HI-06), off the west coast of O'ahu, successful evaluation of two remediation techniques have been conducted by the Department of Defense (DoD) using remotely operated underwater munitions recovery system (ROUMRS) and the energetic hazards demilitarization system (EHDS). Through this evaluation, the DoD proved that these technologies are capable of remotely recovering underwater military munitions and destroying recovered military munitions in a manner that ensures the safety of the public and personnel involved, limiting damage to the surrounding environment, and restoring the area to a more natural state following the demonstration.

If the DLNR is employing the Navy's Explosive Ordnance Removal Team to help eliminate the public safety concern of these sleeping ordnances, we ask that they consider previously tested technology that will safeguard the health of the ecologically significant Molokini islet and surrounding Marine Life Conservation District.

Sincerely,



Harrison Schmitt
Programs Director
Pacific Whale Foundation

cc: Chairperson Suzanne D. Case
Board of Land and Natural Resources



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