

# Money Matters

## Chamber opposes changing rules of game for Superferry

### THE CHAMBER VIEW

by Pamela Tumpap



As previously announced in The Maui News, two bills were introduced in the Legislature this legislative ses-

sion, House Bill 702 (HB702) and Senate Bill 1269 (SB1269), to halt the Hawaii Superferry. Basically, these bills seek to: change the law regarding environmental assessments for harbor improvements using public money; clarify that traffic congestion is to be considered in the environmental impact statement (EIS) process; require an EIS for the Hawaii Superferry; and have work cease and the Superferry's operations delayed until the EIS is completed and accepted.

The Maui Chamber of Commerce is opposing these bills due to their impact on the Hawaii Superferry. Major private and state investments have been made to bring the Hawaii Superferry to our islands to provide transportation alternatives. It's unreasonable and unjust to change the rules in the 11th hour, just as the Hawaii Superferry is about to commence operations.

The Maui Chamber of Commerce supports the Hawaii Superferry. The Hawaii Superferry provides an alternative means of interisland transportation that will benefit the residents and businesses of Maui and will provide small businesses, including the agriculture community, with

an alternate method of shipping via enclosed vehicles. While there are some concerns, including the impact on infrastructure, the on-loading and offloading of vehicles and the time it will take, the impact on traffic, the inspection process, protection against alien species, etc., we believe the Superferry management must and will address these concerns.

However, the Maui Chamber of Commerce does support an EIS for Kahului Harbor. The good news is that our community will receive an EIS for Kahului Harbor in the harbor's master plan and master planning efforts are already under way. So why are we singling out one particular company? Imposing an EIS now only on the Hawaii Superferry project unfairly applies requirements to one entity that has operated within the law and made substantial investments in vessels, people and other assets based on legal rulings. These bills send a strong anti-business message — one we hope to change.

Discussed within the bills are concerns over traffic and environmental impacts — concerns the chamber understands and mentions in its position statement above. Yet, other lines of business at our harbor and harbors around the state also have traffic and environmental impacts, and these businesses are not included in the bills. Regulations should be fairly and uniformly applied.

Further, the U.S. Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration determined, through a categorical exclusion, that an environmental review was not needed for a federal loan guaran-

tee. No ferry operations under the Maritime Administration have been required to obtain such. The Hawaii Department of Transportation, Harbors Division, in consultation with the state's Office of Environmental Quality Control, also determined that an environmental review was not required. These determinations were confirmed by both federal and state courts.

By requiring Hawaii Superferry to cease its operation just as it enters a final phase to begin service would endanger the entire project and be a major setback for Hawaii. The first vessel is beginning sea trials and is scheduled to arrive in Hawaii in May and begin service in July. The state's barges and ramps have been constructed and have arrived in Honolulu Harbor waiting to be installed at each port. Staff required to operate the business is being hired. Changing the rules now is unacceptable.

While Kahului Harbor requires significant master planning to accommodate both current and future uses, we don't believe stopping the Hawaii Superferry is the right answer. We are, therefore, opposing HB702 and SB1269.

We urge the community to come out in support of the Hawaii Superferry and to get involved with the master planning of Kahului Harbor. Let's work together to create a harbor master plan that addresses our concerns and expands resources, transportation alternatives and future economic options.

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