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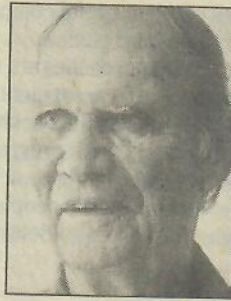
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Researchers must honor

IN 2005, the state of Hawaii finally embraced what native Hawaiians have known for generations: the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands are a delicate, sacred ecosystem that must be respected. The state took a visionary step forward establishing the first state marine refuge in the NWHI and requiring that human activity there "do no harm" to this fragile ecosystem. In 2006, the federal government followed suit, establishing the Papahānaumokuākea National Marine Monument. These protected areas rely on permits to control the human footprint up there.

But today more and more people are going to the NWHI for research, education, even sightseeing. Any time you set something off limits, people want to go there; this is the irony of our success in establishing protections for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. Already this year, permits have been granted to allow unlimited numbers of people to go to the NWHI to do any kind of dredging, discharging and taking, even recreational fishing. Researchers have violated their permits and we have seen little will for enforcement. This is wrong. We must change our attitude about this place entirely — there should be no human footprint there.

We all have a stake in this. The reef complexes of the Northwestern and main Hawaiian Islands are only 100 miles apart. If we leave it be, these remote islands can be what replenishes our waters with resources overexploited and overharvested in the main Hawaiian Islands today. And one day, perhaps, the waters of



GATHERING PLACE

Louis "Buzzy" Agard

Hawaii might again be a refrigerator — a robust food resource for the people of these islands.

When the "do no harm" rule is ignored, the good work for which this area was set aside is not being done. For too long, we have allowed too many human footprints to be left in this delicate place. Whaling, commercial fishing, coral harvesting — I was up there for 10 years, and I can tell you: the place can't take it, and it doesn't need it. When you take stuff from there, when you damage it, it does not come back. I looked around and I could see the place was telling us, "Go home already." So I turned the boat around, set the bearing to 90 degrees and headed back to Honolulu. And since then, I have been trying to tell people, "Hey it runs out. It's fragile. When you take from this place, it doesn't come back." I'm saying it again today.

Millions of dollars have been set aside by the federal government, and with good intentions. But money is a magnet for peo-

Every year tons of marine debris wash up on the shores of islands in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Refuge. This pile waits on Sand Island at Midway Atoll for transport to Honolulu.

ple. They see the money and their first question is, "What can I propose to do up there?" A scientist will say to the Hawaiian fisher, "Take only what you need," but in his research practice he doesn't heed his own advice. This is not why the people of Hawaii and the world fought so hard to protect this place.

Currently, there is no man-

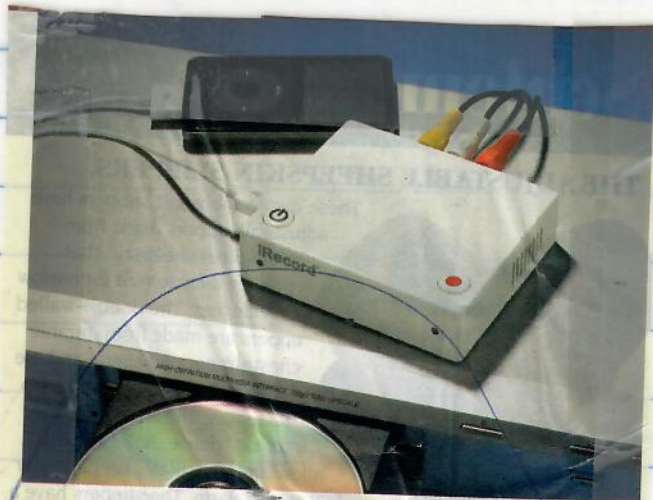
agement plan for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, no conservation goals and no way to say what research is needed to fulfill those conservation goals. No one has answered to the public the question: "What research is needed for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands?" Without a fundamental change in our attitude about this place, the human footprint

will continue to grow and eventually destroy this place.

The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands is a place of great hope for the future of the resources in our oceans, and it is for this reason that we set it aside. Let us honor the commitment we made to protect this fragile place as a true puuhonua.

Louis "Buzzy" Agard, a founding

board member of KAHEA: The Hawaiian-Environmental Alliance, is a former commercial fisher who served on the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council for more than a decade. In 2001, he was honored by President Clinton at the establishment of the NWHI Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve. He still serves on the citizen advisory council to that reserve.



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