



Shark tour alarms Maunalua Bay users

East Oahu residents mobilize to prevent a company from feeding the ocean predators

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Some East Oahu residents are angered by plans to launch a shark-encounter operation a few miles off Maunalua Bay, saying it could endanger the public.

"We're going to stop it," said Ann Marie Kirk, a member of the Ka Iwi Coalition. Many canoe paddlers, stand-up paddlers, fishermen, surfers and bodyboarders use the bay, she said. "This is crucial."

A town hall meeting is scheduled from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Thursday at Kamiloiki Elementary School to address the issue. Area representatives and community groups are expected to attend.

A shark cage on a boat named Snoopy V observed near Kona Brewing Co. at Koko Marina has caught the attention of many residents and Maunalua Bay users. Many say they are shocked and worried that the business would attract sharks closer to ocean-users on Oahu's South Shore.

Business operator Iolani Lewis did not return Star-Bulletin requests for comment, but he told KHON last week that he wants to establish a deep-water tour miles off Maunalua Bay. "While sharks are the main attraction, we want to promote conservation and education," said Lewis.

He said he plans to launch the operation in a couple of months. "I hope to meet with community members to address their concerns about our planned operation. We're not there yet, but we definitely plan to do this," he told KHON.

Any shark-encounter tour would have to operate more than three miles from shore, outside of state jurisdiction.

Despite protests, shark encounter operations are popular off Haleiwa.

Some residents fear that if a shark operation is launched off Maunalua Bay, the attraction will proliferate at other sites around the island. "It's by far a statewide issue," said Elizabeth Reilly, president of Livable Hawaii Kai Hui, a nonprofit community group.

Many canoe-paddling races, including the Molokai Hoe World Championship Canoe Race and the Na Wahine o ke Kai World Championship Canoe Race, are held in waters off Ka Iwi and Maunalua Bay.

"We're not talking about a body of water that is dormant. It's heavily used," said Reilly.

In a written statement, Rep. Gene Ward, who represents Hawaii Kai to Kalama Valley and was involved in organizing the town hall meeting, said, "We have every kind of recreational user at Maunalua Bay, and I think attracting sharks to the area via a feeding operation could possibly endanger public safety."

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