

TO: County of Maui, General Plan Committee
RE: Public Testimony opposed to including proposed Olowalu Town as part of West Maui Urban Designation

Dear General Plan Committee,

Coral reefs form the foundation of Hawaiian culture and livelihood, and represent the intimate connection that exists between the people of Hawai'i and our marine resources. Owing to this, and backed by an extensive understanding of the impacts that coastal development has on near shore reef systems, Pacific Whale Foundation and its members urge you to *oppose* any resolution that would include Olowalu Town as part of the West Maui Urban Designation.

Thanks to decades of research, our knowledge and understanding of the importance of reef systems has expanded exponentially. Yet time and time again, spiting science, culture and common sense, we opt in favor of human whims. Years of concessions has thus transformed Maui's coastal areas from their native beauty into unrecognizable stretches of polluted water and concrete-laden shores.

Elsewhere on our island, development has already had its way, evident from the degradation of the once thriving coral communities found in Ma'alaea and Honolua Bays. Today these two areas are mere remnants of once complex ecological systems, each now covered by less than 10% of live coral. While the Hawai'i Division of Aquatic Resources admits that causes of coral reef decline around Maui are varied, there are "strong indications that human impacts have been very important [in reef degradation]"¹. Coastal development (such as that at Ma'alaea) serves to destroy the coastline's inherent ability to retain soil and other particles. Once these natural upstream buffers are destroyed, the downstream reef systems are subject to sediment run-off and deposition – a process commonly known as sedimentation. Sedimentation can significantly impact coral health by blocking light and inhibiting photosynthesis, directly smothering and abrading coral and triggering increases in macro algae – all processes that characterize reefs not only in Ma'alaea Bay, but throughout areas along Maui's coastline where large-scale development is present.

The 2004 *Status of Coral Reefs of the World* reported that sediment run-off is **the** major stressor to reefs in Hawai'i, while the US Commission on Ocean Policy noted that the delivery of sediment and pollutants to reefs have increased globally as a response to human-induced changes to watersheds. Despite these obvious environmental impacts, the Olowalu Town plan eloquently describes how it will "[respect] the natural resources", and yet ironically remains intent on exploiting a largely undeveloped `ahupua`a. If we are truly committed to "respecting natural resources", then we should allow the Olowalu watershed to continue to do what it has been able to do naturally for hundreds of years – support a healthy reef system and a sustainable environment.

Olowalu is an ecological gem, an extensive aggregate coral reef that spans over 450 acres and supports a diversity of rare and precious sea life. If the Olowalu Town development is allowed to continue, if *you*, the General Plan Committee, vote to include the area as part of the West Maui Urban Designation, then, most simply, we will lose this reef.

¹Hawai'i Division of Aquatic Resources. 2010. *Status of Maui's Coral Reefs*.

<http://hawaii.gov/dlnr/dar/pubs/MauiReefDeclines.pdf>

Development of the Olowalu `ahupua`a is unwarranted and unnecessary, and instead of alleviating expansion needs, will merely serve to augment overcrowding issues. Six hundred plus acres of land wedged between mauka and makai is no place for a large-scale development such as Olowalu Town. Water quality, sedimentation and erosion, beach access, and traffic concerns aside, what is really at stake is the destruction of a precious coral reef and the community, both on land and in the sea, that it supports. We ask you not to take away our reef, our fishing areas, our surfing spots, our family gathering places. We all value the simplicity of life on our island, a value that is severely undermined by developments such the one proposed at Olowalu. We at Pacific Whale Foundation, both as an organization and as individuals, thus urge you take a hard look at the Olowalu Town proposal, and while doing so, to consider the *long term environmental, social and cultural impacts* that a development of this size and magnitude would entail. We've made mistakes in the past, and are paying for them today. But we still have a chance with Olowalu - please do not make it another mistake.

Sincerely,

Lauren Campbell, Masters of Environmental Science and Management
Conservation Manager
Pacific Whale Foundation

¹Hawai'i Division of Aquatic Resources. 2010. *Status of Maui's Coral Reefs*.
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