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80  
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## HOME

### News

[e-Edition](#)  
[Local News](#)  
[Local Features](#)  
[Obituaries](#)  
[Archives](#)  
[Photo Galleries](#)  
[Volcano Update](#)  
[Special Reports](#)

### Sports

[Local Sports](#)  
[Big Fish List](#)

### Opinion

[Letters - Your Voice](#)  
[Editorial](#)  
[Columns](#)  
[Forums](#)  
[Submit Letter to the Editor](#)

### Classifieds

[Submit your Ad](#)  
[Announcements](#)  
[Automobiles](#)  
[Employment](#)  
[Instructions](#)  
[Miscellaneous](#)  
[Real Estate](#)  
[Rentals](#)  
[Services](#)  
[Govt Notices](#)

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### Falling through the cracks

Residents speak out on small boat harbor repairs

by Carolyn Lucas  
*West Hawaii Today*  
[clucas@westhawaiiitoday.com](mailto:clucas@westhawaiiitoday.com)

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Interisland shipping by Matson and Young Brothers has increased throughout the years at Kawaihae Harbor. The Hawaii Superferry is still planning to launch its vessels to Hawaii Island in early 2009. With more operations, the state government is under intense pressure to expand docking infrastructure.

This has aroused strong opposition from local fishermen and ocean recreation users, who believe the state should first fix what is already broken before building or developing additional facilities for private commercial businesses.

West Hawaii residents repeatedly told Ed Underwood, administrator of the state Division of Boating and Ocean Recreation, that the North Kawaihae Small Boat Harbor is in desperate need of repairs, parking and better access. More than 30 people attended the informational meeting Sunday afternoon at the Waimea Senior Citizens Center.

For months, several residents claimed the Kawaihae boat ramp has been out of operation because it clogs up with sand and debris after high surf and storms. This frequently forces numerous small boat operators to forfeit their excursions or compete for the limited space at the Puako boat ramp, which has inadequate parking and bathroom facilities.



A close-up of the cracks on the boat ramp on the north end of Kawaihae Harbor. The small boat area suffered damage from the Oct. 15 earthquakes. - Baron Sekiya | West Hawaii Today

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To solve the problem, Underwood said the state plans to develop a ramp and harbor at the 7.75-acre south basin, where no facilities currently exist. M&E Pacific was hired by the state to create the project's design, expected to be completed this year. Construction is estimated to begin May 2008 and end April 2009.

State Rep. Cindy Evans said there is \$2.7 million secured to build a small boat harbor on the south basin.

Until then, Underwood has asked his staff at the Hawaii Island district office to renew a maintenance-dredging permit before it expires in two months and start getting bids to do the work. He claimed bids were coming in high because of the current building environment on Hawaii Island.

When residents began to grumble about the "ineffectiveness" of certain DOBOR officials, Underwood announced Nancy Murphy was no longer the Hawaii district manager and Dan Mersburgh is serving in the position until it is filled. Underwood was "pleased" with Mersburgh, who has done everything he has asked for so far.

Five people complained about how the dredging was done in the past and claimed the contractors had "no common sense." They questioned why the sand is transferred from the boat ramp and piled in areas where waves can return it to the place it was just removed. They suggested the state move the sand near the coral flats or other destinations deemed appropriate by kupuna.

While the small boat harbor at the south basin is being built, Underwood said the state would repair the existing harbor facilities, including the docks and water. If done correctly, seven temporary mooring buoys may also be installed through private and community partnerships.

Following the Oct. 15 earthquakes, DOBOR conducted a structural assessment of the damages at the North Kawaihae Small Boat Harbor. It noted the wharf and loading dock No. 1 to be in fair condition; the revetment seawalls located at the east side along the wharf and the north side along the access road needed to be reconstructed; the boat launching ramp to have a crack in the slab and needs reconstruction; and loading dock No. 2 needs to be repaired. The design and construction costs of these repairs were estimated to be \$1.85 million.

Nevertheless, more funds are needed to do improvements at Kawaihae Harbor, Underwood said.

"I'll never tell you that DOBOR has no money," he said. "The truth is, DOBOR has money, but it is limited."

To increase funds for DOBOR, Evans said two bills were introduced to the legislature last year. Senate Bill 2150 was meant to prohibit the transfer of the state's small boat harbors to any county without legislative approval. Senate Bill 757 tried to transfer DOBOR back to the state Department of Transportation Harbors Division.

Hawaii Superferry officials were criticized for not contributing to the improvements or betterment of Kawaihae Harbor and the surrounding areas. Underwood could not answer questions regarding the access road and impact of the Superferry, saying it was DOT's jurisdiction.

Besides repairs, residents suggested Underwood create recreational management plans for places like North Kawaihae Small Boat Harbor and Kealakekua Bay, revisit the plans for a marine center at Puako,