

Ocean Views

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Papahānaumokuākea Expansion Is Counterproductive for Hawaii's Sustainable Fisheries

Posted by [Shane Yoshimoto](#) in [Ocean Views](#) on August 31, 2016

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Bigeye ahi being offloaded. Photograph courtesy of Shane Yoshimoto.

Hawaii is the most secluded island chain in the world. The ocean and the resources that come out of it are invaluable to the state. Eating and catching fish is a way of life and deeply rooted into the culture. Hawaii consumes nearly three times more seafood annually compared to the rest of the mainland. The last thing we want to do is completely wipe out our oceans and deny future generations the ability to cherish locally caught, fresh fish.

Two beautiful bigeye ahis. Photograph courtesy of Shane Yoshimoto.

President Obama has recently signed a proposal to expand the [Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument](#) by 350 percent, or twice the size of Texas. This monument was first started by President George W. Bush in 2006. The idea behind this massive marine sanctuary is to restore and protect coral reefs, fish and sea mammals. The 150 or so Hawaii longline fishing vessels will be prohibited from fishing in the designated area. Many speculate that with this monument expansion, Hawaii's fishery will lose 10 percent or more of its annual catch.

Auctioneer Sam, calling out prices at Honolulu Fish Auction. Photograph courtesy of Shane Yoshimoto.

Hawaii's fishery is globally recognized as an innovator in sustainable fishing practices. From NOAA observers on board fishing trips to the careful and precise handling methods, Hawaii is a pioneer as a fishery. Every fishing vessel in Hawaii's fleet is a longliner which is tracked via GPS. No net of any type is used. Each fish is caught by an individual hook and line, usually thousands of miles away from Honolulu. This makes it impossible to catch the entire school of fish and gives the greatest chance for the species to survive and reproduce.

After the weeks-long journey on the high-seas, fishing vessels offload thousands of pounds of fresh fish to the Honolulu Fish Auction. While the target is bigeye and yellowfin tuna, or *ahi* in Hawaiian, the longliners bring in bycatch (species caught other than the primary target species) like mahimahi, and blue marlin as well. There is very little interaction with whales, dolphins and sea turtles, and over the past decade there have been no deaths of these animals due to longlining. Per year, Hawaii lands around 25 million pounds of fish, but that only equates to 3-5 percent of the entire Pacific Ocean's annual catch.

There is a large amount of negative publicity toward fisheries due to pollution, overfishing, and destroying coral reefs and other marine habitats. Much of the fishing by foreign fleets is done by use of trawl and purse seine nets, and this is a huge contributor to these environmental problems. Although they are used differently, both methods have the capability to net entire schools of fish and any other species in their path. Nets also damage coral reefs, and many the size of buildings have been discarded after their working lifespan and are now drifting throughout the Pacific.

Bigeye ahi from the Lady Mocha. Photograph courtesy of Shane Yoshimoto.

With the monument expansion, foreign fishing vessels are likely to fish in these so-called protected waters. There is insufficient enforcement on the waters to control them. When

Hawaii's supply falls short because of the expansion, seafood wholesalers will have no choice but to purchase imported fish. This is product and money that should have stayed in Hawaii and the United States all along. Importing foreign tuna does not only have a direct negative impact on Hawaii's fishery and economy, but most countries have far lower health and safety regulations than the United States. *Salmonella* and *E. coli* outbreaks have occurred in the past from foreign-caught tuna, and most recently Hawaii had over 200 consumers infected with Hepatitis A from tainted scallops that were from the Philippines.

While the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument may have sounded like a good idea, it is not the right answer for the state of Hawaii, its fishery, and the rest of the United States. The monument expansion proposal lacked transparency and the claims made to justify its protection are not backed by science. Our fishing regulations and consumer safety procedures cannot be compared to many foreign fisheries. Hawaii is already fishing in a sustainable manner, and continues to look for ways of improving on this, but will pay the ultimate price. Ahi prices will be higher, jobs will be lost, and Hawaii's food security is at greater risk. Both sides need to come together and look at other ways of protecting our waters and this food source that is so important to so many Americans.

Shane Yoshimoto works as a fish buyer at the Honolulu Fish Auction for the retail and wholesale markets. He loves the ocean and his career and wants to further educate the public about Hawaii's sustainable fishery.

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