

DLNR working on sewage pump station at Maalaea

By *ILIMA LOOMIS, Staff Writer*

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WAILUKU – State officials have responded to a protest at Maalaea Harbor by saying they agree offshore dumping should be ended, and they hope to build a sewage pumping station at the harbor within a few years.

It's possible a federal grant could speed construction of the pumping station, but the state Department of Land and Natural Resources will still need to appeal to the Legislature for funding, said DLNR Chairman Peter Young.

While money has not yet been secured for construction of the pump-out, Young said he hoped to go out to bid for the station's planning and design sometime over the summer.

"A pump-out facility and other improvements are a priority for us at Maalaea," he said.

About a dozen ocean lovers picketed Maalaea Harbor early Thursday morning, hoping to inform sightseers that the tour boats they were boarding dump their sewage at sea.

Organizer Dennis Fitzpatrick said the group received a variety of responses to the picketing effort, including positive comments from tourists and some jeers from boat workers.

He has said the group felt it needed to make a "grass-roots" effort to raise awareness because they hadn't been able to get their message to state officials after years of trying.

Even though a pump station will be built, Fitzpatrick and other picketers said they wanted tour boats to stop dumping and hire a pumper truck to remove their sewage in the meantime.

Young said Friday he agreed dumping was probably not good for the environment.

"I'm not the scientist, but I think a common person would view that having wastewater dumped in the ocean is going to have some effect," he said.

Tour boats are required to have marine toilets, which liquefy and disinfect sewage. Under federal law, the treated wastewater can legally be dumped in the ocean more than 3 miles from shore. State laws would not apply outside of state waters, which are all areas of the ocean more than 3 miles from shore.

Roland Asakura, environmental health specialist with the state's Clean Water Branch, said it is very hard to investigate complaints of tour boats dumping too close to shore.

He said the theory behind the federal law was that any treated sewage dumped 3 miles out would be so diluted it would be undetectable if it drifted to land.

Asakura said regular testing of beaches along Kihei show that the water is clean.

“The water’s OK,” he said. “There’s no indication of any fecal contamination there.”

Sometimes people report seeing feces on the beach, but it’s usually turtle feces, he added.

Young said his department hoped to get \$10 million last year for the Maalaea pump station and other improvements to small boat harbors around the state.

But while the Legislature approved the funding, it was not in a form that could be used by DLNR, Young said.

He asked for a general obligation bond, which would be paid off by DLNR but would use the State of Hawaii’s credit rating and larger bond package for better interest rates and quicker sale.

Instead, legislators approved a revenue bond, which would be issued by DLNR’s Boating Division itself, resulting in much higher interest rates and more difficult sale.

“We were not able to move forward with that,” Young said.

He said he would go back to the Legislature this year to ask for the funds again, but there’s also a strong possibility federal funds will be available for the pump-out station and other small boat harbor improvements.

He also said working with private contractors for a mobile pumping system was an alternative.

“I know the boaters are as concerned as everyone else, and I hope we can move toward working on a cooperative solution,” he said.

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