



Protecting the ocean through science and advocacy and inspiring environmental stewardship

Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources
Division of Aquatic Resources

Pacific Whale Foundation
300 Ma'alaea Road, Suite 211, Wailuku, HI 96763

Friday, April 9th 2021

RE: Issuance of Commercial Aquarium Fishing Permits for the West Hawai'i
Regional Fishery Management Area
HRS Chapter 343-5(a)

Pacific Whale Foundation opposes the issuance of commercial aquarium fishing permits for WHRFMA outlined in HRS Chapter 343-5(a)

Pacific Whale Foundation (PWF), a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization has a mission is to protect the ocean through science and advocacy and to inspire environmental stewardship. The objective of the proposed action is for the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) to issue 7 Aquarium Permits and 7 corresponding Commercial Marine Licenses (CMLs) for the West Hawai'i Regional Fishery Management Area (WHRFMA), to revise the White List from 40 to 8 species, and to implement individual catch quotas for the 8 species remaining on the proposed Revised White List. PWF opposes the issuance of these aquarium permits and supports a No Action Alternative, where no commercial aquarium collection would occur within the WHRFMA and East Hawai'i.

Hawai'i's DLNR Division of Aquatic Resources has approved the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC) to apply for the issuance of Commercial Aquarium Permits for the WHRFMA. This project involves review of both the use of state lands and the use of conservation districts that are involved in the proposed permitting areas.

Implementation of the Preferred Alternative, according to this DEIS, would ensure the lawful, responsible, and sustainable commercial collection of 8 fish species deemed "White List Species" from the WHRFMA. While we commend the PIJAC for integrating catch limits for all species, as well as reducing number of species able to be caught, without a complete understanding of a sustainable catch limit, imposing a limit on 8 species leaves room for excessive take of all other species.

Pacific Whale Foundation acknowledges that the best available science indicates less than significant direct and indirect impact on reef fish populations with the Preferred Alternative outlined in this DEIS. Although the Coral Reef Ecosystem Program (CREP) data are the most comprehensive data publicly available in fish populations estimates, certain limitations of the surveys may lead to an underestimate of some populations. Short period of survey effort, exclusive survey

zone and the misidentification of fish disallow this survey from collecting accurate fish population numbers. Determining actions based on these numbers can lead to an overestimation of population numbers and misidentifying take limits.

The draft EIS states that the research suggests collection between 5%-25% is sustainable to reef species *similar* to those on the White List. We believe this is too large a range to use as a guide and without a verification system to ensure accuracy of self-reported data, there is no way to know what the sustainable catch limit is. In addition, these data come from fish exclusive from the target fish of these permits, further reducing their accuracy in application. Using the precautionary approach, the maximum take should be the lowest estimated percentage of sustainable take (5%) for all species, in all areas open to collection.

This DEIS outlines calculated economic benefits based on a 17-year time frame between 2000 and 2017 and creates a 5-year analysis period, inflation-adjusted, to these permits which under the Preferred Alternative, work out to be approximately 0.06% of Hawai'i's ocean economy, and an even smaller percentage of the overall economy in the State. With such a minute economic benefit, the purpose of this permit issuance is unclear.

PIJAC serves as the legislative voice for retailers, animal suppliers, manufacturers, wholesale distributors, pet hobbyists, and other trade organizations. Given the educational value of aquariums, PWF supports the display of fish, coral, and invertebrates for educational purposes under the following conditions: The aquarium has (1) collected fish under appropriate permits and management plans; (2) a goal of promoting ocean literacy; (3) active conservation efforts to engage the public. We cannot verify that the fish collected under these permits will be used for such purposes, and therefore cannot support the issuance.

There are a number of impacts outside of aquarium fisheries that are affecting coral reefs, including recreational aquarium fish collection, non-aquarium fishing, tourism and climate change. Under the climate change umbrella there includes additional stressors such as coral bleaching and ocean acidification, which lead to coral death. We believe that these cumulative impacts outweigh a single stressor. Using the precautionary principle, without a complete understanding of the environmental stressors on reefs in relation to climate change and other impacts, there should be no introduction of additional stressors to the reef ecosystem.

Due to the near negligible economic benefit and the introduction of a new stressor on a currently stressed ecosystem, we suggest a precautionary approach and oppose the issuance of the 7 aquarium permits and corresponding CMLs and support a No Action Alternative, where no commercial aquarium collection would occur within the WHRFMA or East Hawai'i.



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Thank you,
Shelby Serra
Conservation Coordinator