

He'eia National Estuarine Research Reserve

Ko'olaupoko, O'ahu, Hawai'i

TESTIMONY ON INDIGENOUS CULTURAL PRESERVATION
DR. KAWIKA WINTER
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE UNITED STATES
HEARING ON STRENGTHENING INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES THROUGH CULTURAL AND
ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION
October 25, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the topic of “strengthening Indigenous communities through cultural and environmental preservation.” I applaud the House Committee on Natural Resources for having the wisdom to create a subcommittee to focus on issues relating to the Indigenous Peoples of the United States. I appreciate the Subcommittee’s convening of a hearing on this topic, but it has come to my attention that the Native Hawaiian people, being the Indigenous People of the country’s 50th State, have been left out of the discussion. This is a tragic oversight because Native Hawaiians have a unique culture and history unlike any of the other Indigenous Peoples in the United States, and our ancestral wisdom has much to offer the world.

Native Hawaiians are an Indigenous cultural group that is a part of the Canoe Peoples of Oceania. The diaspora of the Canoe Peoples was enabled by the use of two technologies – long-distance voyaging and wayfinding using celestial navigation. Over the course of 6,000 years, these two technologies allowed our ancestors to discover every inhabitable island in the largest ocean on Earth. One of the last island groups to be discovered was the Hawaiian Archipelago, about 1,000 years ago. It is the most isolated landmass on the planet. In the time between the original settlement of the Hawaiian Archipelago and contact with Europeans in 1778, Native Hawaiians developed a unique language within the Austronesian language family – a language family not present in the continental United States. In the era before European contact, Native Hawaiians used agro-ecology and aquaculture, as well as other forms of ‘Indigenous resource management’ to sustainably support a population upwards of one million people. Native Hawaiian governance was so advanced that the Hawaiian civilization is described by scholars as one of only nine civilizations in history of the world to independently develop into a state system. This state system eventually evolved into the Kingdom of Hawai‘i, which was a member of the family of nations – a status that was recognized through dozens of international treaties. The Kingdom of Hawai‘i was illegally overthrown in 1893, with the assistance of the US military, and Hawai‘i was then annexed to the United States, and eventually became the 50th State. In 1993, President Clinton issued a formal apology to the Hawaiian People for the US’s role in the illegal overthrow of Queen Lili‘uokalani, but sovereignty is yet to be restored.

Given the fact that Native Hawaiians are one of the Indigenous Peoples of the United States and are culturally distinct from other Indigenous groups, Native Hawaiians should be recognized by this Subcommittee. Native Hawaiians should be involved in any discussions on federal efforts to

strengthen Indigenous communities through cultural and environmental preservation. Doing so is an essential part of the federal trust responsibility to Native Hawaiians; and, if done right, could contribute to addressing historical injustices.

The He'eia National Estuarine Research Reserve is a [collaborative management agreement](#) between NOAA, the State of Hawai'i, and Native Hawaiian organizations who are involved in stewardship and cultural revitalization. We actively use federal support to strengthen the Native Hawaiian Community of He'eia via cultural and environmental presentation. I would be happy to help work with the Subcommittee in exploring other ways this can be done for Native Hawaiian communities around Hawai'i.

Me ke aloha,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kawika Winter", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kawika Winter, Ph.D.

Reserve Manager, He'eia National Estuarine Research Reserve