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RL:0383

HCR 54
REQUESTING AMENDMENT OF DLNR REGULATION 4
TO PROVIDE FOR KOA HARVESTING FOR CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL PURPOSES

Statement for
House Committee on
Water, Land Use, Development and Hawaiian Affairs
Public Hearing - 5 March 1980

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HCR 54 would request the Department of Land and Natural Resources to amend its Regulation 4 so as to provide for the harvest of koa for historical and cultural purposes. This statement on the resolution does not reflect an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

The rationale expressed in the resolution is that:

1. Koa is the wood traditionally used for sacred and religious objects, ceremonial utensils...and the construction of Hawaiian canoes;
2. Among these uses canoe construction continues;
3. The present limitation of koa harvesting, under Regulation 4, to a single licensee results in a shortage of koa logs for canoe construction.
4. Through informal assessment, DLNR has identified a number of koa trees suitable for canoe construction; and
5. It is reported that harvest of these trees will not cause undue environmental damage.

That the use of koa for canoe construction is traditionally important, and that a special quality of koa timber is required for canoe construction are certain. However, the resolution does not:

- a. indicate the extent of which trees of this quality may be harvested by the present licensee;
- b. cite the assessment through which trees of this quality have been identified nor the evidence that their harvest will cause no undue environmental damage;
- c. provide an estimate of the sustainable yield of koa of canoe quality:
or
- d. provide estimates either of the demand for koa of canoe quality or the gap between the demand and the supply.

There is a 1976 document that is pertinent to some of these matters, but it is not a critical assessment, it provides no background documentation of its conclusion, and it does not take ecological considerations into account.

It may be that, before 1790, an ecological balance between the harvest of large koas and koa regrowth had more or less been established, although this is not certain. However, harvest of large koas at the pre-1790 rate could almost certainly not be sustained now because of the ecological changes that have resulted from the importation of competing plant species and plant diseases.

We urge that missing information of the types to which we call attention be acquired and made accessible before the DLNR is asked to amend its Regulation 4 for the purpose indicated in this resolution; and that, if and when such an amendment is appropriate, it define the "cultural and historical purposes" for which the koa harvest may be expanded carefully so that the harvest will not be expanded for "commercial uses." Any harvest of koa for canoe construction should be subject to environmental assessment to assure that no detriment to endangered species will result from the harvest.