



# Executive Summary for the 2026–2030 Ports of Entry Monitoring Program Strategic Plan, Hawai‘i Invasive Species Council

FEBRUARY 2026

PREPARED FOR

**Hawai‘i Invasive Species Council**

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**SWCA Environmental Consultants**

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Prepared for

**Hawai‘i Invasive Species Council**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Hawai‘i’s ports of entry represent the most critical, and most vulnerable, front line in the state’s biosecurity system. The movement of people, cargo, and conveyances across air and maritime pathways creates persistent risk for the introduction of invasive species capable of causing irreversible environmental damage, economic loss, and public health impacts. The Hawai‘i Invasive Species Council’s (HISC’s) Ports of Entry Monitoring (PoEM) Program addresses this risk by strengthening early detection and coordinated response at Hawai‘i’s highest-risk gateways (airports and harbors), where invasive species introductions are most likely to occur.

The 2026–2030 Strategic Plan for the Ports of Entry Monitoring Program (2026–2030 Strategic Plan) provides a 5-year roadmap for advancing the PoEM Program from a successful pilot initiative into a more durable, coordinated, and institutionalized component of Hawai‘i’s statewide biosecurity system. The plan builds on more than a decade of experience under the Māmalu Poepoe project and is informed by two foundational evaluations conducted in 2024–2025 by SWCA Environmental Consultants (SWCA): a comprehensive systems review (SWCA 2025a) and an extensive strategic planning summary report (SWCA 2025b), which are based on interviews and engagement with more than 20 federal, state, and county organizations, including university and military representatives.

## **Methodology**

Development of the 2026–2030 Strategic Plan was informed by a structured stakeholder review process led by the HISC and SWCA. In September 2024, HISC and SWCA identified and assessed both long-standing and potential program partners to understand existing levels of participation and determine appropriate outreach strategies. This group included directors or designees from the following:

- Hawai‘i Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (DAB)
- University of Hawai‘i (UH)
- Hawai‘i Department of Health (DOH)
- Hawai‘i Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR), which serves as HISC’s administrative host
- Hawai‘i Department of Transportation (DOT)
- Invasive Species Committees (ISCs)
- Hawai‘i Ant Lab (HAL)
- U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS)
- U.S. Department of Defense (U.S. Army and Navy)

Stakeholders were organized into two tiers to balance depth of engagement with available resources: Tier One agencies representing program leads participated in interviews and written responses, while Tier Two technical experts and partners provided input through written questionnaires. Interview questions were developed based on prior systems reviews and earlier stakeholder interviews (2021), with a deliberate focus on program performance, capacity, governance, and future needs rather than species-specific protocols.

Between October and November 2024, SWCA conducted a total of 32 stakeholder interviews, including five in-person and 27 virtual or hybrid sessions. Interviews focused on identifying operational challenges,

capacity gaps, lessons learned, and strategic priorities for the next 5 years. Where appropriate, group interviews were used to streamline participation across organizations. Plan development was further refined through two facilitated stakeholder workshops held on July 17 and September 27, 2025. These sessions engaged 26 leadership, technical, and frontline operational participants to confirm the program vision, establish guiding principles, refine strategic priorities, and identify implementation considerations. Together, these activities provided the foundation for a collaborative, adaptive, and implementation-focused strategic plan.

## Key Findings Informing the Plan

The SWCA systems review (SWCA 2025a), strategic planning summary report (SWCA 2025b), and two stakeholder input sessions confirmed broad consensus that the PoEM Program fills a critical biosecurity gap not addressed by traditional inspection programs. While existing inspection authorities focus primarily on regulated commodities, PoEM targets high-risk species that easily evade inspections, hitchhike on conveyances, or move through pathways that are difficult to regulate. The program's coordinated monitoring efforts have resulted in multiple high-consequence detections and rapid response actions, including the 2025 detection of coconut rhinoceros beetle (*Oryctes rhinoceros*) at Kona International Airport, demonstrating clear return on investment and real-world value.

At the same time, persistent structural challenges that must be addressed over the next 5 years were identified. These include the following:

- Inconsistent staffing and response capacity across agencies and islands
- Fragmented data systems and limited standardization of reporting
- Unclear leadership roles during detections and response escalation
- Reliance on short-term or constrained funding sources
- The need for greater institutionalization of protocols, training, and interagency commitments

These findings directly shaped the priorities, assumptions, and implementation strategies outlined in the 2026–2030 Strategic Plan.

## Strategic Direction for 2026–2030

The 2026–2030 Strategic Plan advances a risk-based, interagency approach centered on seven priority areas: 1) risk-based prioritization and planning; 2) surveillance expansion and monitoring operations; 3) data management and information systems; 4) response readiness; 5) workforce development; 6) institutionalization of standard operating procedures; and 7) long-term program sustainability. Within each strategic priority area, strategies and actions identify the specific tasks, responsible entities, timelines, and performance metrics needed to achieve program objectives. Together, these elements provide a clear, coherent approach to coordinated implementation, performance tracking, and adaptive management across partner agencies.

Key strategic considerations for the next 5 years include the following:

- Maintaining HISC coordination while preparing for future institutional transitions, recognizing that long-term program sustainability will depend on alignment with agencies that hold statutory biosecurity authority. The PoEM Program is scheduled to move from DLNR to DAB in 2030 (Hawai'i State Legislature House Bill 427, Relating to Biosecurity [Act 236]).

- Formalizing governance, leadership, and technical roles by re-establishing executive- and technical-level working groups to ensure clear authority, coordination, and accountability. The 2026–2030 Strategic Plan defines stakeholder roles and responsibilities and establishes 1) a Program Working Group inclusive of all stakeholders, 2) a Technical Working Group to support the development of science-based protocols, procedures, and best management practices, and 3) an Advisory Committee to provide sustained leadership and strategic guidance.
- Expanding surveillance strategically, including increased coverage at high-risk harbors and partner-managed facilities, without overextending capacity. While expansion is widely recognized as beneficial, decisions to extend the PoEM Program's monitoring footprint rest with the HISC and the Advisory Committee to ensure existing efforts are not diluted.
- Strengthening data systems and communication protocols to support real-time decision-making, accountability, and performance tracking, including standardized detection thresholds, notification pathways, and reporting practices.
- Building workforce and response capacity, moving away from ad hoc monitoring toward more reliable staffing and preparedness through cross-training, Incident Command System-based response readiness exercises, and annual reviews.
- Pursuing stable funding pathways and documenting program outcomes in ways that resonate with policymakers and funders.

## **Conclusion**

The PoEM Program is entering a pivotal phase. The next 5 years represent an opportunity to solidify gains made under the Māmalu Poepoe project, institutionalize effective practices, and position Hawai'i as a leader in coordinated port-based biosecurity. Success will depend on sustained interagency commitment, adaptive management, and continued investment in early detection as the most cost-effective line of defense against invasive species.

This 2026–2030 Strategic Plan provides the framework to guide that work, ensuring that Hawai'i's ports of entry are not just points of arrival, but active lines of protection for the islands' people, ecosystems, economy, and cultural heritage.

## **REFERENCES**

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