

LINDA LINGLE
Governor



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Chairperson, Board of Agriculture

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TESTIMONY OF SANDRA LEE KUNIMOTO
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 17, 2010
10:00 AM
ROOM 329

SENATE BILL NO. 633, SD1, HD1
RELATING TO WATER

Chairperson Carroll and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill No. 633, SD1, HD1 which increases the representation of homestead farmers on the Molokai Irrigation System Waters Users Advisory Board.

SB 633, SD1, HD1 proposes that an additional homestead farmer seat be created, the non-homesteader seat be retained and that each of the four currently named organizations continue to have a representative. Two new definitions have been added, one to define homestead farmer and another to define kupuna homestead farmer. We agree with the added requirements that board members should be active system users and that board members should be engaging in commercial agriculture requiring an active general excise tax license, and we agree with the new definitions.

The 2008 Legislative Auditor's Report on the Molokai Irrigation System asked the department to "consider" adding additional homestead farmer seat(s) and to "Define homestead farmer as it relates to the advisory board..." There was no mention in the audit recommendations of establishing a fixed percentage or number of homestead seats. However, based upon our communications with the Advisory Board members in 2008, the department decided that we would undertake a fact-finding effort to determine the interest among water users of creating an additional seat for a homesteader and further defining the composition of the Advisory Board.

We developed and mailed out a survey to 130 homestead and non-homestead water users. Forty-five surveys were returned (34.6%). Thirty-three surveys were returned by homesteaders and 12 by non-homesteaders. In-person or telephone interviews were conducted by the Deputy Director with 8 of the largest homestead and 8 of the largest non-homestead water users about their thoughts on expanding the Advisory Board and factors that should be considered.

While a minority of homestead and non-homestead water users among the 45 respondents felt there should be no changes to the present Advisory Board, a majority of water users felt: 1) there should be an additional homestead seat on the Advisory Board; 2) representatives should have no conflicts of interest; 3) DHHL should have a greater role on the Advisory Board; and 4) representatives need to be fair and objective.

We believe the current version of the bill reflects these findings and our recommendations and ask for your support of the bill as written.