

MOLOKAI: Some say outsiders are raiding isle 'icebox'

6-7-2014 STAR-ADVERTISER

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>> And on the heels of that come reports that Molokai fishermen are now routinely patrolling the waters of the "friendly isle" to discourage outsiders from fishing their "icebox." One group of Molokai fishermen last month may have boarded a boat from Oahu and allegedly threw a Honolulu spear fisherman overboard — with the free-diver still wearing a weight belt but no fins.

Aila said agents with the state Department of Conservation and Resource Enforcement have finished their investigation into the Big Island scuba allegations. He did not disclose what the investigation found, but said his agents forwarded their investigation to Hawaii County prosecutors, who told the Honolulu Star-Advertiser they have not yet received the case.

Now DOCARE agents are working on a separate investigation into the allegations of a boat boarding and assault along the eastern waters off Molokai.

Aila called the reports "unusual" and "not very

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Malia K.H. Akutagawa
Assistant professor, University of Hawaii's Hawai'i inuiakea School of Hawaiian Knowledge



twice as bad — 8.8 percent, the highest in the islands.

"Captain Clay" Ching, 66, runs a catch-and-release fly fishing business on Molokai and chuckled at Molokai's nickname as the Friendly Isle.

"Molokai is the Friendly Isle, but there's a line drawn in the sand — kind of a fine line — when it comes to their icebox," Ching said.

IN MAY, at a monthly briefing Aila holds for the public, fishermen were shocked by the Molokai allegations and said they represent a new level of tensions between island fishermen.

"Somebody jumped on the guy's boat and threw him in the water with his weight belt on," said Fred Mullins of Miilani, who fishes every week off of Oahu's Kaena Point and heard Aila describe the allegations. "People jumped on the boat and threw him off without his fins. I was surprised. It had never happened before, people coming onto your boat."

Aila declined to go into detail about the Molokai allegations to the Star-Advertiser, saying his agents were

**Territorial
showdowns
over fishing
rights are
increasing**
6-7-2014

By Dan Nakaso
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STAR-ADVERTISER

William Aila spent a career as the Waianae harbor master mediating disputes between fishermen and boaters along the Leeward Coast, but he now finds himself worrying about a new and violent level of tensions above and below Hawaii waters.

Aila, now head of Hawaii's Department of Land and Natural Resources, has been confronted by disturbing reports involving Hawaii's normally friendly fishing community:

>> An underwater video went viral last month of an alleged scuba assault off Hawaii island when a woman said she had her regulator pulled from her mouth as she filmed scuba-diving reef fish collectors.

Please see MOLOKAI, A6

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common."

"Most fishermen are very respectful of other fishermen," Aila said.

But Bruce and Leiana Robinson, the owners of the isolated island of Niihau — known as the Forbidden Isle — paid a rare visit to Honolulu in November to lobby lawmakers to approve a ban on outside fishermen.

AT AN EMOTIONAL news conference, they spoke about how their island's fish population has been depleted by outsiders.

"They don't even have a store," said Malia K.H. Akutagawa, an assistant professor at the University of Hawaii's Hawai'i inuiakea School of Hawaiian Knowledge who is also a UH assistant law school professor. "They're 100 percent reliant on subsistence. But people are raiding their icebox."

The attempt to bar fishing around Niihau, followed by the more recent allegations of scuba and boating violence, are just the most visible result of long-simmering concerns of outsiders encroaching on their neighboring islands.

Akutagawa was born and raised in the east-side Molokai community of Manaa. But for the last two years she has lived on Oahu in

Moilili, where she misses her Molokai gathering practices and the food that comes with them.

"Traditional gathering is a very real thing for Molokai people," she said. "It's not some romantic notion to go and catch my dinner. It's for real. It's for survival. I'm not a proponent of violence ... but I do understand the frustration that Molokai fishermen feel. Basically, people are taking matters into their own hands."

TWO YEARS AGO a commercial fisherman from Maui allegedly systematically hunted 2,000 pounds of lobster at night in Molokai waters until he was intercepted by Molokai fishing patrols, Akutagawa said.

"Now he doesn't come there anymore," she said.

The Molokai patrols are part of a much larger effort by neighbor island residents to win state-mandated approval to bar outsiders and reserve certain areas for more traditional gathering practices.

Akutagawa coordinated a 1993 subsistence study that helped lead to a pilot project that temporarily returned Molokai's Moomomi and Kawaaloo bays to ancient Hawaiian konohiki fisheries management

practices.

While the pilot project officially ended, local kupuna and residents still encourage traditional fishing practices on the bays "as a special place for management," Akutagawa said.

On Molokai, Walter Naki, 59, fishes to feed his family on the east side of the island and does not condone boarding someone else's boat or throwing them overboard.

"We're against the method," Naki said, "but the message has to get across, too, that life is getting tough with the economy. We rely on the ocean for food, and we're getting tons of Maui guys, tons of Oahu guys."

In April, as Oahu enjoyed a non-seasonally adjusted unemployment rate of only 3.48 percent, Molokai's non-seasonally adjusted unemployment was more than

still investigating.

Depending on what the investigation finds — and where it occurred — state enforcement agents could refer the case to Maui prosecutors and also to the Coast Guard for potential federal violations, Aila said.

The Coast Guard is not yet involved, but Coast Guard spokesman Lt. Kevin Cooper said, "We've heard the term 'piracy' thrown around, but we don't know if it falls into that category."

The Coast Guard likely would get involved if the alleged assault occurred three miles outside of state waters, Cooper said.

"Some fishermen see certain sections of the water as their livelihood and as their sustenance," Cooper said. "Our preference is to allow the state to handle this issue, because it's very sensitive locally."