

Use a kapu system, preserve resources

By Kekaulike Tomich

Thursday, June 10, 2010 9:09 AM HST

My name is Kekaulike Tomich, I am of Kaupulehu Kona. I am writing this because I am greatly concerned about the future of our ocean. I am only 20 years old and in my short life I have seen the fish populations decimated. Our society is about to hit the wall and realize how we fish today is not sustainable. I fear that in another 10 years there will be no fish. There are many things affecting fish populations: pollution (plastics, fertilizers, chemicals, run off, etc.), invasive species (roi, taape), and overfishing.

In old Hawaii there was a mind set, a culture of sustainability, an understanding that natural resources needed to be conserved. The people lived with the values of malama aina and malama kai, to care for the land and the sea. The people were in touch with nature, and the ia. The people knew the different cycles of a fishes life and how best to preserve the resource for future generations. The people stayed within their own ahupuaa and wouldn't use resources from another. They had to preserve what was in their own ahupuaa. With the coming of foreigners, their cultures, influences and diseases the Hawaiian culture, indigenous knowledge and understanding of conservation began its demise. Today we no longer live in an ahupaa system, people are able to use resources from all around the island and no longer feel connected to their ahupuaa and their kuleana. Today fishing is often seen as a sport, not a means of sustenance; the people have become disconnected from nature.

Today people fish for sport, not necessarily for food. For example the ulua 100 plus club, fishing tournaments, Hawaii Fishing News, Hawaii Skin diver, Maui Sporting Goods ect... What do people do with those 100- pound ulua? Some eat them, while others take pictures or mount them then throw the meat away because the meat is generally not that good; it tends to be tough, burned from the lactic acid, or have ciguatera. The same holds true with the 1,000-pound marlin, minus the cigautera. We are catching them for sport, not necessarily food. When we gut these mammoth animals, we've all noticed the white or orange sacks. Those are 100,000s of eggs that won't be born that we won't be able to catch later because we needed to feel the tug and fight and feel good about ourselves conquering and killing the 1,000-pound bad boy, which half the time is a pregnant girl.

In managing animals for food, we generally keep the older larger animals as the breeding stock and eat their babies. Why isn't this true for fishing.

The Hawaiians of old knew this, some older Hawaiian fishermen know this, marine biologist know this, but the public doesn't know this. An example of this is the opihi the koele, you would never pick the koele because they make the most eggs. But with today's mentality we pick the koele and the keiki, pound 'em with no thought of what are we going to pick tomorrow. When we go holoholo, do we really need to fill our kui, our cooler, the dinner table, the freezer and our friend's dinner table and freezer? A pono fisherman leaves fish for tomorrow.

I hear some say, "I gotta get ' em before the Micronesian or somebody else get ' em."

To this I say that's their problem, don't become part of the problem, become part of the solution.

The next time you see somebody pounding tell them, "Eh, pono fishermen leave fish for tomorrow" or ask them a simple question: "What you going catch next year?"

In managing our marine resources, don't wait for the government, there is too much bureaucratic bs and not enough money for it to properly manage our resources. We need to take it upon ourselves like the peoples of Moomomi Molokai. They know when the fish in their area will be breeding; they put up a kapu themselves, they don't wait around for 76 people in Honolulu who don't fish to decide how their resources are to be managed. They have established a modern kapu system. The kapu and ahupuaa systems of old were established to manage/protect the natural resources. People of one ahupuaa didn't fish in another, the kapu system kept them from overexploiting the resources within their limited space. But today people aren't restricted to one spot, so once we decimate one area we can always move to the next, but pretty soon there won't be anywhere else to go.

There should be areas closed in the long term to fishing. When an area is closed, the fish are allowed generally to breed undisturbed. There becomes abundance, an overpopulation of fish in that area, some need to migrate to a new area, an open area, where they could easily be caught. But if areas are established, don't expect results overnight, fish take many years to reach breeding size and many more years to become prolific.

Some may say, "I am Hawaiian, I can fish where I like." To them I say, I am Hawaiian; we need to conserve these fish for my keiki -- and yours.

In short, E malama kakou i ka honua.

Pono fishermen leave fish for tomorrow

Fishing is not a sport it is a means of sustenance

Catch the medium ones

Take only what you are going eat

Notice when get eggs and impose a self kapu and let your friends know

We need closed areas

Kekaulike Tomich lives in Kona

