

The path to manta ray protection in the state of hawaii

Keller Laros

Manta Pacific Research Foundation, USA

Kona, Hawaii is one of the best places in the world to observe manta rays in the wild. Manta Pacific Research Foundation (MPRF) has been keeping track of the Kona rays since 1991 and worked toward manta ray protection in the State of Hawaii. With unrelenting commitment from 2003 to 2009, MPRF paved the way to manta protection in the State of Hawaii by providing testimony in writing and in-person during committee sessions, submitting 5600 signatures in support of manta protection in the State, and presenting hand-drawn illustrations and written testimony from school children. With additional scientific data and support from manta researchers from University of Hawaii, lawmakers were convinced that a proactive approach to protect manta rays was crucial. On June 5, 2009, Act 092(09) was signed by the Governor of Hawaii, thereby protecting manta rays from being killed or captured in the State of Hawaii without obtaining proper permits. The lessons learned while obtaining manta protection may be valuable to people in areas that are transitioning from manta fisheries to manta tourism where additional local laws may aid in manta conservation measures.

Biography

Keller Laros, Founder of Manta Pacific Research Foundation, has been a member of the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) since 1985 and has logged over 10,400 scuba dives, most of them with manta rays. Beginning in 1991 he has been identifying and cataloging Kona's manta rays. Co-author of the PADI Manta Ray Diver course, he has been teaching divers about manta rays since 1996. Keller led the effort to gain legal protection for mantas in Hawaii.

keller@mantapacific.org