

Get to Know Your Council Members:

SHAELENE KAMAKA'ALA



Shae (center) at the Kahana Bay Papio Tournament at Ko'olauloa, O'ahu. Photo: Holladay Photo.

Learn about the people who balance competing interests, while trying to make fishery management decisions for the overall benefit of the nation.

Shaelene “Shae” Kamaka’ala was appointed to the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council as an at-large voting member from Hawai’i for a 3-year term starting in August 2022. She has a law degree and certificates in Environmental Law and Native

Hawaiian Law and is the Director of ‘Āina Protection at Hawai’i Land Trust. Born and raised in the rural communities of Punalu’u and Kahana in Windward O’ahu, she has experience in both commercial and recreational fishing and has been extensively involved in community-based fisheries efforts.

Why did you want to be part of the Council?

Sharing about the lifeways of the indigenous peoples of Hawai’i can be a missing asset in these spaces. Our familial relationship with the ocean and its finite resources has been something that kua’āina, people of the land, have maintained for generations. This long relationship is a source of wisdom and knowledge that can really help to inform solutions to issues that the Council seeks to address.

How do you think your knowledge and experiences will contribute to fishery management efforts in the Western Pacific?

I provide a unique perspective as an indigenous woman and bring a diverse background of educational and professional expertise in environmental and indigenous law and forging public-private partnerships and collaborations to support fisheries and ecosystem comanagement efforts on the local, state, federal and international levels.

My main areas of study and work pertaining to fisheries include researching and developing tools, methodologies and processes to meaningfully integrate community and culture into fisheries and ecological management plans, regulations and laws on local, state, federal and international levels. This involves more of the social science and legal work of this field, while I also have experience directly working and partnering with fisheries scientists, GIS professionals, etc., as well as traditional ecological knowledge holders.

How long have you been involved with fisheries in Hawai’i?

Since I was a little girl, my father has always provided his gatherings from the ocean for our family. From nearshore and pelagic fish, to crabs, to *limu* (seaweed). Seeing our east O’ahu lobster population disappear in the 1990s was a stark realization for me that there is no infinite supply of fish out there. Fishing, and more so, the time it takes to watch and observe the ocean and its cycles, was always an important glue for our larger family. It kept us together as my father

and uncles shared their catch with the community as we did traditionally. My father started an annual Kahana Bay Papio Tournament as a fun way to enjoy each other’s company, growing to a beautiful event that the greater community comes out to enjoy. Our Kahana community also does an annual hukilau at the opening of mullet season. Everyone from babies to kupuna (elders) come to learn our traditional way of harvesting mullet in Kahana Bay, passing down integral values of working together, sharing and maintaining our relationships with the ocean and each other.

What are some challenges facing Hawai’i fisheries and what are your thoughts to address them?

Human’s resistance and fear of change. A seemingly impossible challenge to address, yet I’ve seen that the ability to see from others perspectives and leadership making hard decisions for the betterment of the resource are simple solutions.

What does effective fishery management look like to you?

Effective fishery management is knowing that years from now fish and limu stocks will be guaranteed and understanding the interconnectivity of the fish, sand, corals, limu, whales, etc. The indigenous peoples of Hawai’i maintained three of the world’s most efficient and effective management systems, from the mountains straight out to the sea. Effective fishery management for me, looks like fisheries cared for by konohiki and the fishermen of place, where our communities again fish within their areas. The term konohiki has been long misunderstood. Kono, to invite, and hiki, willingness, simply translates to someone who invites willingness to gather in ways that are reciprocal with nature’s cycles. Konohiki were the gatherers of data shared amongst fishers and those that gathered from the ocean, providing them the ability and flexibility to make important management decisions that allow for resource abundance. They observed and kept tabs on how many generations of each species they saw at one time, always ensuring our future needs were protected.

Lastly, what is your favorite fish to eat and how do you prepare it?



Aerial view of the hukilau at Kahana Bay. Photo: Holladay Photo.

Oh that’s a hard one, I love hā’uke’uke (helmet urchin) and toro! But if I had to choose a (whole) fish, my hands down favorite is nabeta (peacock wrasse) coated in corn starch and fried until crispy. The crunch of the nabeta fish scales

are heavenly and I love the dipping sauce that Mark Pomaski of Hilo’s Moon and Turtle prepares for this dish! 🐟