

HCR 162



**Department of Land and Natural Resources
Aha Moku Advisory Committee
State of Hawaii
Post Office Box 621
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809**

Testimony of
Piilani Kaawaloa
Aha Moku Advisory Committee – Moku O Keawe (Hawaii)

Before the Senate Committees on
Water, Land and Agriculture

Friday, April 15, 2016
2:55 P.M.
State Capitol, Conference Room 224

**In Consideration of
HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 162
REQUESTING COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS FOR STEWARDSHIP AND PRESERVATION
OF WAIFI'O VALLEY**

House Concurrent Resolution 162 requests collaborative efforts for the stewardship and preservation of Waipi'o Valley. **The Aha Moku SUPPORTS this measure with amendments.**

We believe that the people who have genealogical ties to the valley, have maintained its cultural and environmental integrity, and continued to use traditional and generational knowledge to sustain these resources must take the leadership role in stewardship and preservation of Waipi'o Valley. These are the families who have historical ties to this specific ahupua'a. They are the direct descendants of Liloa, Umi a Liloa, Keawenui a Umi, the son of Umi A Liloa and the generations of families who lived and worked alongside the royal kings and queens of Moku O Keawe who resided in Waipi'o. The current families who are fighting for Waipi'o now are the descendants of the families who lived in harmony with the Ali'i in a place that is so significant to Hawaiian history that it is considered a wahi pana, a sacred place. These are the people who are the Ha Ola O Waipi'o. These are the people who have unbreakable historic ties to Waipi'o.

Hale O Waipi'o acknowledges and is thankful that the Legislature saw the need to protect Waipi'o as early as 1990 by realizing that health and safety issues were becoming prominent because of a lack of public facilities and unregulated access into the valley. And again, in 2015 when the Waipi'o Valley Stakeholders Alliance (WVSA) was formed to represent the different perspectives of people who have moved into the valley, most for commercial reasons.

Ha Ola O Waipi'o is fully committed to continue their unbroken stewardship of the valley; as well as to encourage WVSA to join them in the protection and sustainability of an ecosystem that has been weakened and challenged over the years by commercial entrepreneurship with no understanding that the valley itself has a symbiotic relationship with the people who have always been its lifeblood.

As the legislature knows, the foundation of the Aha Moku System is to support, protect and bring forth the voices of the communities of an ahupua'a on the sustainability and protection of natural and cultural

resources that are specific to a place. Waipi'o is such a place that has long been revered as an agricultural, spiritual, and historical cornerstone of Moku O Keawe. It is extremely significant, holds Kukuihaele within its rim and is intimately attached to the Hamakua and Kohala moku. It is one of the few places left where kupuna generational knowledge has been consistently passed down and is in use today. The people of Waipi'o, the Ha Ola O Waipi'o, are the living testaments of how native Hawaiian natural and cultural resource methodology has been sustained in an ahupua'a, especially one that is so critically important to the Native Hawaiians of Moku O Keawe. Further, their expertise is willingly shared with all who believe they are stakeholders in the valley. These stakeholders cannot allow their need for commercialism to overshadow the need to protect the extraordinary wealth of history and generational knowledge that permeates Waipi'o.

The Aha Moku believes in the work of Ha Ola O Waipi'o. **We strongly support this resolution in its intent to collaborate efforts for stewardship and preservation of Waipi'o Valley, but ask that Ha Ola O Waipi'o serve as the entity that can work with the legislature and others to address concerns and implement solutions that will further work to protect the environment and ecosystem of the valley.**

Aloha Chair Gabbard and members of the committee,

My name is Jim Cain, my family and I have been blessed to live in Waipi'o Valley for almost 30 years. There we farm taro, process poi for our Big Island community, and have raised our family. I am currently the vice-president of the community group known as Ha Ola O Waipi'o Valley, and an active member of the Waipi'o Valley Stakeholders Alliance. The Alliance was formed in July 2015 and includes representation from the 3 active community groups of Waipi'o: The Waipi'o Taro Farmers Assoc., Ha Ola O Waipi'o Valley and The Waipi'o Community Circle. The Alliance contains representative voices from all the many perspectives of the Waipi'o community and has been working on road access and safety issues with the County of Hawai'i, the implementation of the Waipi'o Stream Management Plan, and is focused on working collaboratively with various community resource partners to proactively implement solutions to issues that have negatively impacted the valley.

Recently the Bishop Museum publicly announced plans to offer 537 acres of Waipi'o Valley property for sale. While the museum has at various times over the past 40 years discussed divesting themselves of their Waipi'o kuleana, this recent announcement expressed a sense of urgency in the museum's need to acquire capital that would enable the museum to move forward in a new strategic and management plan in order to remain solvent. The land, which has been under the ownership and management of Bishop Museum for approximately 130 years represents about 60% of the valley floor. The land, which is divided into about 100 TMK parcels, contains a majority of the taro growing lands, as well as significant cultural sites such as Paka'alana Heiau. Most of the taro production lands are leased to Waipi'o families, many of whom have cared for their 'aina for many generations. The announcement by Bishop Museum to sell their lands has created a great deal of uncertainty and anxiety for the taro farming families of Waipi'o and the future of their beloved and well-cared for farms.

The WVSA is fully committed to be the lead on any efforts to transition stewardship of the Bishop Museum lands and is currently working with many stakeholders and others who have the experience and expertise in land acquisition and land management to identify possible options that will both ensure that Bishop Museum can remain solvent and continue their important work as Hawai'i's State Museum caring for Hawai'i's cultural treasures, while at the same time honoring Waipi'o's past, present and future and ensure the land remains in the loving, caring hands of the Waipi'o families like it has for centuries. The goal is to preserve the historical, cultural and natural resources with the continuation of small-scale community agriculture and conservation land use.

I fully support SCR 125 which honors Waipi'o Valley and the Waipi'o families as the long time stewards of this precious wahi pana, identifies the Waipi'o Valley Stakeholders Alliance as the entity that can best build upon past community efforts, engage with appropriate community resource partners and devise a strategic and long-term management plan for Waipi'o, and encourages Bishop Museum to work closely with WVSA on charting a course forward. I ask for your support in passing SCR125. Mahalo

“WAIPI’O VALLEY STAKEHOLDERS ALLIANCE”
PRESS RELEASE – for January 19, 2016

On January 8, 2016, Bishop Museum issued a public announcement that they were moving in a new direction, with major changes ahead, including the sale of Amy Greenwell Ethnobotanical Garden in Capt. Cook and 537 acres of land in Waipi’o Valley. The Museum’s financial challenges had compelled them to reassess their core mission of operating a museum and develop a strategic plan to phase-out operational activities which are not directly part of their kuleana to care for their trust collections related to Hawai’i and the Pacific.

While the news has taken most of Hawaii by surprise, this is not the case for our Waipi’o Valley community. Bishop Museum has for more than 20 years, considered divesting themselves of their Waipi’o landholdings and as recent as 2013 entertained the possibility of selling their lands in Waipi’o Valley to the State of Hawaii. That effort was abandoned after it became clear to the Museum that the successful sale of its Waipi’o lands was much more challenging and complex than it was prepared to deal with at that time.

What is also not widely known is that our Waipi’o community has undergone major changes as well and in mid-summer of 2015 the three most active and committed organized groups representing Waipi’o Valley today, began a series of meetings toward forging an alliance and collaborating together on matters which impact the entire Ahupua’a and community of Waipi’o.

The new alliance, called the “Waipi’o Valley Stakeholders Alliance” is represented by:

1. The Waipi’o Taro Farmers Association
2. The Waipi’o Community Circle
3. Ha Ola o Waipi’o Valley

The Waipi’o Taro Farmers Association (WTFA) is the oldest active organization in Waipi’o Valley, founded in 1989. This group consists of generational taro farming families who lease the majority of Bishop Museum’s lands in the Valley. They are representatives of the surviving edge of the Native Hawaiian culture in Waipi’o Valley and are currently Bishop Museum’s primary land management and local community advisors.

The Waipi’o Community Circle (WCC), founded in the year 2000, is today, represented by a small group of community volunteers who have been providing oversight for the Waipi’o Valley Information & Education Officers Program since 2007 until 2014 when the County of Hawai’i began funding and managing the Program. This small group of community volunteers also represents the efforts of Auntie Ku’ulei Badua who was responsible for initiating “Friends of the Waipi’o Community Park” (the former Rice/Thomas property, at the Waipi’o lookout) and an effort to organize a community Charrette to develop a vision for a future Cultural Educational and Museum facility at the lookout. While the WCC has not been active since 2012, this small group continues to represent all of the various work of the WCC, including the two above projects.

Ha Ola o Waipi’o Valley (HOOWV), formed in 2014, is comprised of Valley residents, farmers (including Bishop Museum lessees that are not members of the WTFA), cultural educators and practitioners, Waipi’o tour operators and a board of advisors including, the County and State of Hawai’i, Kamehameha Schools, Friends of the Future and the Big Island Visitors Bureau. It is a State of Hawai’i not-for-profit organization that was formed to provide representation for other Valley stakeholders who were not recognized in the State’s proposed Bill to purchase Bishop Museum’s lands in Waipi’o in 2013 when the Museum was considering the sale of its Waipi’o

lands at that time. It is the largest and most diversely represented group in Waipi'o, currently working on various initiatives from River Maintenance with WTFA, stewardship of Kamehameha Schools Waipi'o beach parcel, eradication of Little Fire Ants, and other community initiatives.

The efforts of the Waipi'o Valley Stakeholders Alliance is also currently supported by an advisory group of "Community Resources Partners" which includes the County of Hawai'i, the State of Hawai'i, Kamehameha Schools, Friends of the Future and Big Island Visitor's Bureau.

The purpose of this press release is to inform the public of the Waipi'o Valley Stakeholders Alliance and the fact that we had already begun to develop our own strategic plan and engaged in preliminary talks with our Community Resource Partners and other potential entities for the acquisition of Bishop Museum's landholdings in Waipi'o Valley.

Unfortunately, Bishop Museum's announcement was not well coordinated with our Waipi'o community and the Museum had not yet recognized our Waipi'o Valley Stakeholders Alliance. . Since their announcement, however, our Alliance has informed Bishop Museum of our commitment to protect the current lessees and ensure that we have a lead voice in the future ownership and management of their Waipi'o lands.

Bishop Museum has responded positively to our Alliance's position and is now engaging directly with us and the substantial support of our Community Resource Partners. We are asking all of our friends and family in our community-at-large to support our Waipi'o Valley Stakeholders Alliance as the lead in this matter and be assured that we are committed to see that only the highest good and outcome is achieved for the preservation of the heritage, culture and natural resources of Waipi'o Valley, and for the families who for generations have cared for the land and kept our culture alive in Waipi'o.

Waipi'o Valley Stakeholders Alliance Co-Leaders:

Noland Eskaran, President, Waipi'o Taro Farmers Association

Jesse Potter, President, Ha Ola o Waipi'o Valley

Doug Genovia, Liaison, Waipi'o Community Circle – E&I Program & Friends of the Waipi'o Community Park Project

Contacts for the Waipi'o Valley Stakeholders Alliance:

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