

Eating *honu* honored special link with ocean

I would like to respond to the July 29 letter, "Friendly, endangered turtles would be decimated if harvesting resumed."

The comments of the authors, Ursula Keuper-Bennett and Peter Bennett, on the *honu* (turtles), are indicative of the Western attitude. They lack the knowledge of the host culture with its spiritual association with the ocean and its fauna and flora.

Island Voices

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Our ancestors, the kanaka maoli, arrived on these shores 1,300 years

before Capt. James Cook "discovered" us. They sailed thousands of miles throughout the Pacific with only the stars, winds and currents to guide them to these islands.

The animals in the ocean are the *kinolau* (spiritual manifestation) of the god Kanaloa. To consume the animals in the ocean is not only for the purpose of sustenance but also for spiritual and cultural association with the god Kanaloa. The turtle was a symbol of long life and in ancient times was given to the high chief, because its head "lived" after being separated from its body.

An entire generation of kanaka maoli grew up and was deprived of experiencing the cultural connection to the turtle.

Twenty years ago, hotels and restaurants throughout Hawaii featured turtle steak as an "exotic" food item. That's why the turtles became endangered — through greedy exploitation, and not by the actions of native people.

There are so many turtles now in the Western Pacific that it is time the indigenous people are allowed to take green sea turtles for cultural purposes and home consumption in a controlled process.

The native people in each region throughout the Western Pacific should set an amount that would not harm the population of turtles. This would restore nature's balance of the turtle population. Biologists and the indigenous people could work together to achieve this goal.

To forbid the taking of *honu* is a prime example of placing restrictions on kanaka maoli without their input and knowledge of management. Remember, when Capt. Cook arrived here in 1778, the islands were planted from the mountain to the sea. The islands were surrounded with thousands of fishponds that were "overflowing" with fish. He commented that "these people must have a superior knowledge of the land and sea."

Let's try to gain some of this "balance" back for nature's sake.

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