



Mālama (Preservation/Protection)

Preservation of sea life (and plant life) was always on the minds of the early Hawaiians. Fishing grounds were never depleted because Hawaiian fishermen (*lawai'a*) knew that when a special fishing spot (*ko'a*) was over-fished, other fish would not move in to replenish the area. They tried to lure fish to an area and keep them there by "chumming" the water with things like sweet potatoes, pumpkins, and other vegetables. As the fish became accustomed to that area and remained, the fishermen would then take a little at a time, so as not to alarm the remaining fish. It was also believed that if too much fish was taken at a time, this greedy or wasteful concept would displease the gods.

The Hawaiians then, established the *kapu* system to protect the quantities of fish, and to allow the waters around the islands to replenish itself. They did this by making fishing seasonal. Mrs. Mary Pukui from the Ka'u district of the Big Island wrote this account: *"When inshore fishing was tabu (kapu), deep sea fishing was permitted, and vice versa. Summer was the time when the fish were most abundant and therefore the permitted time for inshore fishing. In winter, deep sea fishing was permitted. A tabu for the inshore fishing covered also all the growths in that area, the seaweeds, shellfish, as well as the fish. When the kahuna had examined the inshore area, and noted the condition of the animal and plant growths, and decided that they were ready for use, that is, that the new growth had had a chance to mature and become established, he so reported to the chief of the area, and the chief ended the tabu."*

Over time the *kapu* system lost its vitality, leaving us with the problem of getting any kind of an abundance of fish for food. Many factors contributed to the fall of the *kapu* system: The introduction of many "western" forms of government (which did not control fishing rites as had been done for hundreds of years prior), the immigration of other races (Chinese, Japanese, Filipino) with strong commercial goals, and the changed lifestyle of many Hawaiians into a more urban way of life.

The Great Māhele of 1848 also played a major role in the destruction of numerous strong Hawaiian values, including the *kapu* system. It introduced the foreign concept of "private property," where land became a commodity to be purchased by the rich and sold by those who needed money. Many Hawaiian people became landless, and only the few wealthy landowners controlled large parcels of land. These and other similar changes led to the degradation of the *kapu* system and the decline of fish along all the shores of all the islands of Hawai'i.

Ho`oponopono (Doing the Right Thing)

Can the *kapu* system be restored to the shores of our `aina so that the abundance of sea life that once was will return? It is a process that will require constant monitoring and should involve every resident in the State of Hawai'i. The state's Division of Aquatic Resources (Dept. of Land and Natural Resources) has re-imposed the *kapu* system along certain coastal regions of O`ahu during every odd-numbered year, and this has made a great impact on the re-population of fish and other sea life. This *kapu* system also regulates the size and weight of what can be taken from the sea, in an effort to minimize the depletion of the young, giving them an opportunity to reproduce and repopulate. Another area of regulation imposed by the government involves the use of certain kinds of nets for fishing. Throw nets (*upena kilo*) and hand nets (*upena kāhe`e*) are allowed, but all other types of fishing nets are prohibited.

