

## 1 What is a National Marine Sanctuary?

In response to a growing awareness of the intrinsic natural, cultural, and historical value of our oceanic and coastal waters, Congress passed the Sanctuaries Act in 1972. National marine sanctuaries promote comprehensive management of the special ecological, historical, recreational and aesthetic marine resources. National marine sanctuaries may be designated in coastal and ocean waters, in submerged lands, and in the Great Lakes and their connecting waters. Fourteen national marine sanctuaries have been designated to date and include nearshore and open ocean waters ranging in size from less than one to over 5000-square miles. National marine sanctuaries harbor a fascinating array of plants and animals, from huge whales to tiny, brightly colored sea snails.

National marine sanctuaries are cherished recreational spots for diving, sport fishing, and wildlife viewing, and support valuable commercial industries such as fishing, marine transportation, and tourism. These protected waters provide a secure habitat for species close to extinction, and protect historically significant shipwrecks and cultural artifacts. Part of the challenge of managing these special areas is balancing multiple uses of the resources.

National marine sanctuaries are administered by the Sanctuaries and Reserves Division of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in the U.S. Department of Commerce. They are part of our collective riches as a nation that belong to all of us as citizens, a public trust that we have the right to enjoy, and the responsibility to protect for future generations.

## Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary

The Oceans Act of 1992 simultaneously reauthorized and amended the Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act of 1972 (the Sanctuaries Act) and designated the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary (the Sanctuary). In designating the Sanctuary, Congress, in consultation with the State, recognized the importance of Hawaii's nearshore waters as essential to the long-term protection and recovery of the North Pacific stock of endangered humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*). Congress also provided for the identification of marine resources and ecosystems of national significance for possible inclusion in the Sanctuary.

Humpback whales migrate to the warm, shallow, nearshore waters of the main Hawaiian islands for reproductive purposes, with the highest density occurring between the months of December and March in the waters around the "four-island area" (Maui, Molokai, Lanai and Kaho'olawe), the Penguin Bank area; around Niihau Island; and along the Northwestern coast of the Big Island.

Prior to commercial whaling, the worldwide population of humpback whales is thought to have numbered approximately 150,000. In the North Pacific, the current humpback whale population is estimated to be between 2,000 to 3,000 animals, considerably less than the estimated 15,000 to 20,000 animals that existed prior to commercial whaling.

Humpback whales are one of the more easily recognized species in Hawaiian waters during the winter months. These waters also provide habitat for numerous other marine species, including Hawaiian monk seals, pilot whales, false killer whales, Pacific bottlenose dolphins, spinner dolphins, green sea turtles, the endangered hawksbill sea turtle, many species of commercially important fish, a diverse assemblage of coral reef inhabitants, and endemic marine species.



# Top 10 Questions

asked about the  
Hawaiian Islands  
Humpback Whale  
National Marine  
Sanctuary



  
National Marine Sanctuary Program

## **2** *What is resource protection?*

Protection of the marine resources and qualities is the highest management priority of National Marine Sanctuaries. Specific objectives of resource protection are to:

- ✓ Involve all agencies and the public in the development and implementation of the Sanctuary management plan;
- ✓ Establish a long-term research and monitoring program to collect baseline data and monitor changes over time;
- ✓ Promote public awareness, appreciation, and voluntary compliance with regulations by stressing resource sensitivity and protection; and
- ✓ Reduce threats to Sanctuary resources and qualities posed by major emergencies through contingency and emergency response planning.

## **3** *What is a resource of national significance?*

National significance refers to an area or resource possessing certain qualities that are unique and representative of the nation's varied marine resources. Such qualities include those which exemplify the diversity of natural resources and the human use of those resources; illustrate the themes of our nation's maritime heritage; and offer opportunities for multiple human activities such as conservation, recreation, ecology, historical and cultural use, research and monitoring, education, aesthetics, and other sustainable uses. The Oceans Act of 1992 designated the Sanctuary in recognition of the national significance of the humpback whale and its Hawaiian habitat.

## **4** *How was the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary created?*

In 1992, Congress, in consultation with the State of Hawaii, designated the Sanctuary to recognize that Hawaii's marine environment is an essential breeding, calving, and nursing area for humpback whales.

## **5** *Why do we need a sanctuary when there are already regulations to protect the whale?*

The humpback whale spends six months of the year in Hawaii's territorial waters. With increasing numbers of whales and increasing human uses and activities in these

waters, Congress determined that there is a need for comprehensive and coordinated conservation and management of the humpback whales and their Hawaiian habitat, as available under the Sanctuaries Act. The Sanctuary will complement and support existing educational, enforcement, research, and monitoring efforts.

## **6** *Will we be able to fish, swim, dive, boat or snorkel in the sanctuary?*

National marine sanctuaries encourage all compatible activities within their boundaries consistent with the goals of resource protection. All activities must comply with existing federal and state authorities (e.g., NMFS 100-yard approach regulation). The State Division of Aquatic Resources and the Western Pacific Fisheries Management Council will act as the lead agencies where fisheries issues are concerned within the Sanctuary.

## **7** *Will Native Hawaiian rights be affected?*

The National Marine Sanctuaries Act specifically requires that the Sanctuary facilitate all uses of Native Hawaiians customarily and traditionally exercised for subsistence, cultural, and religious purposes. Native Hawaiian participation is essential in the development and management of the Sanctuary. In other sanctuaries, Native American Indian tribes play an integral role in Sanctuary development and management.

## **8** *Will the sanctuary be good for business?*

Businesses that operate in and around other national marine sanctuaries are booming. Management of these sites have afforded greater protection of the ecosystem and resources contained within, while facilitating human uses. Businesses actually advertise the presence of a sanctuary to attract visitors. The National Marine Sanctuaries Program encourages this as a way to inform visitors about the presence of a sanctuary and the need to protect these resources of national significance. Increasingly, tourists are seeking nature-based vacation destinations and activities which enrich their lives and minimally impact the environment. Further, protection of these marine resources provides benefits to industries such as, diving, fishing, and nature viewing, which are dependent upon a healthy marine ecosystem.

## **9** *Will the sanctuary implement new regulations?*

Existing Federal, State, and local laws and regulations are being carefully assessed for their adequacy to protect Sanctuary resources and qualities. The Sanctuary will fill gaps, complement existing authorities, and work within existing management mechanisms and permit processes to ensure that impacts on humpback whales and their habitat are addressed. The Sanctuary will encourage development of public and private partnerships to promote resource protection and stewardship. Regulations may be issued to supplement and compliment existing authorities.

## **10** *Will the Humpback Whale Sanctuary be expanded to protect other marine resources?*

The Ocean's Act requires NOAA to provide for the identification of other resources of national significance for possible inclusion in the Sanctuary. The National Marine Sanctuaries Program will work with federal, state, and local governments, non-governmental organizations, the public, and a Sanctuary Advisory Committee and working groups to help identify and assess other resources of national significance for possible inclusion in the Sanctuary.

---

*NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary Program encourages public participation and input, please contact:*

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale NMS, Oahu Office, 300 Ala Moana Blvd., Room 5350, Box 50186, Honolulu, HI 96850. Call 808-541-3184, or 800-831-4888 from the neighbor islands, or FAX 808-541-3450.

- or -

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale NMS, Maui Office, 726 South Kihei Road, Kihei, HI 96753. Call 808-879-2818.

*Printed on recycled paper*