



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

August 8, 1990 F/SWC2:GHB

Ms. Leilani S. Hino  
Director of Community Affairs  
Mauna Lani Resort  
P.O. Box 4959  
Kohala Coast, Hawaii 96743-4959

Dear Leilani,

A belated "many thanks" for the complete package of publicity materials you forwarded to me through Steve Kaiser regarding release of the headstarted "independence day" turtles from the Mauna Lani. I appreciated being able to read through this information. As we discussed, the key point here is that headstarting of sea turtles is an experiment that presently lacks proven value as a long-term (or even short-term) management technique for restocking and recovering wild populations. This issue has been debated back and forth by scientists and conservationists for decades, but the conclusion, as I have stated it, remains the same. Given the worthiness of doing such an experiment, it is my opinion that headstarting can do no harm to a wild population of sea turtles provided: 1) it does not draw upon wild stocks (eggs or hatchlings), 2) it does not inadvertently mislead the public into thinking that the action has proven conservation value that can somehow compensate for problems of habitat degradation and intentional or accidental human-induced mortality and 3) there are safeguards to prevent the spread or introduction of disease into the wild.

I hope this clarifies my views on the headstarting issue, so no confusion will exist now or in the future. A recent issue of *Marine Turtle Newsletter* carried a guest editorial on headstarting authored by the National Sea Turtle Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. A copy has been enclosed for your consideration. I am sure you will find it of interest.

Sometime in October I will be contacting you to arrange for the release of the graft-marked turtle we have had on loan at the Mauna Lani for several years. I will need to carefully photograph the graft, take standard body measurements, and retag as necessary. We are certainly appreciative of the cooperative assistance provided by the Mauna Lani in caring for this turtle.

Possibly by October, you will have made a decision on releasing the four wild-captured turtles (three of which are tagged) being held in the fishponds. A copy of the tagging and measurement data for those turtles has been enclosed.



Again, I appreciate your fine efforts in keeping me updated on the Mauni Lani Resort's activities with sea turtles.

Sincerely,

George H. Balazs  
Zoologist and Leader  
Marine Turtle Research

Enclosure

cc: Steve Kaiser, Sea Life Park

JUL 5 1990

## Turtles get resort hotel head start

By Jim Borg  
Advertiser Science Writer

Four green sea turtles raised in captivity yesterday swam into the wild blue sea off the Mauna Lani Bay Hotel on the Big Island.

Independence Day for the youngsters marked the end of a first-of-its-kind program in which the turtles were raised at the hotel rather than at their birth place, Sea Life Park.

"They are offspring of our captive turtles here at Sea Life Park," said Steve Kaiser, the park's curator of fishes. "This is the first time a hotel has participated in a head-start program."

The turtles or honu, a threatened species, are three years old and spent the last 10 months in the hotel's salt-water atrium ponds, eating lettuce and smelt, a type of fish, said Kaiser.

As hatchlings, the turtles have the diameter of a silver dollar — "pupu" proportions — or sharks and other large fish, Kaiser said. The head-start program allows them to grow to a less vulnerable size.

"We lend the turtles to the resort and when they get big enough, when they have a better chance of survival in the wild, we let them go," he said. "More important is the education aspect and the awareness of their endangered status those turtles bring to the guests. It lets people know there are not as

As onlookers line the beach yesterday, a young green sea turtle contemplates freedom. Many turtles as there used to be and they shouldn't throw plastic into the ocean, for instance."

Turtles, and other marine life, often mistake clear plastic bags for jellyfish and asphyxiate when they try to eat them. Plastic six-pack holders and lost fishing line are other menaces because they can strangle birds and turtles.

Kaiser credited Mauna Lani turtle caretaker Daniel Akaka Jr. with an "excellent

job" of raising the charges, hatched from eggs laid by some of Sea Life Park's 26 resident honu.

The turtles, 20 to 24 inches long, were tagged so that they can be identified later.

All four swam out of sight yesterday, but Kaiser said he hopes they will join the resident turtle population offshore near the hotel.

Since 1978, the park has released 1,300 hatchlings to the wild, Kaiser said. "We farmed them out before, but



Mauna Lani Resort photo.

usually to other oceanariums and aquariums, never a resort," he said.

As yet, no other hotels have expressed interest in the program, which sets specific requirements for turtle nurture.

The Mauna Lani has four other Sea Life Park turtles, three of which will be turned loose when they're old enough. The fourth is being used to study what kind of ID tag works best.