



## What's Being Said About Hawaii's Ocean Decline

Nainoa Thompson, navigator of Hokule'a

“It’s time for us to recognize the value of our ocean, and understand that we are in a time of decline. Not long ago, our nearshore waters were carefully managed by konohiki who ensured bountiful resources by setting strict rules with serious consequences. Our native Hawaiian ancestors understood that their relationship with the ocean was an issue of survival. What many of us yet realize is that humankind’s relationship with the ocean today is the same issue. We must renew our learning with lessons from the past to design and define our future. We must rebuild a culture of an ocean community. This will require a partnership among scientists, government, and those who use and love the ocean like I do. It’s about values and responsibility, and is truly a matter of survival.”

William Ailā, native Hawaiian fisher

“Most if not all kūpuna, with their years of experience, teach us that fishing is a privilege that comes with the responsibility to care for the ocean. Fishermen who use equipment in ways that needlessly kill turtles, sea birds, monk seals, and damage coral reefs do not understand kuleana and do not honor their ancestors, nor their children and grandchildren.”

Dr. Randall Kosaki, recreational fisher and coral reef ecologist

“While pollution, invasive species, and coastal development have also taken their toll on reefs, overfishing is the number one threat facing our reefs today. Part of the solution to this growing problem is to better protect our fish from irresponsible or indiscriminate fishing methods.”

Donna (Kahi) Kahakui, paddler and founder of nonprofit group Kai Makana

“It is my belief that Hawaii’s ocean environment is our most precious resource. Yet, we are doing so little to preserve it in the Main Hawaiian Islands. As a society, it’s time for Hawai‘i to be a conservation leader. It’s time to take what we need, leave what we don’t, and not hurt anything unnecessarily. Our ocean’s future depends on it.”

Bruce Blankenfeld, recreational fisher and navigator

“It’s past time for us to get concerned about the big drop in numbers of our reef fish. We need to remember our values of taking only what you need and leaving some for tomorrow. If we return to the traditional ways of caring for the ahupua‘a, from the mountains to the sea, we can ensure a healthy ocean for the next generation.”

Louis K. “Buzzy” Agard, fisher for more than 60 years

“I remember when there were dense schools of fish in Hawai‘i – so many fish, it was unbelievable. In our oceans today, too many people are fighting over a diminished resource. Everybody keeps taking, but nobody takes care. If we learn to take care, and to take only what we need in a responsible manner, then maybe we can be proud of the future we pass on to our children.”

Thomas Cummings, Jr., former fisher and Bishop Museum educational specialist

“As a native Hawaiian, I’m saddened by the waste of our ocean resources. Hawaii’s ocean is one of the best on earth, but it has been in decline for many years. The traditional Hawaiian system for managing the ocean was based on *Inā mālama ‘oe i ke kai, mālama no ke kai iā ‘oe* - if you care for the ocean, the ocean will care for you. Our ocean can no longer afford careless ways.”

Dr. John E. Randall, senior ichthyologist, Bishop Museum

“The number of the larger reef fishes is clearly far fewer today than when I first dived in Hawai‘i in 1950. Today, our reef fishes are also smaller in size because they are being caught before they reach reproductive maturity. It’s time for us to stop fishing in indiscriminate, wasteful manners.”

Ross Tilton, 14-year-old paddler and recreational fisher

“I’m most worried about losing Hawaii’s pristine beaches due to things like pollution and over fishing. My dad’s friends tell me of a time when you were almost guaranteed to get a hook up while trolling along the coast, but now it seems like the fish population is dwindling. I am concerned that one day I will not be able to go fishing with my children because there will be no fish because of the harmful effects of bad fishing habits.”

Wendell Ko, spearfisher

“As a spearfisherman for the past 35 years, I am offended that the State has allowed this type of net fishing to be done irresponsibly, which threatens not only our precious marine life, but also violates the Hawaiian way of taking only what you need. When spear fishing, I can target the fish I catch, and leave what I don’t need. I have seen unattended gill nets with dead, rotting fish more times than I can remember.”

Kawika Eckart, recreational fisher and lifeguard

“As a lifeguard on O‘ahu for 22 years and a life-long ocean user, I am deeply saddened by the drowning of the monk seal pup in an unattended gill net in Waimānalo, my backyard. This would not have happened if we as an island community were more aware about conservation. I used to gather lobsters, go spear fishing, and even lay net when I was younger. But because of overfishing, there is little left to catch and I rarely fish today.”

Linda Gallano, former fisher and educator

“As a former lay gill netter on the Windward side of Oahu, I fished this area before the widespread use of monofilament nets, and I have to say, the best thing we can do for our nearshore resources is to ban lay gill nets and fund enforcement. In 1962, my former husband and I switched out our linen nets for the more modern sugi or monofilament net, which meant that we could catch more fish in less time. And in a mere ten years, from 1962 to 1972, I noticed a difference in the health of our nearshore reefs. We cannot allow this decline to continue. Hawaii’s natural resources deserve our highest protection and care.”

Douglas “McD” Philpotts, native Hawaiian fisher and woodworker

“Frankly, lay gill nets should have been banned 20 years ago. I’ve fished in Hawai‘i for more than 40 years and I’ve seen with my own eyes how the resources have diminished. The depletion is real, dramatic, and incredible in just one generation. I only hope we’re not too late as I want my son to be able to teach my future grandson how to fish the right way. This father-to-son relationship over generations is more important than short-term economic gain. We don’t have the right to deplete these resources. It’s really our responsibility to preserve them for the future generations.”