

Lawai‘a Pono: Community-Based Fishing

TED KAWAHINEHELELANI BLAKE & CHARLES YOUNG

We are the families and descendants of Hawai‘i’s native fisherfolk. Drawing on our customary and traditional knowledge, we see a pressing need for more closures of fisheries to ensure long-term sustainability. Closures not only allow fish to reproduce and replenish, but also provide a sustainable fishery and greater regulation. We are taking a stand today by providing the general public with proven traditional community-based fishing rules that are sensible, responsible, and consistent with the fishing traditions of our ancestors.

Lawai‘a pono—to fish in a Hawaiian way—isn’t about the take. Rather, it’s about taking care. Lawai‘a pono is about our responsibility to practice restraint and make sacrifices today for the long-term benefit of generations to follow.

CORRESPONDENCE MAY BE SENT TO:
Ted Kawahinehelelani Blake
PO Box 96
Kōloa, Kaua‘i, Hawai‘i 96756
Email: tblake@mac.com

Hūlili: Multidisciplinary Research on Hawaiian Well-Being, Vol. 11, No. 1
Copyright © 2019 by Kamehameha Schools



Reconciling these rights and responsibilities is a simple task. However, a breakdown in native culture and a disconnection from that which truly feeds us has caused confusion. Even talking about kuleana in some circles can cause conflict and gives rise to questions and accusations like, “Who are you to tell me what I can and cannot do?”

In previous generations, one’s position and status were automatic—something you were born into. This idea of knowing your place is still present in local culture today. Our elders recall their “bag boy/bag girl” days of their youth, carrying the catch bag as youngsters, as foundational to their skill and practice as lawai‘a.

As lifestyles, economies, and attitudes about our rightful roles as Kānaka change, so does our behavior. Vehicular shoreline access, larger coolers, and readily available freezers have changed the fishing landscape. For example, vehicular accessibility to fishing spots, hauling coolers in vehicles, and advanced fishing gear allow modern-day fishers to take more than they can consume in two to three days. This puts a strain on the fishery and inhibits our responsibility to take care of and provide for generations that follow.

As the posterity of kūpuna who knew their places well, we understand that to perpetuate lawai‘a pono, we need to adapt to changing times, attitudes, and issues. We do so by remaining steadfast to our values and by living our island values of reciprocity, respect, and trust in each other. As descendants of keen observers of place, we also understand that managing people is the most effective way to manage fish populations sustainably.

Though the State of Hawai‘i is mandated to manage our resources, we recognize that the people of this place

know their resources best. Therefore, we assert that regulations need to be placed-based and come from the ground up. Blanket rules and regulations do not work. For example, spawning seasons in neighboring ahupua‘a can vary along the same shoreline. Our methods for managing resources should remain traditional, yet we should be adapting to our observations. We need to pay attention to every detail of the watershed, shoreline, and sea, because one change is an indicator for another, and these change variations are all interconnected.

Community-based subsistence fishing areas (CBSFA) are legally designated areas per HRS §188-22.9 (1994), where our Hawai‘i fishing communities establish fishing rules, in partnership with government, based on customary and traditional practices of that area.

Hā‘ena, Halele‘a, Kaua‘i

In 2006, the legislature passed a law designating Hā‘ena as a CBSFA (HRS §188-22.9). After a decade of interviews, studies, stakeholder and public meetings, and more than twenty drafts and ten rounds of agenda review, the Hā‘ena rules package was signed in 2015 by Governor Ige (HAR §13-60.8). The Hā‘ena community rules make sense for that place.

For example, the rules stipulate not using more than two poles per person, and that ‘ula needs to be gathered by hand only, with a bag limit of two. Also, kūpuna identified a juvenile pu‘uhonua (fish nursery), and scientists supported their evidence. The rules for the pu‘uhonua state that no one go within that papa so as to not disturb the breeding and growth process. They do not say to stay out, but just to swim around. Lawai‘a are so attuned to the ocean, they know that even their shadows affect the i‘a, so they walk carefully along the shore.

Ka'ūpūlehu, Kona, Hawai'i

Though not a CBSFA, Ka'ūpūlehu's ten-year rest period gives kama'āina families the time needed for manini and other important food fish to reproduce and replenish the area, from Kīkaua to Kalaemanō, while families continue to monitor their grounds and create a comprehensive management plan. Seeing their fishery depleted, they said, "Try wait" to give the reef a rest before it's too late. Ka'ūpūlehu is within the West Hawai'i Regional Fishery Management Area (FMA) created by Act 306, which was passed by the Hawai'i State Legislature in 1998 in response to concerns about commercial aquarium harvesting. The ten-year rest period was attained through a rule amendment and approved by Governor Ige in mid-2016.

Mo'omomi, Ko'olau, Moloka'i

From 1994 to 1996, Hui Mālama'o Mo'omomi piloted a CBSFA and is working today with the Ho'olehua

Hawaiian Homestead to establish an expanded CBSFA from 'Īlio Point to Kaholaiki Bay.

Communities throughout the pae 'āina are creating lawai'a pono initiatives. They are taking steps by finding solutions appropriate for their unique places, ma uka to ma kai. They are restoring lo'i, replanting native plants, compiling moon calendars, passing down traditions of hānai ko'a, hosting family fish camps, running monitoring programs like Makai Watch, implementing 'opihi rest areas, surveying fishers and ocean users, convening and connecting people, creating outreach and educational programs, and volunteering hundreds of selfless hours to tend our resources and bring back abundance for all.

Reciprocity in our relationships with others and with our resources can restore abundance. For lawai'a pono, join us as we 'auamo kuleana in putting forward community-based fishing rules and solutions and seek to partner with the state and others in ways that mālama sustainable fishing customs and traditions of our community.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

TED KAWAHINEHELELANI BLAKE serves as executive director of Mālama Kōloa and is a member of E Alu Pū. His formal education includes Kamehameha Schools, Orange Coast Community College, College of Idaho, and the University of Hawai'i. He was born on Kaua'i. Residences include Kōloa, Kona, Kaua'i and Tiahura, Mo'orea, Niamata'i.

CHARLES YOUNG is a lawai'a, educator, and kama'āina of Ho'okena, South Kona, Hawai'i. He also serves as the secretary of Kama'āina United to Protect the 'Āina / Friends of Ho'okena Beach Park, a nonprofit organization focused on the preservation of cultural and natural resources and culturally sensitive economic development in Ho'okena.

