

1/2016 HSA

Plans to expand whale

Federal officials cite a lack of support from the state as the reason

By Gary T. Kubota
gkubota@staradvertiser.com

The federal Office of National Marine Sanctuaries has withdrawn plans to expand the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary amid resistance from the state, the community and boating and fishing groups.

John Armor, the office's acting director, said the decision followed a letter from the state of Hawaii, issued Friday, "with concerns" about the proposal.

"After listening to input from the community and the state, NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) is withdrawing the proposal to expand sanctuary conservation around Hawaii," Armor said in a news statement Tuesday.

NOAA needs support

from the state, which serves as co-manager of the humpback whale sanctuary, to proceed with the expansion plan, he said.

The proposal would have added 235 square miles to the sanctuary's existing 1,366-square-mile management zone, which lies within the shallow (less than 600 feet), warm waters surrounding the main Hawaiian Islands.

The sanctuary was founded in 1992 and remains the only U.S. sanctuary dedi-

sanctuary scrapped

cated to a single species.

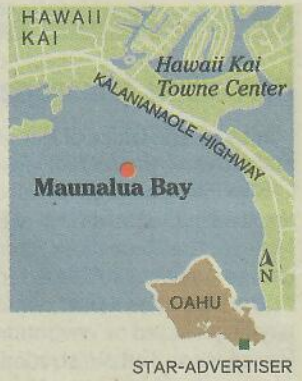
In March NOAA issued a draft proposal expanding the sanctuary's role to include all marine species within its boundaries and to increase the size of the sanctuary by 17 percent.

Under the now-withdrawn plan, Special Sanctuary Management areas would have been established at Maunalua Bay, Penguin Bank off western Molokai and in waters around Maui County, with restrictions against taking and possessing marine

species, altering submerged lands, setting off explosives and introducing non-native species.

At a public hearing attended by hundreds of people, Hawaii Kai Boat Club co-founder Todd Carle criticized the federal agency for wanting to create new rules when it had no budget for expansion improvements. Also, fishing groups opposed the proposal's call to increase protective areas for

Please see **BAY, B3**



BAY

Continued from B1

Hawaiian monk seals around Niihau and nearby Lehua islet.

Federal officials said the number of Hawaiian monk seals, an endangered species, is dwindling and that research showed pollution was giving rise to a breakdown of coral reef and an increase in coastal erosion in Maunalua Bay.

Under the proposed ex-

pansion, sanctuary officials wanted to have a "special sanctuary management area" for Maunalua Bay that would look at its overall ecology, including oil discharges and seafloor disturbances.

Whale sanctuary official Malia Chow said the proposed special designation for Maunalua Bay has been scrapped.

Suzanne Case, director of the state Department of Land and Natural Resources, said the whale sanctuary has had many successes, particularly

its program to disentangle whales from debris such as ropes and nets left in the ocean.

Scientists estimate that there are 20,000 humpbacks in the North Pacific. An estimated 12,000 swim to Hawaii's waters to mate and nurse their young, typically between September and March.

"Although ultimately the sanctuary will not have an expanded purpose, we look forward to building upon its accomplishments," Case said.

regional Sea Turtle Recovery coordinator at NOAA, discusses conservation and management challenges of protecting our local sea turtle population. Free. Call 697-7868.



4/14/16

>> "Getting to Know Hawaii's Sea Turtles" talk: 2 p.m. Saturday, Waianae Public Library. Irene Kelly,

For a complete calendar, visit star-advertiser.com



JAMM AQUINO / 2012

Green sea turtles are seen feeding at the ocean's edge in Pupukea. Irene Kelly of NOAA will talk about regional sea turtles at the Waianae Public Library Saturday.