

Preservation or Disposal of the Kula Kai Fishing Vessel

- a. Shall the Authority Authorize the Executive Director to: (1) Accept the Donation of the Historic Kula Kai Fishing Vessel; (2) Waive All Outstanding Kewalo Basin Harbor Mooring Fees; and (3) Expend No More than \$50,000 in Kewalo Basin Harbor Funds for Removal of the Vessel from the Water for Preservation or Disposal?**
- b. Upon Successful Removal of the Kula Kai Fishing Vessel from the Water, Shall the Authority Authorize the Executive Director to Transfer Title of the Vessel to the Kewalo Keiki Fishing Conservancy?**

Staff Report

August 3, 2011

Background: The Kula Kai is the last wooden fishing sampan in the State of Hawaii. The Kula Kai first sailed the seas in 1949 and like others of her kind is distinctive for its sharp high prow, long narrow hull, live bait well, low stern and high house amidships. The 80-foot vessel is characteristic of the locally designed and constructed fishing vessel that was the backbone of the State's aku fishing fleet. Sampans powered the fishing industry, providing tuna for the canneries and fresh fish for local consumption.

Sampan fishermen were also a distinctive breed. Builders, crew and captains were a highly respected part of our local community. The builders adapted to the rough waters around the State. The sharp prow and long hull allowed the sampan to cut through the water and gave the vessel a range of 1,500 miles. The high house amidships provided a vantage point to see the birds and other tell tale signs of a school of aku. The low stern allowed the fishermen space to use their barbless hooks to hook the school of aku that was driven to frenzy by the release of live bait from the sampan.

With the advent of World War II, because many of the boat owners and the fishing crews were from an enemy nation, vessels were confiscated for other purposes and the fleet was much reduced in size. With the coming of modern fishing vessels and the closing of the canneries, the fleet was further reduced. By 2006, with the loss of access to nearby Pearl Harbor for bait fish, rising fuel costs and the loss of the eyes of the fishing fleet to find fish, the Kula Kai seemed destined for the salvage yard.

In 2006, when the Kula Kai seemed destined for the salvage yard, efforts by experienced shipwrights, expert fishermen and other stakeholders to renovate the vessel sufficiently to fish and then finance refitting of the vessel for the ordeal of fishing were undertaken. However,

the profits have not been realized in sufficient numbers for the vessel to be updated and overhauled.

Since March of 2011, when the vessel's certification by the Coast Guard was lost, HCDA staff has been working with the vessel's current owner (Butch Jacobe) and the Kewalo Basin Harbor agent to establish a sustainable program to preserve the vessel. The plan that has been developed calls for the following actions.

- Transfer ownership of the vessel from the owner to the Kewalo Basin Harbor.
- Waive the one month of outstanding moorage fees that has been accrued.
- Secure a bid for moving the vessel to the cove adjacent to the Honolulu Shipyard.
- Lifting the vessel out of the water and depositing it on an existing concrete pad adjacent to the premises of the Kewalo Keiki Fishing Conservancy.
- Transferring the title to the vessel to the Kewalo Keiki Fishing Conservancy for its preservation and use as an open air classroom for aspiring ship wrights specializing in wooden vessels.
- Allowing the Kewalo Keiki Fishing Conservancy to permanently moor the Kula Kai in the ground to facilitate public access to its deck.

Discussion: As the Kula Kai is no longer seaworthy, it will not be able to generate the necessary revenue to maintain the vessel. A failure to maintain the integrity of the vessel at its current mooring might cause the Kula Kai to take on water, overwhelm its bilge pumps and sink at its mooring. This could create a situation where the cost to raise the vessel would far exceed the present requested expenditure of funds.

Besides ensuring that the Kula Kai would not sink at its mooring, movement of the vessel out of the harbor and the water will allow for preservation of the vessel. In the course of preserving the vessel out of water, there will be an opportunity for the vessel to be used by kupuna ship wrights to pass on their knowledge to the next generation of craftsman that will be trained to work on today's wooden vessels.

Although all of the details of the preservation and education program are not known at this time, it is essential (given the rigors of maintaining a wooden vessel properly in the water) that the Kula Kai be removed from the water at this time.

Recommendation: Staff recommends that the Authority:

- a. Authorize the Executive Director to: (1) accept the donation of the historic Kula Kai fishing vessel; (2) waive all outstanding Kewalo Basin Harbor mooring fees currently associated with the Kula Kai; and (3) expend no more than \$50,000 in Kewalo Basin Harbor funds for removal of the vessel from the water for preservation or disposal, and
- b. Upon successful removal of the Kula Kai fishing vessel from the water, authorize the Executive Director to transfer title of the vessel to the Kewalo Keiki Fishing Conservancy for the purposes of preservation, education and public access.