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Posted June 20, 2014 - 1:01am

## Groups partner to combat Hawaii aquarium fish collection



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Michael Putnam interview after Round 2

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West Hawaii Today

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with a national one to provide more education about the impact of aquarium fish collection on the state's reefs.

ently gave about \$32,000 to the Humane Society of the United States, is of the same amount, to pay for a campaign on Hawaii Island, said Robert Wintner, owner of Snorkel Bob's and foundation creator.

g of wildlife in the pet trade," Wintner said. "Hawaii has an unfortunate history of this, converting (things that should be held in the) public trust to money."

Wintner has been an outspoken advocate for banning the aquarium fish trade entirely in Hawaii.

Humane Society International Executive Director Teresa Telecky said she hopes the campaign will "reduce or even eliminate" the aquarium fish trade. She called the trade "extremely cruel," because it causes the deaths of hundreds of thousands of animals annually.

"After awareness comes changes in policies," she said. "The counties are taking the action to protect wildlife and the coral reefs. I think the ball is in the Hawaii County Council's court."

The issue has sometimes been framed as outsiders working against Native Hawaiians who want to keep the trade in place, Telecky said, but that doesn't match with her experience, that shows some Hawaiian organizations and people who have lived in Hawaii for generations also oppose aquarium fish collecting.

She also wanted to make clear the point of the upcoming campaign is about the aquarium fish trade.

"The campaign has nothing to do with people fishing for human consumption," Telecky said. "It has to do with people going to a reef, for free, and collecting animals that belong to all the people of Hawaii."

The Humane Society already has a campaigner in place, Telecky said.

In addition to providing half of the funding for the Humane Society's campaign, the Snorkel Bob Foundation also temporarily installed a television in the West Hawaii Civic Center's County Council office. The television is equipped with an UNTanked system, which plays high-definition video footage of a Hawaii reef.

Konawaena High School graduate Shawn Verne founded UNTanked, which is owned by technology company CityHost411. UNTanked is based in Florida, where Verne lived for about two decades. He came up with the idea for the company after moving his family back to the Big Island and seeing a decline in the reefs compared to what he saw there when he was growing up in the 1970s and 1980s.

"When I first moved back, I was shocked by the reefs," Verne said.

So he took his technological background and came up with a way to film reefs and make those films available for businesses to display on televisions, instead of actual saltwater aquariums.

"We try to capture the reef at its best without any human interaction," Verne said, noting that his crews set up the cameras and then leave the area. "It's just like living art."

The system at the civic center has about 90 minutes of footage, which was filmed off Hawaii Island. A system at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration office on Oahu has about three hours, Verne said.

Wintner praised the videos.

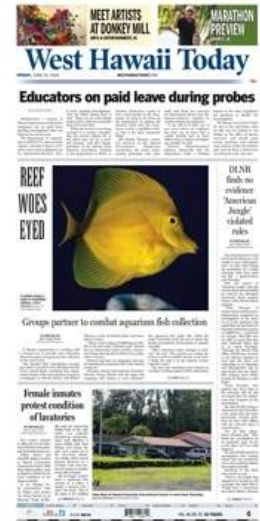
"It shows what abundance looks like," Wintner said, noting many Hawaiian chants talk about the concept of abundance. "Abundance is the opposite of sustainable. It's our objective, to return to abundance."

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- rickokona

an hour ago

Reef ecology is extremely complex and they are already under tremendous stress from ocean warming and acidification. These things we locals can do very little. But, we can stop those who use underwater vacuums to take fish from the reef. The value of the reefs to the Hawaiian economy is estimated at \$30 B per year. Our interests are best served by keeping the fish on the reef. The fish collection must stop and before we find doing so is the straw the breaks the camels back. Malama pono

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- Mike Rostron

3 hours ago

Hawaii is extremely fortunate to have an advocate like Robert Wintner. It is certainly in the state's interest to stop all aquarium fish collection. As with most things, follow the money to see who benefits from the aquarium fish trade. A handful of people who decimate the reef fish population for their own profit. The citizens should take matters into their own hands if the state does not outlaw reef fish collection very soon. We also applaud Sea Shepherd's role in helping to educate people about the negative effects of aquarium fish collecting on the fragile reefs of Hawaii and elsewhere.

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