

APT Committee

From: Tara Apo-Priest <tapo@hawaii.edu>
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Aloha mai,

As requested, here is a written copy of my testimony for APT-1(6)

Mahalo nui,
Tara

May 31st, 2022

Aloha Chair Sinenci and members of the Agriculture and Public Trust Committee,

My name is Tara Apo, I am a senior of Sustainable Science Management at UH Maui College, and I also help develop community based stream monitoring in the Huelo area.

I am testifying in strong support of the East Maui Community Water Authority. This brings stewardship of our water resources back into the hands of the people of Maui, where it has not been for many generations, and gives voice to communities who have historically been neglected. This will help Maui County ensure water security for its residents moving into a climate uncertain future.

For over a century we've had a system controlled by large scale agriculture, which has failed to uphold the public trust purposes for our streams. We must not perpetuate this cycle by allowing a 30-year lease to be granted A&B/Mahi Pono.

The Canadian Pension fund that owns and controls Mahi Pono, PSP, has already invested in the privatization of water rights in other drought prone areas globally, and has an egregious track record world wide.

Our water does not belong in the hands of this foreign corporation, who is already our largest land owner, and who's government mandated priority is to maximize returns on investments. Unfortunately, this is exactly what will happen unless action is taken.

This is Maui's opportunity to work together towards systems of pono resource management and ensure water security for our keiki and our mo'opuna.

This is a chance to dismantle a broken and unjust system that wastes an exorbitant amount of water and prioritizes commercial profit over the well being of our mauka to makai ecosystems, local communities, and the preservation of our most vital resource – wai.

Maui can serve as a model for the rest of our state - Many municipalities across the country manage water through water authorities or similar structures and are federally funded.

The establishment of this water authority provides the opportunity to set fair rates for our water users – to ensure water security for our upcountry farmers and ranchers who are the bedrock of food security for our island.

We have an opportunity here to generate revenue to repair the aging and leaking infrastructure of the EMI system and to fund watershed conservation, and to help make sure we continue to receive as much rain as possible to these vital areas. With climate uncertainty on the horizon, we cannot afford to mismanage this resource.

The first step of this water authority would be to complete an in depth feasibility study for how this could be operated. We can do this, and we can do this well.

None of this can be accomplished if we perpetuate old inadequate systems.

As a whole we need to become much wiser about how we are stewarding our resources to ensure the sustainability and resilience of our people and our 'āina.

This is how we ensure good resource management – we have the right experts, and we engage the minds of the community, we source knowledge from different sectors, so collectively we can make sure we are thinking about all of the things we need to think about to understand and care for such complex systems.

I hope members of the council will see this for the opportunity that it is - Let's allow Maui to pave the way.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify and for the important work that you do.

Aloha,
Tara