



OHA-3

Recognizing the Success of the Konohiki Fishing Rights System and Supporting Community-Driven, Place-Based Management for Hawai‘i’s Nearshore Fisheries

This resolution seeks to support subsistence, kīpuka communities’ efforts to guide harvesting and conservation practices in their nearshore waters, consistent with the principles underlying the highly successful konohiki fishing rights resource management system.

The ahupua‘a-based konohiki fishing rights system ensured sufficient abundance in Hawai‘i’s nearshore waters to sustain a pre-Western contact population of up to a million or more residents. This system allowed hoā‘āina (“tenants”) and konohiki (“landlords”) to directly control harvesting and conservation practices in the coastal waters of their ahupua‘a, based on their intimate knowledge of, connection to, and reliance upon the resources of their place.

After the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom, the Hawai‘i Territorial government’s largely successful effort to abolish the konohiki fishing rights system led to a century of decline in our once abundant nearshore fisheries. The ongoing decline in our nearshore fisheries today may threaten the survival of Hawai‘i’s few remaining subsistence, kīpuka communities, as well as undermine Hawai‘i’s economic, ecological, and recreational interests.

Fortunately, many kīpuka communities are now seeking to work with the state on local marine management initiatives, to protect and perpetuate traditional practices and subsistence lifestyles dependent upon abundant nearshore resources. These communities possess deep and intimate knowledge of their nearshore areas, informed by generations of daily observation and reliance. Their community-driven management proposals, which seek to guide harvesting and conservation practices in their local waters, apply many of the fundamental principles underlying the konohiki fishing rights system, and may have the best chance of successfully restoring and maintaining nearshore fishery resources. The success of these communities’ efforts may also inspire other communities to reconnect and take responsibility for the resources of their place, thereby transforming our nearshore resource management paradigm, and helping to save our ocean environment, our cultural heritage, and a foundation of our islands’ economies and local ways of life.

Accordingly, this resolution describes the success of the traditional konohiki fishing rights system, the consequences of its abolishment, and the potential and wide-ranging benefits of once again adopting community-driven and culturally-grounded marine management proposals. The resolution further urges the Department of Land and Natural Resources to support the appropriate development and implementation of such community-driven fisheries management initiatives, including but not limited to community-based subsistence fishing area (“CBSFA”) proposals.

WHAT WAS THE KONOHIKI FISHING RIGHTS SYSTEM & WHY WAS IT SO SUCCESSFUL?

The konohiki fishing rights system was an ahupua‘a-based resource management approach, reflected in the Hawaiian Kingdom’s earliest written laws, that provided hoā‘āina and konohiki with exclusive rights to harvest from their ahupua‘a’s nearshore waters. The konohiki held the



additional authority to place kapu on or otherwise guide the harvesting activities of hoā'āina, for conservation or other purposes.

While exclusive rights of access are not likely to be reestablished for our nearshore fisheries, modern community-driven and place-based fisheries management initiatives share many of the same underlying principles that informed the konohiki system's success, including:

1. Looking to those with the most intimate knowledge of and connection to an area's resources and ecological features, to establish harvesting and conservation guidelines for the area;
2. Incorporating place-based traditions and customs that preserve cultural and community connections to the nearshore area and its resources; and
3. Fostering a continued sense of kuleana in community members, to actively steward and care for the nearshore resources of their place.

WHY SHOULD WE SUPPORT THIS RESOLUTION?

- Our fisheries need a better management paradigm. Since the effective abolishment of the konohiki fishing rights system, numerous articles, government reports, kūpuna accounts, and even local fishing books have observed a continuous decline in our nearshore fisheries, particularly for the most popularly targeted species. Many subsistence community members and long-time fishers today have voiced the critical need for better fisheries management now, to save our remaining stocks from irreparable collapse.
- We all benefit from abundant fisheries. A thriving nearshore environment is necessary to support a thriving Hawaiian culture, and perpetuate a foundation of our islands' unique heritage. Robust and carefully managed nearshore fisheries are also critical to the social, recreational, and economic interests of our islands, and all Hawai'i residents. Reversing the continued decline in our nearshore fisheries will therefore benefit Native Hawaiians as well as all those who call these islands home.
- Community-driven management worked before, and can work again. The historical success of the konohiki fishing rights system, along with numerous modern case studies on community co-management of public resources, demonstrates that community-driven, place-based management approaches may give us the best chance of successfully saving and restoring our nearshore fisheries.
- Kīpuka communities can lead us back towards community-powered abundance. Overfishing is clearly not the sole cause of depletion in our nearshore waters. However, largely unregulated overfishing clearly has a profound impact that may compound and exacerbate the numerous stressors placed on our ocean environment. Allowing our subsistence, kīpuka communities to inform harvesting and conservation practices in their local waters, based on generations of expertise and daily reliance on their nearshore resources, can reduce the direct impacts and threats of unregulated overfishing on their resources and way of life. Such communities' greater sense of empowerment and kuleana may also facilitate increased engagement with other civic processes, including land use and community planning, that may address additional threats to their coastal environment.