

COUNCIL OF THE COUNTY OF MAUI
**PUBLIC WORKS AND
FACILITIES COMMITTEE**

April 4, 2008

**Committee
Report No.**

08-56

Honorable Chair and Members
of the County Council
County of Maui
Wailuku, Maui, Hawaii

Chair and Members:

Your Public Works and Facilities Committee, having met on February 20, 2008, and March 12, 2008, makes reference to County Communication No. 08-45, from Councilmember Bill Kauakea Medeiros, relating to the matter of the genetic modification of taro.

By correspondence dated February 14, 2008, Co-Chair Medeiros transmitted a proposed resolution entitled "URGING SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL NO. 958, RELATING TO GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS".

The purpose of the proposed resolution is to urge the Legislature to pass Senate Bill No. 958, which will impose a ten-year moratorium on developing, testing, propagating, cultivating, growing, and raising genetically-engineered taro in the State.

By correspondence dated February 16, 2008, through February 20, 2008, nine individuals submitted written testimony on this matter. Six individuals supported the proposed resolution, while three opposed it. Those in support of the resolution stated that genetic engineering of taro should be opposed for cultural and spiritual reasons, and cited safety concerns with genetic modification of plants. Those in opposition to the resolution stated that biotechnology may be the only method available to stop the onset of plant disease and insect attacks, and promoted the value of further experimental research.

At its meeting of February 20, 2008, your Committee met with the Corporation Counsel; a Deputy Corporation Counsel; Penny Levin, Onipaa Na Hui Kalo; and Walter Ritte, Hawaiian Learning Center.

Your Committee received oral testimony from 20 individuals. Fourteen testifiers supported the proposed resolution, while six testifiers opposed it. Eight testifiers submitted written testimony in conjunction with their oral testimony, and three testifiers submitted written testimony only. A testifier submitted a document entitled "Genetic Modification and Patenting of Haloa".

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Testifiers in support of the proposed resolution cited the cultural importance of taro to the Hawaiian people, and the unknown risks thought to be associated with genetically modified organisms. They linked genetic engineering of food products with the issue of food security and asked that researchers not tamper with a staple crop like taro.

Testifiers in opposition to the proposed resolution discussed the negative economic impact of banning any type of agricultural research on companies currently working with other genetically-engineered crops. They reviewed the importance of agricultural research of all types to protect taro from the risk of devastating diseases, invasive species, and adverse climatic conditions.

The Kipahulu Ohana supported the resolution, stating that their organization sees no practical value in genetically modified varieties of taro and strongly opposes such modification for spiritual and cultural reasons. Monsanto Hawaii, Monsanto Molokai, the Maui County Farm Bureau, the Molokai Farm Bureau, and Dow Agro Science opposed the resolution, stating that protecting and preserving taro can best be accomplished through all types of scientific research, and that a moratorium on such research would result in a further decline in the number of varieties of taro.

Your Committee received two video presentations from Ms. Levin and Mr. Ritte. Both presentations provided an overview of the efforts to protect taro from genetic engineering, and provided a cultural context for the importance of the taro plant to Native Hawaiians.

Your Committee deferred consideration of the matter pending further discussion.

By correspondence dated February 25, 2008, through March 5, 2008, seven individuals submitted testimony in support of the proposed resolution. They stated that genetic engineering of taro should be opposed for cultural and spiritual reasons, and cited safety concerns with genetic modification of plants.

By correspondence dated March 4, 2008, Co-Chair Medeiros transmitted a revised proposed resolution entitled "URGING SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL NO. 958, RELATING TO GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS". The revised proposed resolution clarifies that taro farming impacts the entire County of Maui and not only the island of Maui. The revised proposed resolution also adds a reference to "Haloa, the elder brother of man" in Hawaiian culture.

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At its meeting of March 12, 2008, your Committee met with a Deputy Corporation Counsel.

Your Committee received oral testimony from nine individuals, all in support of the revised proposed resolution. Two testifiers submitted written testimony in conjunction with their oral testimony, one testifier submitted a petition containing 365 signatures, and one facsimile testimony was distributed. Testifiers again cited the cultural importance of taro to the Hawaiian people, and the unknown risks thought to be associated with genetically modified organisms. They linked genetic engineering of food products with the issue of food security and asked that researchers not tamper with a staple crop like taro. They restated the cultural and religious importance of taro to Hawaiians.

Your Committee discussed the complexity of this issue as well as the compelling arguments on both sides of the issue. Your Committee further noted the statewide interest in this matter, and the sense that, out of respect for the indigenous host culture, this resolution should be supported.

Your Committee voted to recommend adoption of the revised proposed resolution and filing of the communication.

Your Public Works and Facilities Committee RECOMMENDS the following:

1. That Resolution No. 08-31, attached hereto, entitled "URGING SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL NO. 958, RELATING TO GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS", be ADOPTED; and
2. That County Communication No. 08-45 be FILED.

Adoption of this report is respectfully requested.

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BILL KAUAKEA MEDEIROS Co-Chair

DANNY A. MATEO Member



MICHAEL P. VICTORINO Co-Chair

JOSEPH PONTANILLA Member

G. RIKI HOKAMA Member

Resolution

No. 08-31

URGING SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL NO. 958, RELATING TO GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS

WHEREAS, Senate Bill No. 958, currently pending before the Hawaii State Legislature, will impose a ten-year moratorium on developing, testing, propagating, cultivating, growing, and raising genetically-engineered taro in the State; and

WHEREAS, kalo, the Hawaiian word for taro, is a culturally significant plant to the kanaka maoli, Hawaii's indigenous peoples; and

WHEREAS, kalo is an integral part of the Native Hawaiian culture and represents Haloa, the elder brother of man, and genetically altering the structure of the taro plant represents a defilement of the genealogical link between the two; and

WHEREAS, today, there remain approximately 85 varieties of kalo out of the hundreds that were known in Hawaii and, of these, the majority, approximately 69 varieties, are unique to the Hawaiian islands due to the horticultural skills of native Hawaiian farmers; and

WHEREAS, farmers, Hawaiian groups, and private individuals have expressed their concerns that genetically-modified taro will destroy the genetic strains of native taro species, and is disrespectful of the cultural foundation taro holds for Native Hawaiians and their religious practices; and

WHEREAS, kalo is a healthy and nutritious staple in the diets of many residents throughout the State of Hawaii; and

WHEREAS, the important cultural relationship between kalo and the kanaka maoli expresses the spiritual and physical well-being of not only the kanaka maoli and their heritage, but also symbolizes the environmental, social, and cultural values important to the State of Hawaii; and

WHEREAS, kalo continues to have tremendous agricultural, cultural, and traditional significance to the residents of our County and State; and

Resolution No. _____

WHEREAS, cross-pollination of genetically-modified kalo would place an immeasurable threat on traditional varieties; and

WHEREAS, the amount of usable land for raising kalo is scarce in the County of Maui, and any negative impact would devastate the kalo industry in the County of Maui; and

WHEREAS, experimenting with the genetic engineering of this crop, without thoroughly examining and evaluating the adverse effects of that process, is careless and could have far-reaching, irreversible, and unintended consequences; and

WHEREAS, the purpose of Senate Bill No. 958 is to recognize the importance of kalo in the heritage of the State, by creating a ten-year moratorium on developing, testing, propagating, cultivating, growing, and raising of genetically-engineered kalo in the State of Hawaii; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the County of Maui:

1. That it hereby urges support of Senate Bill No. 958, which will protect the biological lifeblood of the State from irreparable harm; and
2. That certified copies of this resolution be transmitted to the Honorable Charmaine Tavares, Mayor, County of Maui; the Honorable Linda Lingle, Governor, State of Hawaii; the State House of Representatives; the State Senate; Sandra Lee Kunimoto, Director, State Department of Agriculture; Andrew Hashimoto, Dean, College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR), University of Hawaii at Manoa; Harold Keyser, CTAHR, Maui Community College; Penny Levin; Steven Hookano; Pauahi Hookano; Victor Pellegrino; and Walter Ritte.