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Ahi is inspected inside the United Fishing Agency's Honolulu Fish Auction.

# Hawaii fisheries deserve our support

By Eric Kingma

If you're planning to eat locally caught seafood today, you can feel good about your choice. Hawaii's commercial fisheries are fished at sustainable levels and support a vibrant local seafood industry.

However, with ongoing concerns around global ocean health, seemingly all commercial fishing gets a bad rap. While certain areas of the world's oceans are subject to overfishing, that is just not the case for Hawaii's fisheries. Not all commercial fisheries are equal; some, like Hawaii's, are well-managed and deserving of our community's support.

Approximately 65% of U.S. waters around the Hawaii archipelago are closed to commercial fishing as part of the federally designated Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. And the U.S. waters around all but two of the Pacific Remote Island Areas are fully closed to commercial fishing as part of a separate federal monument. Now, a proposal endorsed by President Joe Biden aims to fully close the remaining waters around Palmyra and Howland/Baker Islands, despite the fact that the area from 0-50 miles is already protected.

Marine protected areas can be effective in supporting conservation objectives, but closing all U.S. waters to the full extent (0-200 miles) does not strike a balance between protection and sustainable use. Moreover, science doesn't support that these area closures have material benefits to abundant populations of highly mobile species such as tuna.

Closures of U.S. waters to commer-

cial fishing force Hawaii longline vessels to fish on the high seas among larger, unregulated, subsidized foreign vessels. This reduces Hawaii's supply of fresh fish landings, which impacts the fleet, local seafood businesses, and Hawaii's seafood consumers.

Hawaii's longline fishery is among the most highly monitored, comprehensively managed fisheries in the world. For decades, the fishery has exceeded standards for observer coverage levels, pioneered satellite vessel tracking, and developed effective protected species mitigation measures. Management and oversight of the fishery involves hundreds of personnel from several federal agencies. The fleet is also certified by the Marine Stewardship Council for adhering to internationally recognized standards for environmental sustainability.

Hawaii residents consume seafood at two to three times the national average — and Hawaii's commercial fisheries represent an overall economic value to the state of nearly \$1 billion, supporting around 10,000 local jobs in food service, retail and support-services sectors. The Hawaii longline fishery, anchored by the Honolulu Fish Auction, is the state's largest fishery and its largest food producer, both in value and volume.

The Hawaii-based fleet consists of 145 locally owned vessels that land around 30 million pounds of premium

## ISLAND VOICES



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grade tuna and other species annually — worth approximately \$120 million in dock-side value. Founded in 1917, the fishery consistently ranks Honolulu Harbor within the nation's Top 10 ports in fisheries value.

Hawaii's commercial fishermen are hard-working, skilled, brave individuals who risk their lives to produce quality seafood. For many of Hawaii's commercial fishermen, fishing knowledge and respect for the ocean is a tradition passed down for generations.

Both the fishing and farming sectors are important local producers, providing nutritional benefits to Hawaii's residents and supporting local food self-sufficiency. Our fishermen, like our farmers, are committed to sustainability because they know their livelihoods depend on the health and resiliency of the ecosystem. Perplexingly, even with Hawaii residents' high consumption rates and its known health benefits, seafood is absent from the state's food planning efforts.

If anti-fishing initiatives continue to erode Hawaii's commercial fisheries, local seafood choices will be mostly foreign-supplied, frozen, preservative-treated and from poorly monitored fisheries. It's time to start supporting Hawaii's commercial fishermen and recognize their invaluable contributions, and the healthy local seafood they produce.