

## United States Senate

May 8, 2026

The Hon. Neil Jacobs, PhD  
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere  
Administrator, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Under Secretary Jacobs:

Hawai'i is home to a number of endangered species, including the Hawaiian monk seal that is endemic to the Hawaiian Islands. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has played a critical role in the recovery of the population of monk seals, from conservation of their habitat to significant outreach, education, and volunteer coordination to minimize human disturbance. Residents of Hawai'i respect monk seals and the waters and beaches we share, but following an attack on a monk seal on a Maui beach this week, I am concerned that visitors also need to be properly educated.

On Wednesday, May 6, state and Maui County law enforcement officers responded after someone was caught on video throwing a large rock at a monk seal. There was immediate and strong public outcry. Law enforcement officers quickly detained the alleged suspect and are gathering evidence in preparation for turning the matter over to NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement. I applaud Maui residents and local law enforcement for their swift action. NOAA support for monk seal education, outreach, management, and science in Hawai'i helped enable this strong response. Even more impressively, these efforts have added up to one of the most extraordinary recoveries of a marine mammal species in the United States: from roughly 1100 to 1600 individuals over 15 years.

This alarming incident shows that we need to do more to educate the 10 million visitors who we welcome to Hawai'i each year--including continuing to ensure NOAA Fisheries, its Office of Law Enforcement, and the agency as a whole have the capacity and resources necessary to recover endangered species like the Hawaiian monk seal, conserve their habitats, and enforce their federal protections. Since coming to the Senate, I have championed annual funding of roughly \$4.5 million for monk seal science and management. I request that NOAA provide answers to the following questions by May 29, 2026.

1. What steps has NOAA taken in recent years to strengthen monk seal education and outreach?
  - a. How has that contributed to monk seal recovery?
  - b. What are the most significant remaining threats to monk seal recovery?

2. What relevant activities is NOAA undertaking in Fiscal Year 2026, especially collaborations between NOAA managers and scientists together with their state and county counterparts?
3. How can we better facilitate education for visitors to Hawai'i?

I appreciate NOAA's continued partnership with Hawai'i state and local officials and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



BRIAN SCHATZ  
U.S. Senator