

TO: Representative Marcus Oshiro, Chair
House Finance Committee

FROM: Chris Kobayashi

DATE: Thursday, March 27, 2008
(Submitted by email)

LATE

Aloha Chair and Committee members;

I am testifying as an individual and a taro farmer from Kauai in strong support of SB2915 which requests the establishment and funding of a taro security and purity task force. I am also a member of 'Onipa'a Nā Hui Kalo, a statewide organization of taro farmers, as well as a participant of the SCR206 dialogue.

There have been decades of research and decision-making by agencies and institutions regarding taro without taro farmers. We've been considered "cooperators" rather than "collaborators" or "partners." This task force represents the first time that all the agencies and institutions involved in taro research and crop security are willingly at the table with us. We find that to be a refreshing and encouraging change.

The collective message from SCR206 dialogue participants last year was – let this continue, and let it be funded so that taro farmers can afford to participate and real action, based on agreed upon priorities, can occur.

Taro farmers also said; let us be the voice that leads so that research and action will stem from the lo'i and not from the clouds; not out of touch with the realities of taro farmers' lives and conditions.

There are a number of amendments from taro farmers which were to be submitted in the House Agriculture Committee. Because the bill was passed directly to the Finance Committee, these amendments are important to address. In order to ensure that these amendments are complete, I attach those portions of the bill with changes herein (Sections 2, 3 and 8).

Each portion of work outlined in the task force bill is a critical piece of a whole. They will provide all participants in this ongoing dialogue with the needed guidance for non-gmo alternatives to taro issues and actively support priorities set by the task force. The bill will also provide long-overdue support to one of the most important and complete traditional Hawaiian taro cultivar collections in the state (which has gone unfunded for more than two decades); the collective updating of Bulletin 84 (which has gone unfunded since the need was first expressed more than 15 years ago); and to gathering information for task force for decision-making.

Funding is also necessary to provide for someone to coordinate and record the task force's efforts and so that taro farmers can afford to be at the table. It needs to be allocated **IN THIS YEAR** so that the dialogue and positive actions begun in Oct 2007 and described in the taro farmers' SCR206 Report to the Legislature can continue without interruption.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify.

Chris Kobayashi
826-7836

Report Title:

Taro Security and Purity Task Force; Appropriation

Description:

Creating the taro security and purity task force and appropriating funds for that purpose. (SD1)

THE SENATE
TWENTY-FOURTH LEGISLATURE,
2008
STATE OF HAWAII

S.B. NO. 2915
S.D. 1

A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO TARO...

[amendments per taro farmers' recommendations; as underlined]

SECTION 2. There is established the taro security and purity task force. For administrative purposes the taro security and purity task force shall be placed within the ~~department of agriculture.~~ Office of Hawaiian Affairs.

SECTION 3. The taro security and purity task force shall consist of the following members or their representatives (one each):

- (1) The department of agriculture;
- (2) The office of Hawaiian affairs;
- (3) The University of Hawai'i; and
- (4) The Hawai'i Farm Bureau Federation;
- (5) 'Onipa'a Nä Hui Kalo;

The taro security and purity task force shall ...

SECTION 8. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawai'i the sum of \$650,000 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2008-2009 to be allotted as follows:

(1) ~~\$250,000~~ \$375,000 for the convening and implementation of the taro security and purity task force; including the conducting of dialogues and the implementation of task force priorities on all islands; for retaining the minimum of at least one person to facilitate, coordinate, communicate, and record the work of the taro security and purity task force; and for preparing the final report to be submitted to the legislature.

~~(2) \$100,000 for retaining the minimum of at least one person to facilitate, coordinate, communicate, and record the work of the taro security and purity task force;~~

~~(3)~~ (2) \$150,000 for archival and ethnographic research of the history of taro and taro practices in Hawai'i and the traditional Hawaiian cultivars to aid in its revival and to revise Bulletin 84: Taro Varieties in Hawai'i (1939) which is the key reference for taro growers and researchers; and

~~(4)~~ (3) \$125,000 for protection of the Moloka'i taro varieties collection, the oldest and most complete collection and source of taro varieties in Hawai'i, and.

~~(5)~~ \$25,000 for preparing the final report to be submitted to the legislature.

The sum appropriated shall be expended by the ~~department of agriculture~~ Office of Hawaiian Affairs for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 9. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2008.



SB2915, SD 2, RELATING TO TARO
House Committee on Finance

March 27, 2008

2:00 p.m.

Room: 308

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) **SUPPORTS** S.B. 2915, S.D. 2, **with amendments**. The bill would establish the Taro Security and Purity Task Force within the state Department of Agriculture. The task force would be funded with \$650,000 from the state general fund for the 2008-2009 fiscal year. The task force would be responsible for continuing the dialogue on protecting taro among taro farmers, the Native Hawaiian community, scientists and various government agencies.

OHA commends the positive and productive dialogue on the protection of taro that occurred throughout 2007 as a result of Senate Concurrent Resolution 206, Session Laws of Hawaii 2007.

We believe that continued dialogue is needed to revive the taro industry and to ensure that the culturally significant practice of mahi'ai kalo (taro farming) continues to thrive.

OHA requests that an amendment be added to the bill that states that the Taro Security and Purity Task Force be housed within OHA for administrative purposes, on the condition that OHA also receives the state appropriation to oversee the task force and fund its various duties. Taro farmers had originally broached this amendment, and OHA supports this effort as we feel it is our responsibility to help ensure that this important process is successful.

OHA urges the Committee to PASS S.B. 2915, S.D. 2, taking the above considerations into account. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.