

September 16, 1973

"I want this statement to be read in its entirety at the Public Hearing so my testimony will be in its entirety in the records. Thank you."

TO: Division of Fish and Game, Land and Natural Resources.
Honolulu, Oahu

FROM: Alike Cooper
163 Kaiulani St., Hilo

Ano ai Ke aloha;

It is sad that the State Div. of Fish and Game is trying to set up affecting laws to stop turtle fishing in the eight Hawaiian Islands.

Let's look at the problem. The turtles start to leave these eight main Hawaiian Islands in March and April. A person who has fished at French Frigate Shoals, will know that turtles travel toward French Frigate Shoals in March, April and May. If you have fished turtles around these eight Hawaiian Islands, like I have since 1944, you will know that the green sea turtle is absent from these waters from March to October. The turtles start arriving at French Frigate Shoals in May and June.

Each mature female green sea turtle will lay three times, and at each laying will have about 100 eggs. In July and August and up till the middle of September, depending on the year, these small turtles hatch, crawl into the ocean and disappear. We start to see the small turtles about 7 or 8 months later around the flag lines 100 or so miles from shore. After that they start popping up around the Hawaiian Islands. This turtle weighs from 8 to 15 lbs.

Let me take you back to French Frigate Shoals when the turtles hatch. You can visualize many small sand islands a few feet above the water. The turtles are hatched by the millions. As the baby turtles reach the top of their nest,

the birds are a problem, for they eat the baby turtles before they reach the water. If these infant turtles survive the bird attack, the sharks, kahala, ulua, uku, etc., will whip them. I would estimate that less than 1/10 of 1% survivors become one year old. We don't see these turtles until about 8 months later when they start to arrive at Hawaii.

By the first week in September nearly all of the large sea turtles leave French Frigate Shoals and by October and November they have returned to our eight Hawaiian Islands.

In recent years, I have seen very few small Hawaiian born turtles. I could list 20 or more places where turtles laid eggs in the past.

How do we solve this problem of what appears to be a diminishing number of turtles in our Hawaiian waters. First of all, you ought to stop all spearing of turtles and shooting of turtles with powerheads. Other methods such as hooking, grabbing and netting ought to continue to be permitted. It would be highly advisable to program a team of fishermen to French Frigate Shoals during the hatching period; millions of young turtles can be brought back to Hawaii. All available resources can be used to raise these turtles up until about one year old. At this time the turtles can be released in the ocean. This proposal can be a joint venture with the State Division of Fish and Game, the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, the University of Hawaii, Sea Life Park, Oceanic Institute, Undersea Research, Makapuu (they are doing lots of turtle work), and all others who would like to participate. In five years, if this program is put into effect, there should be a significant increase in turtles and all of the turtles needed will be available in these waters surrounding our islands.

Dr. John Hendrickson, of the Marine Division of the University of Arizona, would be an able resource person. For he is one of the turtle specialists in the world today. He has written many projects that were not funded years ago. If

these projects had been funded, the turtle decimation would be nonexistent today. Baby turtles have been raised successfully in Hawaii in the past.

There seems to be a growing string-like cancer-type growth on turtles that are caught around harbors and in polluted areas. This unique growth is also a subject worthy of research.

The decision to bar turtle fishing in these Hawaiian Islands is another instance where the people who will make decisions have not included the commercial fisherman in the decision making process. There are commercial fishermen who make their living by catching turtles.

To stop further fishing clearly deprives the fisherman of his livelihood. I wonder if the responsibility of the decision making group doesn't intend them to provide affirmative action steps for providing a viable income resource to the fishermen, especially if the decision making board be held in direct responsibility for displacing a fisherman. The required investigation preceding this decision has not been thoroughly undertaken.

The real causes of turtle desication is pollution, spearing, shooting, poisoning by man's waste, and many other causes that proper studies reveal.

As I look at the set of rules and regulations for control, I believe that these were drawn up on emotional biases and not on facts.

Let us look at some of the regulations for control.

1. Prohibiting the sale, etc. I ask you, what will happen to the fisherman who fishes turtle on a full or part-time basis? It seems that a control of this nature is an infraction of a citizen's Constitutional Right. For any law that deprives a person of his occupation is inappropriate. Now when the law has been based on inadequate research and little or no facts about the cause of turtle decimation, nor the exploration of alternative remedies, it can be a real

infringement of a fisherman's constitutional rights if the law proposed is carried out.

2. Permitting, etc. Why 36 inches, maybe 24 inches measurement would be more reasonable.

3. A permit seems to be unconstitutional also.

4. Prohibiting use of nets. Nets are the only humane way to catch turtles, for the turtles are not cut, bruised or hurt. My type of turtle nets, maybe one out of 200 turtles are found dead in the nets.

How many turtles were taken by nets? How many by spear, powerhead, shooting, hook or grabbing? Unless the facts can verify that net fishing is the contributor to the problem, a decision of this matter cannot be made.

Whose livelihood will be cut off, will the fisherman be reimbursed for his turtle equipment he now uses for catching turtles? Will he be able to claim a deduction on his state and federal taxes? These questions are realistic and must be answered by the group that makes the decision to cut off a person's source of income.

When I read the regulations for turtle control, I felt that they are unjust. I still believe this.

All of the people of the sea know that the solution to turtle decimation is not in a regulatory control measurement to stop the catching of turtles. This is an impractical, unreasonable and unconstitutional plan.

If a reasonable size of 24 inches shall be placed on turtles and stop all spearing, shooting, you will find that the existing laws are adequate. In the same instance, meaningful research should be undertaken to determine other alternative solutions to the problem. And last but not least this board should be made more accountable to its responsibilities by issuing a firm position against pollution.

In these alternative suggestions, I feel are the reasonable approach to practical solutions to an existing problem.

Aloha a Nui Loa Kakou,

Alika Cooper
Commercial Fisherman

P.S. I would be very happy to work with your group.