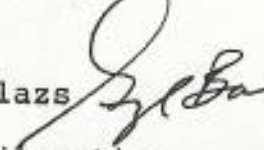




U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Southwest Fisheries Center Honolulu Laboratory
2570 Dole St. • Honolulu, Hawaii 96822-2396

February 3, 1987

F/SWC2:GHB

MEMORANDUM FOR: F/SWR43 - Gene Witham
FROM: F/SWC2 - George H. Balazs 
THRU: F/SWC2 - William G. Gilmartin
SUBJECT: Sea turtles being held in captivity

The recent troubling case involving two sea turtles being kept at a private residence in Hawaii Kai highlights a continuing problem in identifying individual animals. A single turtle was being held there 2 years ago which was claimed to have been acquired "pre-Act," before 1978. Now there are two turtles. But is one of them the same individual I saw 2 years ago, or is it a different one? While I can make an educated guess, there is really no way to tell for certain. In order to do so, a turtle would have to have been tagged with our permanent ID tags, measured, and perhaps even photographed. About all that can be concluded with certainty about the Hawaii Kai turtles is that one of them was not in the pond when I was asked to visit the site 2 years ago.

I can foresee this problem re-occurring time and again during coming months and years. Steve Kaiser at Sea Life Park has, in fact, pointed out to me on several occasions a questionable situation involving a captive turtle (turtles) at the Mauna Lani Bay condominium. How many turtles are being held there, and are they the same ones from year to year? I only have comprehensive tag and ID records for turtles at 1) Sea life Park, 2) Kahala Hilton Hotel, and 3) Mauna Lani Bay Hotel. Ideally, we should have similar files for every turtle in captivity in the State of Hawaii. Maybe now would be a good time to actively work toward this goal. There are a number of ways that such an inventory and identification project might be accomplished. It won't be easy, but I believe it will save lots of future headaches. I'm available to help in whatever way necessary.

