

BLNR supports grassroots conservation

By Hannah Kihalani Springer,
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After decades-long struggles to secure state support of grassroots conservation initiatives, we are at a turning point. The state Board of Land and Natural Resources (BLNR) recently gave us reason to believe our state is on an improved trajectory with regard to supporting local communities' efforts to protect the places they live in. The board greenlighted a few key projects where grassroots leadership has led to measures to husband the gifts of the 'aina for generations to come.

No one knows those places better than the families who have lived there for generations. They treat their natural "ice box" — the ocean — and the 'aina with the respect that is their due as providers of the food that allowed them to survive and thrive.

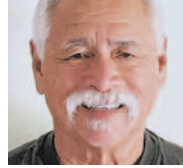
On June 23, Maui's Kipahulu 'Ohana Inc. — like Haena, Moomomi and Milolii before them — received approval to proceed to public hearings, the next critical step toward establishing Community-Based Subsistence Fishing Area rules. Also approved was Hui Maka'ainana o Makana's request to continue managing the reservation system at the Ha'ena State Park on Kauai. On Oahu, Malama Pupukea-Waimea 'ohana got approval to contract with BLNR to conduct the Pupukea Marine Life Conservation District Carrying Capacity Study to ensure "abundance in perpetuity" and respectful use of the tidepools and coves consistent with Native Hawaiian cultural traditions.

A recent flurry of publicity about corporate fishers shed light on the

ISLAND VOICES



Hannah Kihalani Springer, Charlie Young and Kamalei Pico are members of the Lawai'a Pono Hui; this piece reflects the views of many other members of the hui.



failure to understand differences between types of fishing. Quite often those who "speak on behalf" of the fishers are allowed to conflate and overlook these differences. The impression they create is that only corporate fishers matter. A narrative that overlooks the diverse interests in fishing and rights has allowed some to suggest that they speak for all fishers when this is hardly the truth. This often confuses the general public and more recently confused our own policymakers.

For example, a recent article in this paper concerning prospective near-shore fishery rules led with photos of longline vessels. Longliners do not fish the nearshore. This kind of mistake leads to the generalization of fishing that negatively impacts subsistence voices. We understand what corporate fishers do. But do they, the public and the state understand what we subsistence fishers do?

Subsistence fishers are all about

rights: the right to fish for subsistence and to observe practices that preserve a tradition of taking only what is needed to feed our families. Commercial fishing is all about the privilege of taking far more than one needs because there is a profit to be made by selling a large catch. The first approach is tied to Hawaiian cultural tradition. The second is tied to Western capitalism unfettered by social obligations, respect for indigenous peoples, and the need to be good neighbors. Native tradition honors rights holders. The market economy rewards stakeholders.

In discussing the importance of fishing to Hawaii, some tout the number of commercial fishing licenses in the state. That should not be the only measure of value. The Hawaii Agricultural Foundation's question for its July 12 event is: EAT THINK DRINK 22: Fish for the Future: Are we overfishing? It features a keynote speaker from NOAA Fisheries' Office of Communications and panelists from Hawaii's commercial longline fisheries and recreational fishers." Why no subsistence fishers?

We routinely overlook the vital role subsistence fishers play in preserving cultural traditions that have taught us to take no more than we need from the oceans. Culture teaches us to think in terms of the needs of at least seven generations. Capitalism drives us to maximize profit in the short term.

BLNR's recent decisions indicate that the state government can, and will, take the long view. We urge the state to do more to help communities protect the cultural practices that have served us all so well.