

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 27, 2025

The Honorable John Phelan
Office of the Secretary of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon, Room 4D652
Washington, DC 20350

Secretary Phelan,

We write with our concerns about the Navy's proposal to expand the usage of the island of Ka'ula for increased inert bombing and gunfire training by the Navy, Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps. In Hawai'i, there is a significant level of mistrust with the Department of Defense as a whole, and the Navy in particular. As the Navy has now determined it would like to double the inert bombing and gunfire training it currently carries out on one of our smaller and uninhabited islands, we write to urge the Navy to provide more information about the impacts to Ka'ula to satisfy the concerns from Kaua'i residents and the state writ large. This additional due diligence by Navy should include a national security justification for this expansion and explain to the public how this training is reasonable given the impacts to Ka'ula and surrounding community. The onus is on the Navy to demonstrate this need with proper analysis. To that end, we believe the Navy must conduct a comprehensive environmental impact statement (EIS) and a study to demonstrate the national security need to retain training at Ka'ula.

Too many pressing questions concerning the use of Ka'ula remain unanswered. As part of a comprehensive EIS, the Navy must assure the public that it has an effective plan and will allocate resources to environmental remediation on Ka'ula. This will also allow the public to fully understand the impacts of this increased bombing on Ka'ula's environment. In parallel to conducting a comprehensive EIS, we request that Navy also submit a study to Congress clearly outlining the pressing national security requirements for training at Ka'ula. Both of these efforts are necessary to provide sufficient information to the public about ongoing and proposed expanded training at Ka'ula.

Doubling the amount of training at Ka'ula is a significant step that warrants more information on the environmental impacts to the island. The State's seabird sanctuary on Ka'ula is home to thousands of seabirds, and the island's sea cliffs are a resting place for endangered species like monk seals. Despite these known populations of wildlife, the draft environmental assessment does not contain sufficient analysis that impacts on wildlife would be "less than significant." The public deserves a clear, comprehensive, and evidence-based EIS to demonstrate that the Navy has done its due diligence on the environmental impacts of these trainings.

Ka'ula is also surrounded by prime fishing waters that, should training surge from 12 to 31 times per year, would further limit Kaua'i fishermen's access. Kaua'i fishermen have a right to be able to access the waters around Ka'ula on a reasonable basis. The ongoing inert bombing activity

limits fishing, which would only become more difficult with the Navy's proposed increase in training.

As a part of the military's study and investigation into why access to Ka'ula has a national security requirement that outweighs potential impacts to Ka'ula's environment, we request that the following questions be addressed:

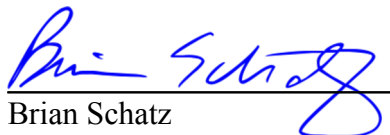
1. While any training can be justified as necessary to national security, how would a reduction or termination of access to Ka'ula impact readiness in units operating in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) area of responsibility (AOR)?
2. Why has the Navy not already built in more redundancies to address any readiness issues due to a lack of availability of training ranges?
3. What is a tangible impact to readiness lost if Ka'ula is not available for training? What specific impacts will the services experience to units and personnel who are impacted by this loss of access?
4. How has the Navy determined that there is an irreplaceable need for access to Ka'ula that cannot be fulfilled by an alternative site?

Additionally, we request a separate response to the below questions no later than June 16th, 2025:

1. Does the Navy plan to program specific environmental remediation funding, including to address existing and future ordinance clean up?
2. How does the Navy plan to protect regular and reliable access to Ka'ula's waters with the proposed substantial increase in trainings? What assurances can the Navy provide to the Kaua'i public that disruptions to access would not significantly impede their right to fish?
3. How will the Navy effectively plan for increased environmental impacts to the southern end of Ka'ula?
4. While Ka'ula provides a unique training opportunity for sustained overwater flights with overland targets that mimic environments in the region, what gaps exist in readiness that demand doubling training activity to be combat-credible? Is there a substantive scheduling and access issue at other training ranges that uniquely warrants this substantive jump in training activity at Ka'ula?

We look forward to your prompt response to this letter and your engagement on this issue.

Sincerely,


Brian Schatz
United States Senator


Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Jim Tokuda
Member of Congress



Ed Case
Member of Congress

CC: Admiral Stephen Koehler, Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet