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Vol. 12, Issue 95 - Thursday, April 5, 2007

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Gov and mayor talk stink over sewage plant upgrade order

By Crystal Kua
ckua@starbulletin.com

Mayor Mufi Hannemann and Gov. Linda Lingle continued the verbal war yesterday over the city's substandard waste-water treatment plant in Honouliuli.

Hannemann said Lingle's statement that the city is dumping "untreated sewage" into the ocean from the plant is "irresponsible." He added that it could be potentially damaging to Hawaii's tourism industry.

"If I were the Virgin Islands, if I were a competing visitor destination, I would have taken her comments and played it all over the world and said, 'Honolulu is dumping raw sewage into the ocean,'" the mayor told members of two state House committees yesterday.

Lingle told a reporter, "That's a ridiculous statement. What's going to damage (tourism) is if people know that we're in violation of the Clean Water Act, and we continue to do it knowing that we're in violation."

The mayor endorsed House Resolution 130, which backs the city's efforts to seek a universal settlement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency over its sewage treatment plants and collection systems. He spoke before the committees on Energy and Environmental Protection, and Water, Land, Ocean Resources and Hawaiian Affairs -- which later passed the resolution.

Last week, the EPA announced that it had tentatively decided not to give the city an exemption to the federal Clean Water Act for the Honouliuli Wastewater Treatment Plant. The EPA's tentative decision could mean \$400 million in mandated upgrades at the plant for a higher level of sewage treatment before discharge into the ocean.

Hannemann said the EPA appears ready to require the same for the Sand Island Wastewater Treatment Plant, a mandate that could mean \$800 million in improvements.

The Honouliuli plant uses primary treatment of sewage to screen out large floating objects, remove grit and use tanks to settle out solid materials.

The EPA wants the city to apply secondary treatment, using bacteria to consume a large portion of the organic matter in the sewage.

Last week, in response to reporters' questions about the EPA decision, Lingle was quoted saying, "We support the EPA decision.

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Yes No





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We don't think the city should be dumping untreated sewage into the ocean."

Hannemann said after yesterday's hearing that the governor's statements are "untrue" and should have never been made "without a benefit of a briefing. We're not dumping raw sewage ... and she's out of step and out of touch with our congressional delegation," which supports the city's efforts to settle.

Answering a reporter's question, Lingle said the state Department of Health is the enforcement arm for regulating cleanliness of the waters surrounding the islands.

"The city has to comply with the Clean Water Act. If they don't meet the requirements now, they are in fact polluting the ocean, and they need to come into compliance," Lingle said.

"I think it's important to note that when you're a mayor ... at some point you just have to take responsibility."

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