

MPA NEWS



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West Hawaii Council Approves Fish Management Areas

A West Hawaii working group approved in March the proposal for a network of fish replenishment areas (FRAs) in which aquarium fish collection would be prohibited. In an attempt to end a longstanding feud between dive tour operators and fish collectors on the west coast of the island of Hawaii, the multi-stakeholder group voted to set aside a total of nine FRAs, representing 35% of the 150-mile (240 km) West Hawaii coastline.

Aquarium fish collectors boycotted the vote, insisting they had been assured the percentage would be no more than 30% of the coastline. They will be required to abide by the decision, however, which will be incorporated in the state's administrative rules.

Dive tour operators had argued since the 1980s for limitations on collectors, and in 1996 the Hawaii Department of Aquatic Resources helped to establish a West Hawaii Reef Fish Working Group to develop a management plan for regulating the industry. More than 70 members of the West Hawaii community and six state officials were involved in the working group, which met over 15 months. It was during this period that researchers at the University of Hawaii - Hilo gathered significant evidence that the populations of several of the collectors' target species of aquarium fish (e.g., tangs and angelfish) were in fact suffering declines related to collecting.

Acting in conjunction with the working group, the state legislature passed a law in 1998 declaring that a minimum of 30% of West Hawaii coastal waters should be set aside as FRAs, leaving the placement and exact percentage for the working group to decide. The target percentage was based on contemporary research of reef fish by several biologists, who had suggested that in the absence of management in neighboring fished areas, reserves should be established to represent at least 30% of the shelf.

Once the 30%-minimum figure was set, two issues arose. Collectors felt betrayed, insisting they had been promised the 30% figure and no more, while some diving-oriented communities reportedly attempted to cluster what was viewed by others as a disproportionate share of the FRAs. In the end, the working group distributed the FRAs relatively evenly along the length of the coast.

For more information:

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Conference Calendar

10-13 Aug. 1999 - Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada. "New Tools, New Approaches for the Sustainable Management of the Marine Environment." Organized by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Canada. Web site: www.gfc.dfo.ca/communic/colloque/overview-e.html.

7-11 Oct. 1999 - San Remo, Italy. "Seventh International Conference on Artificial Reefs and related Aquatic Habitats." Web site: www.soc.soton.ac.uk/SUDO/DEPT/7CARAH/7carah.html.

7-12 Nov. 1999 - Fiji. "Oceans in the New Millennium: Challenges and Opportunities for the Islands." Organized by the International Oceans Institute. Web site: www.usp.ac.fj/oi.

1-3 Dec. 1999 - Anchorage, Alaska, USA. "Fifth North Pacific Rim Fisheries Conference." Topics will include declining species and management implications. E-mail: Fisheries.ION@alaskapacific.edu.

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