



SUPPORT US



News That Matters ▪ [Support us](#)

Environment

Hawaii Gave Up Funding For Marine Mammal Protection Because Of Cumbersome Paperwork

Dropping out of the federal program has not hampered efforts to protect the islands' marine species, including monk seals, state and federal agents say.

By Marcel Honore / About 17 hours ago

🕒 Reading time: 5 minutes.



Share Article



7

For years, the state officers who enforce Hawaii’s conservation laws boosted their patrols and resources under a special partnership that helped their federal counterparts, who are thinly stretched across the islands, enforce their own laws on native species.

That “joint enforcement agreement,” or JEA, sent hundreds of thousands of federal dollars to the state’s [Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement](#) each year to help the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association better protect monk seals, spinner dolphins, sea turtles and other marine animals.

However, DOCARE withdrew from the JEA last year because the monthly reporting requirements for those federal dollars had grown too cumbersome.

In September, “we decided to take a time-out from the program so that we can recalibrate our process to make sure we can meet the reporting requirements under the agreements,” DOCARE Enforcement Chief Jason Redulla said last week.



Department of Land and Natural Resources officers, along with a federal officer, speak to swimmers in Honaunau after the swimmers allegedly harassed a pod of wild spinner dolphins. State and federal authorities say their prior joint agreement was a valuable tool, but they also say that enforcement hasn't been hurt by the state's leaving it. (Courtesy: DLNR via AP/2023)

Now, DOCARE wants back in. The agency intends to apply by a deadline later this month to rejoin the JEA, Redulla said.

If accepted, it would probably resume sometime in August or September, he added.

Both Redulla and local agents with NOAA's [Office of Law Enforcement](#) described the JEA as a valuable tool to bolster the manpower and equipment used to enforce [the Marine Mammal Protection Act](#), [the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act](#), [the Lacey Act](#) and other federal laws that aim to protect marine species.

"We become a force multiplier. We have the ability to be deputized as federal officers, and that in turn helps the federal government," Redulla said last week.

But he and the federal agents also downplayed the deal coming to a halt for at least a year.

There's been virtually no impact to DOCARE's enforcement levels despite the loss of federal funds that cover overtime, fuel, equipment and other costs, said Frank Giaretto, deputy special agent in charge for OLE's Pacific Islands Division.

"Our relationship with DOCARE has never been better, regardless of whether they have a JEA in place," Giaretto added.

Further, both agencies said that the lack of a JEA did not affect their ability to respond to monk seal incidents across the islands, including the death of a day-old monk seal pup in May on Oahu's North Shore in which an unleashed dog attacked the seal, dubbed PO7.

Two local residents, including an employee of the state's Division of State Parks, were charged in the death [and fined \\$20,000](#). Both State Parks and DOCARE are part of the larger Department of Land and Natural Resources.

A Win-Win Partnership

Former DLNR Director William Aila said he was surprised to learn the state had withdrawn from the JEA.

"In my experience it was advantageous," said Aila, who led the department from 2010 to 2014.

By working together, the state enforcement officers would receive training from the federal officers to write their reports to meet federal prosecutors' needs, resulting in better prosecution against marine species violations, he said.

DOCARE also purchased a couple of boats and other equipment with the federal dollars while Aila was at the agency, he said.

"There were positive things that came out of it," he said.

Redulla and the OLE agents said the JEA's primary benefit was the funding.



An unleashed dog harasses a Hawaiian monk seal, representing a violation of federal law by the dog's owner. (Courtesy: DLNR/2022)

Martina Sagapolu, the assistant director for NOAA OLE's Pacific Islands Division, also said she understood why DOCARE withdrew last year.

"It's a lot of paperwork — welcome to the federal government," Sagapolu said.

NOAA is trying to make the reporting requirements easier but federal funding awards require a lot of justification, she said.

"They had too much going on," Sagapolu added.

During its last year in the agreement, DOCARE received more than \$275,000 to help NOAA's thinly stretched law enforcement personnel bolster their patrols and investigations across the islands, according to Redulla.

The funding awarded by Congress for such JEA agreements has gradually decreased in recent years, Sagapolu said. DOCARE's share shrunk by nearly half in a 10-year period. In 2014, the division received [more than \\$574,000](#), according to reports.

Sagapolu's enforcement division has fewer than 12 people to cover the entire U.S. Pacific region, including Hawaii, Guam and other U.S. territories, she said. It's the smallest of the OLE's five divisions but has to cover the largest area, representing some 1.7 million square miles, according to Sagapolu.

Redulla said his agency revamped its internal procedures and its staff can now provide the federal government with the reporting data it needs.

"I don't think we lost out on much," he said. "I think it was more important that we ensure if we're going to accept federal funds that we're able to comply with the federal requirements of the FEA program, so we're being responsible with the funding that's being given to us."

Help Power Local Journalism.

Now more than ever, local news is a vital community resource: connecting neighbors, uplifting voices and sharing information that empowers people to make informed decisions in their everyday lives.

But did you know that only 1% of Civil Beat readers donate?

[Support Civil Beat's growth today with a gift of any amount](#) — it only takes a minute. And for those who can, please consider supporting our local journalism with a monthly donation. Thank you.

CONTRIBUTE

About the Author



Marcel Honore  

Marcel Honore is a reporter for Civil Beat. You can email him at mhonore@civilbeat.org

[Use the RSS feed to subscribe to Marcel Honore's posts today](#)

[Comments](#)

[My Profile](#)



Signed in as

A_Honu_World Not you? [Sign Out](#)

Aloha, Civil Beat readers. We appreciate your thoughtful comments. But in order to make commenting an engaging experience for as many readers as possible, a few rules: Please limit the number of times you comment per story so everyone has a chance to participate without feeling like they are in the middle of an argument between just a few people. Don't repeat the same comment over and over. Be civil and respectful of others even if you disagree. Language and words are important so please avoid snark and put-downs. Name calling and mocking of people's names is specifically prohibited; so are personal attacks, including on Civil Beat and our reporters and contributors. General nastiness and stereotyping also will be rejected. DO NOT WRITE IN ALL CAPS; that comes across as yelling, don't you think? Stay on the topic of the story, please, and not turn everything into a screed on Trump or Biden. Misinformation and disinformation will be rejected. In general, not every comment may get posted. We may suspend or ban commenters who overstep at our sole discretion.

Note: Different people may use the same username. For instance, there are at least six different commenters who go by Malia. There are at least five Ricks and four Daves. Usernames that are clearly intended to ridicule someone else are not allowed.

Election season note: We welcome thoughtful discussion of candidates and issues in the comment section. Please follow our general guidelines, in particular: No personal attacks. Be civil and respectful of others even if you disagree. Misinformation or disinformation, especially mischaracterization of candidates and their positions, will be rejected. **Do not use the comment section to campaign for your own election or to undermine your opponents.** You have other venues for that kind of thing. Moderators are working to prevent the comments from becoming political rallies. Not every comment may get posted.

No links, please.

Be patient. We read every comment but we also need to sleep, spend time with our families and do our other work so there may sometimes be a considerable lag between when you write your comment and when it appears on the story. Weekends and evenings in particular.

Click on "Sign In". Your old account should still work. If you don't already have an account you need to create one (click on "Register").

Need help? Email membership@civilbeat.org.

Post a comment

B *I* ” ☰

1,200 characters remaining

SUBMIT

[All Comments](#) 7

Sort by

Newest



— **Kamanulai** 5 hours ago

One aspect missing from the reported perspectives is requirements other than the paperwork. All Fed kala typically comes with obligations on manpower & activity. For example, Fed highway funds hinge on x amount of

speed, seatbelt & safety enforcement; some USDA grants target only >1 acre (sorry, beekeepers); DEA "gets back" x manhours for Green Harvest ops; etc.

JEA at least used to require x manhours in support of NOAA's priority missions: Federally protected marine species, and commercial fisheries. All good when aligned with DLNR priorities and full DOCARE staffing, but... If there's just (say) 10 officers, requiring 100 hrs/wk amounts to 25% of their time, and a corresponding reduction in *other* missions (eg. near shore & recreational fisheries; and terrestrial work: state lands patrol, cultural resource protection, hunting, etc).

While I'd favor the JEA, there is quite the balancing act involved for the DOCARE Chief and his staff. It isn't pono to imply bad faith here; we should wish them luck, and support their efforts to accomodate the Feds *and* get the funding, without compromising State interest or the books.

 Respect  Reply  Share

 Report

 [Profile & Replies](#)

 [Top of comments](#)

 [Top of page](#)

GET IN-DEPTH REPORTING ON HAWAII'S BIGGEST ISSUES

Sign up for our FREE morning newsletter

Enter email	SIGN ME UP!
-------------	--------------------

And don't worry, we hate spam too! You can unsubscribe any time.