

PRESS CONFERENCE

11:00 a.m. October 21, 2009 at the Waikiki Aquarium

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NOAA LIED to Moloka'i and **STOLE** Our Seal!

There are only 1,100 Hawaiian monk seals left on Earth. NOAA is taking credit for "rescuing" one of them – KP2, the famous Moloka'i seal. But that's not what really happened.

In August, NOAA secretly decided to take KP2 to Ka'ula Rock, which is infested by aggressive tiger sharks. People who know the area said that KP2 would not survive. When Moloka'i people found out where NOAA wanted to take the seal, they asked NOAA to reassure them that he could survive there. But NOAA refused to provide any evidence that the area was safe.

Adults and children fell in love with KP2 because he was friendly, curious and playful. Many asked why he couldn't just stay at the Kaunakakai Wharf instead of being moved far away. But NOAA refused to listen to anyone else's opinion.

At dawn on October 16, NOAA agents came to the Wharf and secretly captured KP2. They posted DLNR agents at the Wharf along with police officers to make sure that nobody tried to rescue the seal. After a military C-130 picked up KP2 at the Moloka'i Airport, the police and DLNR agents left the Wharf. NOAA never told the community that the seal had been taken. NOAA treated people who wanted to protect KP2 like criminals. NOAA has no respect for our community.

NOAA LIES:

- NOAA keeps saying that KP2 can hurt people. But NOAA also admits that there is no recorded evidence of any monk seal ever killing or seriously harming a human. Moloka'i people grow up in the ocean, and can protect themselves against aggressive seals. NOAA made KP2 into a "killer" seal so it could justify its decision to take him away.
- At a meeting on October 1, NOAA said the community would have one or two months to educate our community before the seal was taken. Two weeks later, the seal was gone.
- At the same meeting on October 1, NOAA promised to provide evidence that KP2 would not be in danger from the sharks at Ka'ula Rock. NOAA never gave any proof of safety before taking KP2.
- In a phone call on October 14, NOAA promised to give 24 hours notice before taking the seal. On the evening of October 15, they sent an e-mail to say that the seal would go sometime in the next three days. By dawn the next morning, the seal was gone.
- KP2's eye problems are not new. Moloka'i volunteers reported them to NOAA months ago. But NOAA never sent a doctor to check on him.
- NOAA is now claiming that they "rescued" the seal. But they fully intended to take him to tiger shark waters when they secretly took him last Friday. They didn't care enough about KP2's life even to check on whether he might get eaten by sharks at Ka'ula Rock. They weren't "rescuing" him at all. They were sending him to almost certain death.

What We Want

- NOAA bring KP2 back home to Moloka'i.
- Build an ocean enclosure where "tame" seals can safely live, so the species can survive.
- Move NOAA out of the Department of Commerce and into the Department of Interior. The Hawaiian monk seal species is dying. Commerce protects commercial interests, The seals need an agency that can protect them.

[OUR ISLAND]

Friendly seal causes concern at Molokai

The public loves KP2, but officials say he is a safety risk

BY LEILA FUJIMORI
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Seventeen-month-old monk seal KP2 has won the hearts of Molokai children and adults.

"I saw the children, and I went in and that little guy loved me," said Ingrid Toth, 70, who swims daily off the Kaunakakai Wharf. "He would swim with me and go around my legs. He would go under me and hug me, and he would go on top of me."

But KP2, who was rescued when just a day old and raised by humans, has been hanging around the wharf for months. His weight has jumped from 100 pounds in the spring to between 160 and 175 pounds, said a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration official.

NOAA, whose personnel rescued KP2 when he was seen nursing on a rock and rejected by a negligent mother, will be moving him, likely to a remote area on Kauai.

"The seal poses a public safety risk to members of the Molokai community," said David Schofield, a marine mammal specialist with NOAA. "Some form of intervention will need to take place. It's just the when and where we're still discussing."

KP2, the first monk seal pup raised by NOAA, received 7½ months of care in captivity, then was freed into the wild, able to forage for himself and exhibiting normal wild seal behavior, Schofield said.

But once he discovered Kaunakakai Wharf, he was getting fed and taking fish from fishermen, Schofield said.

"He jumps over and he nudges into you, and it's pretty hilarious. It's like you're playing with a dog in the water."

Kodi Piirto
Visiting from Ontario, Canada

Federal law protects the endangered Hawaiian monk seal. It is illegal to harass, kill, harm and pursue the animals. As a guideline, humans should try to stay 150 feet away from marine mammals.

Schofield says KP2, the name given by NOAA, has become like the bears of Yellowstone National Park who raid trash bins and cars for food, becoming a potential threat to humans.

But he understands that KP2 has become "an ambassador; he's become part of the community."

Toth, who says KP2 was the size of a German shepherd and has become the size of a small dolphin, recently gave her a scare in the water.

"He came from the back and wiggled himself on my head," said Toth, a 20-year resident of Molokai. "With his whole weight, he was on top of my head. Not long — seconds. I pushed real hard with my head."

Kodi Piirto, 26, of Ontario, Canada, said he saw KP2 a couple of weeks ago.

"He jumps over and he nudges into you, and it's pretty hilarious," he said. "It's like you're playing with a dog in the water. The little kids will ride him and stuff. He's totally docile."

The kids are "laughing and giggling," he said. "It's a great time."

Walter Ritte, a Molokai hunter known for his Hawaiian activism, said, "We're not quite sure there is a problem."

He believes this young seal is like a hoailona, "a sign that says things are going to be good. ... You got to pay attention."

He said when Molokai residents fought the battle of Laau Point, where developers wanted to develop rich fishing grounds, they found seven or eight monk seals.

"The Hawaiians are trying to survive, and the monk seals are trying to survive," he said. "There's a



COURTESY MOLOKAI DISPATCH

An endangered Hawaiian monk seal designated by NOAA as KP2 gets up close with swimmers at Kaunakakai Wharf on Molokai.

strong relationship with the seals. Now that the seals are back, the Hawaiians need to have time to reintroduce themselves to the seals. They're like long-lost relatives."

Residents are also concerned NOAA will relocate KP2 to Kauai, where there have been

two shootings of monk seals. "For NOAA to keep interfering without discussing it with us, that will be a big mistake," Ritte said.

But Schofield says he has spoken for months with Ritte and others.

Schofield cited the case of R042, a monk seal born in the wild on the Big Island but around people most his life.

When he got to be 300 pounds, he started to play rough and had to be relocated to the Northwest Hawaiian Islands.

10-22-2009

[HAWAII'S MARINE LIFE]

SEALED FATE



Molokai residents say a federal agency should not have removed a Hawaiian monk seal without their consent

BY GARY T. KUBOTA
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MOLOKAI residents flew to Oahu to protest a federal agency's removal of a nearly blind Hawaiian monk seal from waters off Kaunakakai.

The residents, who held signs yesterday in front of the Waikiki Aquarium where the seal was taken, said the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration removed the seal known as "KP2" without consulting the Molokai community.

They also said the seal should have been treated for cataracts months ago.

"The kids loved that seal," said Molokai resident Karen Holt. "There was no opportunity to say goodbye. Nothing."

Keiko Bonk, the Hawaii program director for the Marine Conservation Biology Institute's monk seal campaign, said there needs to be

more communication between the community and NOAA seal recovery officials.

Hanohano Naehu, who lives on Molokai, said federal officials need to find a better way of working with Hawaii residents in the recovery of the monk seals, especially with the animal's numbers increasing on the island.

Molokai resident Walter Ritte said NOAA should treat the seal medically for cataracts and then bring him to Molokai and establish a place for him at a the fishponds along the shoreline.

Federal marine mammal response coordinator David Schofield said NOAA received calls from residents and teachers on Molokai about the need to remove the monk seal, which weighs about 160 pounds and was "getting too big."

Julie Lopez, a NOAA volunteer and Molokai resident, said the seal was becoming aggressive and held

a woman underwater for 30 seconds.

Lopez said the woman, who swims daily, once swam with KP2 but the incident scared her.

"He was starting to do that to the little kids as well," Lopez said.

Lopez said she and other volunteers recommended the removal of KP2.

Lopez said KP2 also lay on the catwalk at Kaunakakai pier and when people came up on him from the back suddenly, he would lunge at them.

KP2 was rejected as a pup by his mother on Kauai after his birth in May 2008.

NOAA officials raised the pup at the agency's fisheries research facility at Kewalo on Oahu and released him at Kalaupapa in north Molokai in December.

Schofield said the seal appeared at Kaunakakai wharf in March and began exhibiting rough play in July, jumping on surfboards and