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## Latest oceans study necessitates action

If any state should take close and careful notice of a new national report on ocean policy out last week, it should be Hawai'i.

That's doubly true because this latest report is the second of its kind in less than a year urging similar radical reforms.

The ocean is, quite literally, our life blood. It entertains us, it feeds us, it helps us maintain our wonderful weather and, of course, it is a core attraction for the millions of visitors who support our economy.

Most problems identified by the comprehensive new 450-page report from the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy are those pointed out by the Pew Oceans Commission last June — even though many of the Pew commissioners were drawn from conservation organizations, and many of the U.S. commissioners worked in the oil, shipping and banking industries.

Interestingly, the U.S. commission's recommendations tend toward a beefing up of bureaucratic controls, while the Pew recommendations seek greater reliance on science. We'd suggest the seriousness of the assessments by both commissions, more than the specific recommendations, is what's critical.

Although the White House has shown little

enthusiasm for environmental activism, especially with a cost estimated at \$3 billion, one might hope the U.S. commission's report will have strong influence with President Bush, since he appointed its 16 members.

All of the commissioners agree that "the oceans are in trouble," said commission Chairman James Watkins, a retired admiral. "We know if we don't get moving now, in 10 years we may not be able to recover."

The report details seafood contaminated with bacteria and chemicals such as mercury and dioxins; urban runoff laden with oil, trash and human waste; farm runoff that causes blooms of algae that suffocate all life and create oceanic "dead zones"; and rising sea temperatures that are killing coral reefs and spreading water-borne viruses.

Members of Congress began working on an ocean bill last year, in response to the Pew report. Ocean advocates in Congress say they will need Bush's backing to pass such legislation. The White House said it won't take a position on the new report, now in its draft form, until it is completed in the next few months.

Watkins said we must act now to save our oceans before it's too late. There's very little room remaining for disagreement.