

Late

To: Honorable Representative Clift Tsuji, Chair, House Agriculture Committee  
Honorable Representative Ken Ito, Chair, House Water, Land, Ocean Resources and  
Hawaiian Affairs Committee

From: Jim Cain, taro farmer, Waipi'o, Hawai'i  
Jerry Konanui, taro farmer, Puna, Hawai'i  
Paul Reppun, taro farmer, Waiahole, O'ahu  
Penny Levin, taro farmer, Ke'anae, Maui

Relating to Bills:

HB2451 Relating to agriculture - taro farmer education and training program;  
HB2452 Relating to agriculture - agribusiness incubator program; taro farmers;  
HB2453 Relating to taro – appropriation taro farming grant program; and  
HB2454 Relating to public lands – DLNR, taro

Hearing date: Wednesday morning, the 30<sup>th</sup> of January from 8:30am, Conf. Rm 325

Date: 30 January 2008

Aloha Honorable Chairs Tsuji and Ito and Committee Members;

We are taro farmers from the islands of Hawai'i, O'ahu, Kaua'i and Maui and members of 'Onipa'a Nā Hui Kalo. *We are testifying neither in favor, nor against HB2451, 2452, 2453 or 2454 at this time. We are requesting that the Agriculture Committee and the Water, Land and Hawaiian Affairs Committee defer the hearing of these four bills for one to two weeks.*

Last year, there was a growing awareness among state legislators of the many problems impacting taro farmers' survival. During the summer of 2007, many of you visited taro farms across the state and heard about the struggles farmers have in continuing to grow and protect this culturally important and sustainable food crop. We appreciate the response, demonstrated by the number of taro bills before you this year.

In October, 2007, under the direction of SCR206 which called on the Department of Agriculture to develop a non-gmo taro security and purity research program, the DOA convened a gathering of taro farmers, researchers from UH CTAHR and HARC, agriculture extension agents, botanical gardens and representatives from OHA, the Farm Bureau and DOA. While no final agreements were made regarding the direction of non-gmo taro research, all participants agreed that the dialogue was positive and that it needed to continue.

At that meeting; however, a very clear message emerged from farmers. Taro farmers themselves need to be at the table and full partners in decision-making and program development with agencies and institutions. Our undeniable expertise stems from decades and centuries of work in the lo'i.

These four House bills (2451, 22452, 2453, and 2454) have had no input from taro farmers. As currently written, the bills have the potential to be helpful, but they have a greater potential to be wasteful of taxpayers, the state's and taro farmers time and money in the service of politics without real change.

This afternoon (Wednesday, January 30<sup>th</sup> at 1:30pm) the House Chair and Vice-Chair of the Agriculture Committee, representatives from the Hawaiian Caucus, Chair and Vice-Chair of the Senate Agriculture and Hawaiian Affairs Committee, the Chair of the Department of Agriculture, Associate Dean of the UH College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, and representatives of OHA, poi producers and taro farmers have agreed to sit down together and discuss the taro bills before the 2008 legislature in hopes that the bills that come before you are legislation that conserves and coordinates resources, brings new partnerships to the table, and truly serves taro farmers in the highest good.

It is for this reason that we request the hearing of these bills be deferred for one to two weeks.

Mahalo.

Paul Repp  
Chuck Repp  
Jann M. Cui  
Jerry Konanni  
peyhi