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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

January 23, 2008

**Launching a yearlong celebration of Hawai'i's coral reefs**

Various government agencies, nonprofit organizations and community groups have come together to launch the International Year of the Reef in Hawai'i on Friday, Jan. 25 at the State Capitol.

The event, which runs from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., will officially launch this global campaign in partnership with the state Department of Land and Natural Resources, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA), Malama Hawai'i, The Nature Conservancy and the Coral Reef Outreach Network.

The mission of the campaign is to raise awareness about the value and importance of coral reefs and threats to their sustainability, and to motivate people to take action to protect them.

The kick-off event will feature educational booths and displays about threats to Hawai'i's coral reefs and actions being taken to protect this valuable natural resource. Nainoa Thompson, navigator and executive director of the Polynesian Voyaging Society, will speak about the health and importance of Hawai'i's oceans.

Hawai'i's campaign will include various events, educational activities, service projects and workshops throughout the year and across the state.

Coral reef ecosystems provide food, shoreline protection, white sandy beaches, underwater paradises and surf breaks. The reefs in Hawai'i support more than 7,000 species of which one quarter are found nowhere else in the world.

More than 80 percent of all visitors to Hawaii participate in ocean recreation activities, which depend on healthy coral reef ecosystems and contribute to a diversified local economy by generating an estimated \$700 million in gross revenues.

Like elsewhere in the world, coral reefs in the Islands are experiencing a decline in populations of many species of reef fish, corals, invertebrates and marine algae. In addition, these ecosystems are suffering from the impacts of land-based pollution, irresponsible fishing, the proliferation of non-native species, coral disease and bleaching worsened by rising sea temperatures, high recreational use and the interruption of stream water flow.

For more information about Hawaii's coral reefs, their unique ecosystems, their importance to the state and its economy, their threats and what people can do to help protect this important natural resource, visit [www.iyor-hawaii.org](http://www.iyor-hawaii.org).

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