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Finding Pathways of Communication through Common Grounds in Resource User Conflict: Trouble in Paradise

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Title: Finding Pathways of Communication through Common Grounds in Resource User Conflict: Trouble in Paradise
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Abstract:

Hawai'i, referred to as the Paradise of the Pacific, is known for its "aloha" culture and is commonly romanticised as a utopic escape. However, the environmental realities of the island are far from perfect. Both flora and fauna have been introduced to the islands at alarming rates, and many native species are currently under threat. Most of these environmental issues go unnoticed to the visitor eye. Visitors' perceptions are mistakenly skewed into the idea of paradise as they are greeted with shell lei (imported from the Philippines) or orchid lei (non-native flowers imported from Asia). What happens underwater becomes even more of a mystery to visitors staying ashore. Tahitian grouper (originally introduced as a food source) prey upon native species at astounding rates and have proven toxic to humans in their foreign environment. Algae blooms from nutrient-dense runoff (sometimes associated with golf courses) suffocate reefs. Further, native and endemic marine organisms are removed from the reefs by the thousands daily to feed the increasing demand of the aquarium trade industry.

For many Hawai'i residents, marine tourism is a staple livelihood. Yet, some residents' livelihoods depend on extractive use of marine resources, such as harvesting marine organisms to supply the aquarium trade. Thus, a direct user conflict of marine resources is created. This presentation explores emergent themes from a testimony analysis of Hawai'i legislation aimed to increase regulations on the aquarium trade. The data set of over 1,400 individual testimonies produced the following emergent themes: sustainability, regulations, legislation, economy, user conflict, social benefit, environment, animal welfare, extractive resource use, and culture. Thematic overlap between the two user groups was found within all themes except culture. Although there were significant variances between the two groups at the subtheme level, the commonalities found in the emergent themes creating starting points for negotiating areas of dissension between the user groups. As an example, the findings demonstrated that both user groups were concerned with, and would benefit from, healthy reef ecosystems. However, data at subtheme levels revealed repetitive environmental concerns from supporters resulting from aquarium collection that were further compounded by other environmental issues. Alternatively, the opposition viewed the current state of the aquarium trade fishery as sustainable and felt that these other environmental issues should be prioritised. To ground emergent themes and subthemes, examples from the literature were used to authenticate resource-user positions and perceptions. The support of peer-reviewed science provides validity to the perceptions of both groups and, in essence, evens the playing field in the conflict. This presentation explores ways in which the nine areas of thematic overlap may be used to reduce dissension in the user conflict. Further, it explores the significance of the single uncommon theme, culture. Despite the lack of mention of cultural implications by the opposition, Hawai'i *is* culture, making the exploration of this theme critical.