

Contact: Kelsey Daimon

Marketing and Public Relations Coordinator

Telephone: 808.270.7084 Facsimile: 808.270.7070

Email: kelsey@mauioceancenter.com

Holomua na Honu Maui Ocean Center Releases Five Green Sea Turtles

August 13, 2012—MA'ALAEA, MAUI, HI - Maui Ocean Center will release five juvenile green sea turtles, honu, into the ocean the morning of Thursday, August 23, 2012 at 10:30 a.m. from the south shore fronting Grand Wailea, A Waldorf Astoria Resort. Many of the Aquarium's employees, who have spent two years feeding, cleaning and caring for the honu, will be joined by staff of the Department of Land and Natural Resources-Division of Aquatic Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, and the Grand Wailea to witness the turtles' introduction into the open ocean.

"Maui Ocean Center has been a part of Sea Life Park Hawaii's Hawaiian Green Sea Turtle Educational Loan Program since we opened in 1998. Through this extraordinary program we have released forty-two turtles over the past fourteen years and once again, these two year old turtles are ready for life in the open ocean" said John Gorman, Curator at Maui Ocean Center. "This is our second release from shore and following the very successful shore release last year on the west side, we are pleased to share this exciting event with the community and visitors." According to Gorman, the turtles weigh around 19-27 pounds each.

The event begins at 9:00 a.m. with festivities and educational opportunities included presentations by prominent local marine biologists, researchers and community members, informational booths, a turtle encounter, a blessing of the turtles and live music. Presentations by Cheryl King of the Hawksbill Recovery Project, Glynnis Nakai of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Patrol volunteer program, and Donna Brown of the Marine Option Program Turtle Stranding Network with topics including nesting programs, current research, and the Hawksbill Recovery Project. Several organizations will be on hand to share information and answer questions including the Hawksbill Recovery Project, Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Land and Natural Resources-Division of Aquatic Resources, UH-Maui College Marine Option Program, Grand Wailea, and Maui Ocean Center. A highlight of the morning will be the chance to experience an up-close and personal encounter with the *homu* and Maui Ocean Center's Curatorial staff. At 10:30 a.m., the *homu* will each receive a blessing by Kahu Dane Maxwell, Maui Ocean Center's Hawaiian Cultural Advisor, prior to being released to the ocean. Immediately following the release, enjoy live music and hula by Kalani Smythe.

"In Hawaiian culture, green sea turtles are one of several species considered na 'aumakua, a family's ancestral god or deity that takes the form of an animal. The remarkable history of the Hawaiian people and their profound connection to the sea is at the heart of who we are at Maui Ocean Center." says Kate Zolezzi, the Aquarium's

General Manager. "In respect for our island's host culture and the marine animals displayed at the Aquarium, we are honored to have Kahu Dane present for the introduction or release of animals at Maui Ocean Center."

Including the turtles released during Holomua na Honu 2012, a total of forty-two turtles have been released by Maui Ocean Center through Sea Life Park Hawaii's Hawaiian Green Sea Turtle Educational Loan Program. Shortly after the turtles arrived at the Aquarium and their unique personalities began to stand out, a turtle naming contest was held. Each turtle was appropriately named; 1. Lalama (fearless), 2. Kilakila (majestic), 3. Luana (to be at leisure/relaxed), 4. Hoku (star), and 5. Loli'i (relaxed/at ease). The turtles will be marked in white with "MOC" and the numbers 1 through 5 on their shells. Maui residents and visitors are urged to keep an eye out for these turtles. If you encounter one, please note the day, time and location, and contact Maui Ocean Center at (808) 270-7000 or info@mauioceancenter.com to help with tracking the turtles.

The shore release is made possible with the dedicated and generous assistance of the NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, Sea Life Park Hawaii, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Department of Land and Natural Resources, Grand Wailea, other organizations participating in the event, and many more.

The event is complimentary and open to the public. A special event parking rate of \$5.00 is available at Grand Wailea with validation. Validation is available at Maui Ocean Center's information table at the event. For more information call (808) 270-7000 or visit www.mauioceancenter.com.

Hawaiian Green Sea Turtle Educational Loan Program

In partnership with Sea Life Park Hawaii, the sea turtles are part of the Hawaiian Green Sea Turtle Educational Loan Program, authorized by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and conducted under the scientific supervision of National Marine Fisheries Service-Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center. This program is specifically designed as an educational outreach program geared towards education, conservation, and the enhancement of the public's awareness of the oceans and its inhabitants.

The turtles were hatched at Sea Life Park Hawaii on Oahu and have lived at Maui Ocean Center since August 2010. Sea Life Park Hawaii is home to a colony of adult Hawaiian green sea turtles which has produced approximately 200 to 800 hatchlings each year, all of which are released into the wild. Some of these turtles, like the ones at Maui Ocean Center, and those kept at Sea Life Park Hawaii or other collaborating institutions, are released at a later age to provide an educational opportunity for those that visit these institutions, as part of the Hawaiian Green Sea Turtle Educational Loan Program.

When the hatchlings reach the ages of two to three years, under the authority and approval of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service-Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, they are released into Hawaiian waters at a location approved by the agencies. Sea Life Park Hawaii replaces those turtles released with new hatchlings in order to maintain each facility's educational display program.

Each of the five turtles being released by Maui Ocean Center will be outfitted with Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tags implanted in both rear flippers. The tags, small microchips about the size of a grain of rice, contain an electromagnetic code. Using hand-held scanners, researchers are able to identify PIT-tagged turtles. When the turtles return to land, the PIT tags will allow National Marine Fisheries Service-Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center and researchers to identify them as the turtles released from Maui Ocean Center.

Maui Ocean Center

Maui Ocean Center displays live coral and Hawaiian marine life in over 60 vibrant exhibits. Twenty-five percent of the animals found at Maui Ocean Center are endemic, meaning they are found nowhere else in the world. In addition to daily marine life presentations given by ocean naturalists, Maui Ocean Center highlights specific marine species with enhanced presentations, special guest talks, hands-on activities, upgradeable behind the scenes tours and more each month. Throughout August, Maui Ocean Center celebrates "Turtle Mania" with interactive events that allow guests to experience green sea turtles up close and personal with the opportunity to learn about the biology, behavior and diet of these amazing creatures. Program details can be found at www.mauioceancenter.com.

Sea Life Park Hawaii

Sea Life Park Hawaii is not only a fascinating visitor attraction, it is a repository of knowledge, a refuge and a habitat for some of Hawai'i's most important and beloved sea creatures. Guests swim with dolphins, interact with sea lions, feed sea turtles, and dive with sea rays in an educational and entertainment manner found nowhere else in Hawai'i. Located north of Hanauma Bay, Sea Life Park Hawaii features a beautifully designed park with reefs, lagoons, pools, and theaters. Both adults and children can take part in thrilling water activities and exhilarating encounters with marine mammals. Give your entire family an adventure to look forward to – make a reservation today. The park is open daily from 10:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. For more information, visit www.sealifeparkhawaii.com.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) works to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people by enforcing federal wildlife laws, protecting endangered species, managing migratory birds, restoring nationally significant fisheries, and conserving and restoring wildlife habitats such as wetlands.

FWS operates within the Department of the Interior to manage the 150 million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System of more than 551 National Wildlife Refuges and thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. Under the Fisheries program, FWS also controls 70 National Fish Hatcheries, 65 fishery resource offices and 86 ecological services field stations. For more information visit www.fws.gov/.

NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is the federal agency, a division of the Department of Commerce, responsible for the stewardship of the nation's living marine resources and their habitat. NMFS is responsible for the management, conservation and protection of living marine resources within the United States' Exclusive Economic Zone (water three to 200 miles offshore). Using the tools provided by the Magnuson-Stevens Act, NMFS assesses and predicts the status of fish stocks, ensures compliance with fisheries regulations and works to reduce wasteful fishing practices. Under the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act, NMFS recovers protected marine species (i.e. whales, turtles) without unnecessarily impeding economic and recreational opportunities. With the help of the six regional offices and eight councils, NMFS is able to work with communities on fishery management issues. NMFS works to promote sustainable fisheries and to prevent lost economic potential associated with overfishing, declining species and degraded habitats. NMFS strives to balance competing public needs. For more information visit www.nmfs.noaa.gov.

Department of Land and Natural Resources

The Department and Land and Natural Resources mission: Enhance, protect, conserve and manage Hawaii's unique and limited natural, cultural and historic resources held in public trust for current and future generations of visitors and the people of Hawaii nei in partnership with others from the public and private sectors. For more information visit www.hawaii.gov/dlnr.

Grand Wailea

Grand Wailea is the largest private employer in Maui County. Since opening its doors in 1991, Grand Wailea adopted a philosophy of corporate citizenship, becoming an active member of the Maui community. In 2011, Grand Wailea donated more than \$1 million in community contributions provided in a variety of ways including monetary donations, gift certificates for rooms and food and beverage credits as well as in-kind services. For more information about Grand Wailea, call 808.875.1234 or visit www.grandwailea.com.

Turtles in Hawai'i

Of the seven species of sea turtle in the world, five are found in Hawai'i. The green sea turtle, hawksbill and leatherback are considered native to Hawai'i, and the loggerhead and olive ridleys are rare visitors. Green sea turtles, known as *honu* in Hawaiian, are the largest hard-shelled sea turtle in the world, and the most common sea turtle in Hawai'i. As adults, *honu* mainly eat algae and sea grasses, which turn their fat layer green, giving them their common name. Green sea turtles are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

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