



MCBH PRESS RELEASE

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Marine Corps Completes Environmental Assessment for Home Basing Two New Aircraft

MARINE CORPS BASE HAWAII – The Marine Corps has completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to determine the impacts of home basing two new aircraft here: the KC-130J aircraft and the MQ-9 remotely piloted aircraft. The EA involved a detailed analysis, extensive consultations with the local community and government agencies, and full consideration of public comments. Based on the results of that analysis (details below), the Marine Corps has determined that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required and has subsequently issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). This paves the way for the basing of a KC-130J squadron here; it also modernizes an existing squadron – Marine Unmanned Aerial Squadron 3 (VMU-3) – by replacing its current RQ-21 unmanned aircraft with the MQ-9 aircraft.

The EA began in early 2021, and assessed possible impacts to the environment and the local community ranging from noise and traffic to natural resources and cultural resources. The EA carefully reviewed potential impacts to the environment and local community, and concluded that impacts were less than significant across all resource areas. As part of the assessment, the Marine Corps consulted with the Hawaii State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), Native Hawaiian Organizations (NHO), the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), and other consulting parties. During these engagements, and in studying public comments submitted by the local community, it became clear that community concerns centered largely on potential noise and historic property impacts.

To address concerns regarding the impact of home basing on historic properties, the Marine Corps signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the SHPO and ACHP. This MOA contains a number of measures to mitigate adverse effects to historic resources resulting from the home basing. For example, a new Type 2 hanger will be built to replace Hanger 103 in order to provide a modern facility, capable of meeting the needs of modern aircraft. Despite being new, the design of this hangar will incorporate historic design elements consistent with those found on hangars built here during World War II.

To address public concerns about noise, the Marine Corps conducted an in-depth analysis. The draft EA accounted for future noise from KC-130J and MQ-9 operations and maintenance, as well as existing noise from the MV-22 aircraft already home based here. The analysis concluded that the new aircraft would not expose the surrounding community to a day-night average noise level above 65 decibels (65 dB DNL), which is the federally recognized standard of significance. After receiving the public's comments, and in response to their concerns, the Marine Corps expanded the analysis in the Draft EA by providing additional data on the noise impact on 22 off-base locations. This analysis confirmed that no location would exceed the "significant" noise threshold of 65 dB DNL.

Why KC-130s and MQ-9s?

Home basing the KC-130J squadron here and upgrading VMU-3 with new MQ-9 aircraft improves the Marine Corps' ability to deter conflict, respond to crisis, and maintain stability and peace throughout the Indo-Pacific theater. The KC-130J squadron provides the Marine Corps with increased aerial refueling and transport capabilities in the Pacific, including the ability to rapidly move Hawaii-based Marines throughout the vast region. The MQ-9 provides the Marine Corps with improved situational awareness about the operating environment, which aids decision-making and rapid response to crisis or contingency. The importance of these capabilities to the Marine Corps, the Joint Force, and like-minded allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region cannot be overstated.

Both the KC-130J and the MQ-9 will be assigned to Marine Aircraft Group 24 (MAG-24), which is based at Marine Corps Air Station Kaneohe Bay. MAG-24 is modernizing to meet the challenges and demands inherent to aviation operations throughout the Indo-Pacific. The KC-130J aircraft will belong to a new squadron, VMGR-153, which will begin flight operations with two aircraft in early 2023. VMGR-153's aircraft numbers are expected to increase over the next few years, with a final strength of 15 KC-130J aircraft arriving by fiscal year 2026. Two MQ-9 aircraft are also anticipated to arrive in 2023, replacing the RQ-21 unmanned aircraft that VMU-3 has flown for the past four years. The anticipated final end strength of MQ-9s will be six aircraft by fiscal year 2025. These aircraft will be based in the historic Hangar 102.

The EA, FONSI, all accompanying documents, and additional information can be found at:

<https://www.mcbhawaii.marines.mil/Resources-Services/Pertinent-Information/MQ9-KC130>.

For information concerning the EA and resulting FONSI, contact 1st Lt Mark McDonough, MCBH Communication Strategy and Operations, at: mark.mcdonough@usmc.mil. For more information about

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Connected media: Photos and video b-roll are available at:

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