

## RESTORING OUR LIVING WEALTH:

# A New Waterkeeper Project Will Restore Native Pearl Oysters to Clean Nearshore Waters

The Waikiki Aquarium is partnering with O'ahu Waterkeeper and the Pacific Aquaculture and Coastal Resources Center ("PACRC") at UH Hilo to deploy cages of native oysters to improve water quality and clarity. The project will restore oyster populations at selected O'ahu locations, including Marine Corps Base Hawai'i, Kāne'ohe Bay.

This project has deep cultural and historical significance. "It is an oyster dream come true," commented Rhiannon Tereari'i Chandler-'lao, Executive Director of the statewide Waterkeeper organization Waiwai Ola Waterkeepers Hawaiian Islands. Native shellfish species were once abundant as expressed through Native Hawaiian chants, songs, and legends. The new project involves the restoration of three species of native shellfish: *Dendostrea sandvicensis* (Hawaiian Oyster) and *Pinctada margaritifera* (Black-lip Pearl Oyster) and *Pinctada radiata* (Rayed Pearl Oyster).

Filter-feeding oysters can improve water quality by removing harmful pollutants. Oysters also remove carbon from the water and use it to build their shells, underscoring their importance in our changing climate and marine environment. The restoration projects will begin in late 2018 with support from private donors including Douglas Emmett, the Chee Family Foundation and the Sangham Foundation.

In conjunction with the native oyster restoration projects, Waterkeepers will engage the community in watershed education to reduce the flow of pollutants towards the nearshore waters. "We want children to be able to visit the oysters and learn about environmental issues such as stormwater, wastewater, water quality and fishing safety," added Chandler-'lao.

"With technical support from the Waikiki Aquarium, species native to O'ahu will be selected and bred at PACRC for this restoration," stated Dr. Maria Haws, the Director of PACRC. "We are developing hatchery production methods for native shellfish species, in part because many local species have become rare and may possibly require protection. For example, the Black-lip Pearl Oyster is already a protected species under State law." Waikiki Aquarium's critical role is to ensure the health of oysters collected from O'ahu waters by providing quarantine facilities before oysters are sent to Hilo for spawning and cultivation.

The oyster restoration in Hawai'i is the first project of the new environmental nonprofit organization O'ahu Waterkeeper, a member of Waterkeeper Alliance. The project is modeled after several successful partnerships with Waterkeeper organizations on the East Coast involving the restoration of native oysters to improve water quality, including the Billion Oyster Project in New York Harbor. Under the direction of Board President Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Waterkeeper Alliance is a global movement to protect water resources, currently uniting more than 340 Waterkeeper Organizations and Affiliates throughout over 40 countries.

For more information about Waterkeeper activities in Hawai'i, please visit [www.waterkeepershi.org](http://www.waterkeepershi.org) or come speak with them at the 5th Annual Hawai'i Shorts International Film Festival on Saturday, August 21. We will be at the Waikiki Aquarium sharing updates and informations about their projects and much more.



Photo: NOAA



Rhiannon Tereari'i  
Chandler-'lao and RFK, Jr.  
Photo: John L. Wathen