



PRESIDENT-ELECT NOMINATION FORM

Section 1: Nominee Details:

Name: Dr. Alexander R. Gaos

Date: 21/11/2023 10:14:08

Email address: alexander.gaos@noaa.gov

Professional affiliations:

- NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center – Research Marine Biologist
- International Sea Turtle Society – Member & Travel Grant Committee Chair & Session Chair
- IUCN Marine Turtle Specialist Group – Eastern Pacific Region Co-Chair
- Eastern Pacific Hawksbill Initiative (ICAPO) – Scientific Advisor
- Asia-Pacific Marine Turtle Genetic Working Group – Steering Committee Member
- Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council Pelagic Planning Team - Member
- NOAA's Sea Turtle Climate Vulnerability Assessment initiative – Panel Member

Country of residence: USA

Geographic area of work:

Pacific Ocean, with current emphasis on Oceania and the West Pacific. Formerly focused on research in the East Pacific and still involved in various initiatives in that region.

Section 2: Nominee Response:

How would you describe your work with sea turtles?

My official title is a 'Research Marine Biologist' with the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). In addition to analytical research and publishing manuscripts, my role includes a primary focus on developing relationships, programs, and networks that facilitate sea turtle research and conservation. This typically entails working with people from small coastal communities in countries across the Pacific Ocean, while also coordinating and collaborating with national researchers and government officials.

Which Annual Sea Turtle Symposia, or Annual Workshops have you attended?

I have attended a total of 15 of the Society's international sea turtle symposia to date, including the years: 2004, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2022, 2023. I am planning to attend the 2024 and 2025 symposiums, prior to hopefully hosting the 2026 meeting.

What contributions have you made to past symposia?

- Travel Grant Committee Chair: 2011 to Present
- Co-founded the ISTS Student Committee
- Served in the following roles on multiple occasions:
 - Session Chair
 - Student presentation judge
 - Speed chatting expert (two separate occasions, including the inaugural event)
- Lead author of dozens of oral and poster presentations
- Co-author of >100 oral and poster presentations

I am extremely proud of these efforts and of having supported various Presidents, symposia, and our Society.

What would you like the Nominating Committee, Board of Directors, and membership to know about you as a candidate for President-Elect?

Ultimately, the symposium is about the Society, its members, and the sea turtle community as a whole. We need to remain a strong, well-connected network of individuals and organizations in order to continue leading efforts to understand and recover sea turtle populations around the globe, and the symposium is the vessel that makes that happen. Thus, although I will be honored and excited to highlight research and conservation endeavors in Hawaii and across the Pacific, ultimately it comes down to ensuring a successful symposium that can help our Society continue to develop and strengthen.

Recognizing numerous successful past symposia, many facing their own unique challenges, I am extremely confident my team and I will be able to put on a prosperous meeting that will benefit the Society and its members and help facilitate future meetings. Hawaii presents several distinct cultural and financial opportunities that are prime for picking. Perhaps no place on earth has a more recognizable connection to sea turtles than Hawaii, where these charismatic creatures (locally known as “honu”) have become a poster child for the islands. Honu are also highly revered in traditional Hawaiian culture. Amazingly, the sea turtle symposium has never been held in Hawaii and our initial inquiries lead us to believe we will be able to harness unparalleled support from local businesses and industry. We are excited and motivated to tap into that support and host a highly enjoyable and successful meeting.

Do you plan to host a face-to-face Symposium or an online Symposium?

We plan to hold an in-person meeting, which we feel best facilitates interactions, networking, and collaboration development.

Briefly describe the supporting staff and organizations you have available to assist you

From an organizational standpoint, as the meeting’s President I will leverage support from local collaborators and staff in Hawaii and the Pacific Islands Region, including numerous NOAA staff, other federal, state and territory employees, University faculty and students (e.g., University of Hawaii), and members of several local non-profit organizations. In addition to these local-based partners, I will recruit support staff from the expansive international network of friends and colleagues I have established over the course of my career. In this fashion I expect to engage and involve a wide range of colleagues across the sea turtle community, with emphasis on involving individuals from the Pacific Islands Region.

Although members of this team will be confirmed as we advance, prior to developing this nomination application I assembled a “Conceptualization Committee” (current members listed below) to discuss the idea of hosting the meeting in Hawaii, including opportunities (venues, funding, activities), benefits, and challenges. This team will continue to meet as we develop the symposium staff (there will be overlap between these two groups) to discuss how things are progressing and generate additional ideas.

The Conceptualization Committee currently consists of:

Dr. Summer Martin – NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center
Dr. Shaya Honarvar – University of Hawaii Pacific Cooperative Studies Unit
Dr. Todd Jones – NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center
Jen Homcy – Foundwood
Ingrid Yañez – Eastern Pacific Hawksbill Initiative
Stacy Hargrove – NOAA National Sea Turtle Coordinator
Eldridge Naboa – US Fish and Wildlife Service
Tommy Cutt – Maui Ocean Center Marine Institute
Dr. Camryn Allen – NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center
Shawn Murakawa – NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center
Irene Kelly – NOAA Pacific Islands Regional Office
Dr. Yonat Swimmer – NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center
Dr. John Wang – NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center
Joy Browning – US Fish and Wildlife Service
Dr. Jeffrey Seminoff – NOAA Southwest Fisheries Science Center

Briefly describe the venue you foresee for the symposium and why you would choose this possible venue

We have engaged multiple potential venues and confirmed the feasibility of holding the meeting in Hawaii. There are several options that have the capacity to host a meeting of 1,000+ people and that combine the dual benefit of being close enough to various attractions to make access feasible, while being secluded enough to ensure participants can focus on symposium activities. The venues are close to the ocean, incredible food options, and various touring options, including green turtle basking beaches. The hotels are also within a reasonable distance of airports hosting major international airlines, which will facilitate participant transportation and attendance.

Briefly describe the actions you would take to organize a ‘green’ symposium

The use of environmentally friendly and sustainable products is a major point of emphasis in the State of Hawaii. In alignment with local approaches, we will pursue efforts to minimize all single-use items, including utensils, straws, foam plates, cups, and food containers. We will provide water stations for attendees to facilitate the use of reusable drinking containers. We will encourage reef-safe activities and the use of reef-safe sun block by attendees. We will also minimize the size of the symposium program (previous symposia feedback leads us to believe that a printed program is an essential resource for an organized and enjoyable program) and promote the use of digital media over print for other aspects of the meeting.

How will you ensure diverse representation (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, field of expertise) in your Program Committee, Invited Speakers, and Session Chairs?

Hawaii's geographic location in the center of the Pacific Ocean and past immigration history, has made it an extremely diverse archipelago. The NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center works with partners across the Pacific Ocean, including those located in Oceania (i.e., Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia), the West Pacific Ocean (East and Southeast Asia), and the South and East Pacific Ocean (Pacific Coast of the Americas). Oceania alone represents a highly diverse region consisting of dozens of countries, each hosting dozens of provinces that often have distinct cultures, dialects, and even languages. Essentially all these regions are underserved and hosting the meeting in Hawaii represents an important opportunity to facilitate attendance by local inhabitants and promote equity within our Society.

We are excited to highlight our region's diversity, support attendees from numerous countries across the globe, and involve new people into our Society and the symposium organizing team. We will seek to involve students from several universities (e.g., University of Hawaii, University of Guam, University of the South Pacific) and highlight career paths and connections for underserved students. In addition to our efforts to raise a large pot of funds for Travel Grants, thus promoting participation from numerous countries, we are also reaching out to international government partners in Oceania and other parts of the West Pacific to encourage supporting staff participation and involvement.

We will also be involving multiple Pacific Islander cultural practitioners as part of the organization committee, to ensure we actively highlight local traditions from Hawaii and other countries across the Pacific Islands Region. Placing a focus on the culture, values, and way of life of Pacific Islanders will allow us to shine a spotlight on peoples from a vast ocean region that has previously never been a focus of the international sea

turtle symposium.

Have you confirmed with your employer that you will be able to serve in the capacity as President of the ISTS as the legal representative of the Society and the associated 5-year term of commitment? Further, in your role, have you confirmed that there is no conflict of interest among yourself, your employer, and the ISTS with respect to fundraising and/or receiving funding and in-kind support from government and non-government entities in your host country?

We have confirmed strong support from NOAA leadership and colleagues, both within the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science and across other Science Centers and offices (including the national office) to host the meeting in Hawaii and for my role with the Society over the next several years. Myself, my direct Supervisor, and our Center's Director are all aware of the time and resource commitments needed to host a successful symposium and to serve as President. I have also had preliminary discussions with our financial team regarding options for funding the symposium and how we can garner and allocate potential federal funding support.

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How would domestic and international participants reach your proposed venue?

Hawaii is a primary destination for visitors from around the world and as a result, there are multiple international airports that host major airlines with direct flights from countries around the Pacific Rim. Regarding the entry of foreign nationals to the United States, we will provide links to pages with information on obtaining Visas, as well as

letters of invitation (for those that have completed registration) to support the Visa application processes. Hawaii is made up of several islands, each with its own unique vibe and opportunities, so we will encourage symposium participants to spend several extra days outside of the symposium dates to explore the archipelago and all it has to offer.

Why is convening an ISTS symposium in your region important at this time, and how would regional sea turtle conservation benefit from hosting a symposium?

We have been considering the idea of hosting the symposium in Hawaii for several years. After receiving confirmation of support from our Center's leadership, identified potential funding opportunities, and assessed overall benefits, we feel the timing is right to host the meeting in Hawaii in 2026.

There continues to be a paucity of research and understanding of sea turtles in much of the Central and West Pacific Ocean, especially in Oceania and Southeast Asia. This is due in large part to the geography of the region, which often consists of numerous disparate islands facing unique conservation realities, heightening the logistical and financial challenges of conducting research and conservation. Hosting the meeting in Hawaii will allow us to highlight the abundance of research opportunities and needs in the region.

Climate change is front and center in much of the region, which consists of many low-lying islands that are highly susceptible to impacts such as rising sea levels and increasingly intense storms. Hawaii itself presents a novel case with East Island, a small island that was formerly the primary nesting habitat for Hawaiian green turtles and that was obliterated by a hurricane in 2018. Research to understand impacts to the population and how turtles might react and adapt to the loss of the island is currently underway, while many other exciting and challenging research questions remain to be explored.

In addition to numerous research opportunities such as these, the symposium will also allow us to highlight recent advances in filling existing data gaps as there are a series of research initiatives being led by our team, our partners, and our colleagues across these regions that will be culminating right around the same time as the 2026 meeting dates. The symposium represents an ideal opportunity to share these research findings and maximize visibility.

Why is the ISTS as an organization important to you, professionally and personally? What is your vision for the ISTS over the next 5 to 10 years?

From a professional standpoint, hosting the symposium would represent a major milestone in my career. In addition to the joy it would bring me, it would lend credibility and help bolster my reputation in the regions where I work, thus facilitating my ability to engage leaders and garner support for sea turtle research across the Pacific Ocean. Given this context, hosting the symposium and serving as President is not an opportunity I take lightly. Having the fortune to be a part of more than a dozen previous symposia, I am acutely aware of the many aspects that need to come together for a successful event. I meet these challenges with open eyes and enthusiasm.

Ensuring a successful symposium that leaves the Society in better financial standing (than prior to the meeting) is also something I see as necessary and achievable with a Hawaii meeting. Additionally, the Society continues to make major strides in areas such as increasing international venues/opportunities and providing grant support to worthy projects, and I would like to be part of the effort to continue and expand those opportunities to support diversity and equity.

Please include a 250-word bio

The sea turtle community, including researchers, managers, and community members, have represented my extended family for the past 20 years. The relationships I have and will continue to develop provide true inspiration and motivation for me as a person. They have also led to amazing research endeavors that I will cherish for the rest of my life. Given that context, the idea of orchestrating a meeting that brings all of you to a place as unique and special as Hawaii, would bring me an immense amount of satisfaction and happiness. My personal upbringing is diverse and multi-cultural, as is the history of Hawaii, and we will use this unique venue to highlight research and traditions across the Pacific Islands Region and beyond. I have extensive experience engaging funders and garnering the necessary support to successfully carry out sea turtle initiatives, which I will directly apply to ensure a successful ISTS44 in Hawaii in 2026. Early in my career I developed experience through work with various non-profit organizations in Latin America, which eventually led me to successfully co-found, direct, and acquire financing for an international sea turtle network, which I managed for over a decade. I did so while attaining a Master's degree and subsequently a Doctoral degree. Having worked with NOAA over the past decade, I have continued to develop unique

research initiatives across the Pacific Ocean. I would be humbled and honored at the opportunity to apply my skills to ensure an unforgettable symposium in Hawaii.

Photo of Nominee:

[Photo](#)

Section 3: Declaration

Circle your response to the below statements:

I am a current member of ISTS Yes

I have read and understand the ISTS by-laws and constitution Yes

**I have read and understand the terms of reference for the
ISTS President-Elect:** Yes

**I understand that the Annual Board Retreat is usually in the
3rd week of August:** Yes