

July 9, 2021

To: Hawaii State and Congressional Senators and Representatives

From: Thousands of concerned Hawai'i residents

RE: Unsustainable Tourism and its Impact on our Communities

Aloha:

We are a combination of Hawai'i residents represented by different Facebook groups that are all involved with ETA-Hawai'i: Enough Tourists Already. The group was formed a year ago by a concerned resident who, like the rest of us, saw firsthand how much we had suffered under the crush of too many tourists. We have several thousand members in our groups from all islands. Our members are of all backgrounds, ethnicities and political partisanship. We have circulated a [petition](#) (see addendum below) that has over 1,150 signatures at this point, and as is the case with our membership, is growing exponentially as residents learn of our groups.

The measures all of you took to keep us safe during Covid, while much appreciated, also lifted the veil on just how much our quality of life had suffered due to over tourism. During lockdown our reefs rebounded, we could enjoy the beach and sacred sites without mobs of tourists and we could travel on uncongested roads. We understand that this pause was temporary, and we know that you have been under pressure from the industry to open the doors as fast and as wide as possible. However, now that you have done so, the problems are just getting worse. Too many people too soon, and no one is prepared. We are on a collision course and, and just like with the issue of climate change (which is exacerbated by over tourism), if something isn't done to address this issue there will be no Hawai'i left for our keiki... just a hollowed out "Disneyfied" version of a culture and place that has survived for thousands of years despite numerous obstacles. It has created sore tensions, near hatred, angered confrontations and issues such as overcrowding, reef damage and gridlock traffic and overall angst. These issues are not limited to the residents: visitors, too, feel the frustration. Overcrowding is a cancer that will ultimately be the death of Hawai'i tourism, the 'āina and the Hawaiian culture.

The members of our groups and the signers of the petition would like to see you take the steps we have outlined in the attached document. As well, we ask that you take the time to read the second addendum titled "testimonies". These are comments from your constituents as to why these issues are so close to our hearts. They are powerful words full of mana.

We realize that your jobs are extremely difficult, especially in these days of uncertainty and increasing concerns over the quality of all our lives here. However, we just cannot keep looking to the immediate future. We need to look forward for our keiki and their keiki to ensure that Hawai'i survives. We ask that you please take our concerns under your utmost consideration.

Mahalo,

ETA (Enough Tourists Already)
HALE Hawai'i
Maui COVID19FACTS

Addendum 1--Petition

1. Create a reservation system for popular sites, similar to what is in effect for Hā'ena on Kaua'i or the online tickets required for Hanauma Bay on O'ahu.
 - a. Strictly regulate these systems to prevent large tour operators from gaming the system & getting all the tickets.
 - b. Charge fees to non-residents and limit the number of visitors per day.
 - c. Make overcrowded destinations like the road to Hana a gated road that lets people with passes through (residents get passes while tourists can reserve only a certain number a day), and consider a "hop on, hop off" bus system to increase revenue.
2. Reserve more parking for residents, especially at crowded beaches.
3. Allow only community approved guides in culturally sensitive areas. Give preference to guides with ties to the 'āina over all others.
4. Enforce no parking restrictions at tourist sites, with high fines for violators.
5. Use HTA money to create public service announcements on all incoming airlines that explain rules and regulations concerning wildlife, ocean safety, cultural sensitivity and pono visiting. Reach out to the local community for input on what to include. Make posters and other printed publications about how to visit in ways that are pono and require that hotels and resorts pass them out to guests.
6. Charge visitors for all emergency rescues when they disobey weather warnings and "no trespassing" signs.
7. Taxpayers should not be funding the HTA; the tourist industry should be doing that. Create a budget line for diverting money from the HTA into creating sustainable jobs outside of the tourist industry. Create paid job training programs for former hospitality workers.

Create a separate "impact fee" for anyone from outside of Hawai'i who applies to start a tourism-related business here. These fees can be used to support the job training program and/or to mitigate the environmental damage caused by over-tourism. Ensure that Kānaka maoli are considered for receiving these training opportunities and give preference where possible.
8. Create a campaign to encourage visitors to "buy local" instead of only spending money at mainland-owned businesses.
9. Limit the number of rental cars coming to the islands and reserve a percentage of rental cars for resident use.
10. Establish more oversight of beaches to prevent hotels and concessions from taking over the beach with lounge chairs, umbrellas, kayaks, exercise equipment, etc.

11. Severely limit the operation of helicopter tours. They are a detriment to the land and to the people. Regulate the limited number of tours that are allowed to operate and fine those who fly when not permitted.

12. Similarly, enforce better regulation of water tours—boating, kayaking etc. Charge these tour operators parking fees as well as increased ramp/docking fees. Ensure that local fishermen are granted priority access before the pleasure/tourist-oriented operations.

13. Address the explosion in the number of short-term vacation rentals that has had a huge negative impact on the quality of life of residents and has created a dangerous housing shortage.

a. Limit STVR's to resort areas: no renewals of current legal short term rental agreements as they expire, moratorium in residential and agriculturally zoned property;

b. Prosecute all the MANY illegal short-term rentals, especially in agricultural and residential neighborhoods;

c. Revise property tax structure to disincentivize mainland investors from using our limited land as a moneymaker. i.e., hotel tax rates on properties whose owners are not Hawai'i residents. Use this increased revenue to fund first-time buyer and other homebuying programs for local families, with preference given to Kānaka maoli where possible.

Addendum 2--Testimonies

The following statements are comments from the ETA website as well as reasons why people signed the petition. All in their own words.

Kawika Marko:

“Our communities must be compensated/rewarded for putting up with the inconvenience and disruptions that we have always had to deal with for the sake of tourism. Laws related to penalties for desecration and injury to ‘āina need to be strengthened with the proper resources to enforce them on tourist. Tourists also deserve to be educated on local culture and customs and the local laws for their help and protection and for ours.

Our schools desperately need resources. Our roads and bridges and other infrastructure are crumbling. We are headed into a drought while the Grand Wailea uses more water than any other entity on the island. We want the money that is earned here to be spent here. We should tax and surcharge tourists to the max. Why should the resorts and a few major conglomerates that control our islands prosper and benefit exponentially while our local ‘ohana are forced to work multiple jobs just to be able to feed their families. Extra surcharges are used in several other destinations to limit the amount and quality of tourists that visit. It's been very effective. I also wish that we could have our own dedicated spots. The ones that are special to us where we spend time and have memories with our ‘ohana. All of our spots that used to be just locals have now been taken over completely by tourists. It is sad. We bear the weight of the burdens to live here. Most of us tolerate and preserve out of pure love, respect and deep appreciation for the ‘āina, the people, etc. We build and strengthen our local communities. We care for and support each other like no others. We endeavor to practice Aloha and humility. We pay taxes and make all the sacrifices. We deserve our own spots or at the very least set days that are for locals only. Here on Maui, ocean recreation activities are supposed to be illegal on Sundays, yet they still do it. In fact, there are multiple tour companies and other tourism related companies breaking the law on a daily basis and there is little to no enforcement.

I miss the days when you knew of or personally knew everyone on the island. There was so much Aloha. It was a real thing then. You never passed anyone or saw anyone who didn't throw shaka or hug you with hā. Even people you didn't know would act with kindness and love. I believe that we can find our soul and repair it as a community again if we all come together, get organized and fight with conviction for what we know is right and for the things that we believe in. For our keiki and for our ‘ohana. I believe that our ire should be focused on our state and local government officials. Not on the tourist as a whole. Right now I'm struggling watching the homeland that I love become a tragic victim to the extent that I don't recognize it anymore. As I travel the island, I am filled with sadness seeing all of the over-development and abuses against our people and especially the constant desecration of the ‘āina that is supported by the representatives who we have handed the privilege of serving us. The elected officials whom we pay to protect our home and our way of life.

I'm usually not nearly this eloquent nor can I muster a decent vocabulary without some pidgin sneaking in but I am always passionate about Hawai'i and I don't want to look back 20 yrs from now and feel this type of regret for not trying as hard as I can to fight for and to be the change that we owe to ourselves and to the deeply rooted native ‘ohana, culture and traditions. Our ‘āina is helpless. It is crying out for our help”.

Anna Annette Kaohelaulii:

"I am appalled at the behavior of our recent visitors. Posts that I have seen from friends about the overcrowding on trails makes me so sad. I have spent so many years building or repairing trails on O'ahu. This questionable behavior of our visitors will mean that we will have to harden or pave our trails. They will not hold up!

Hawai'i people had to sacrifice during the pandemic, and followed rules because we understand and know we are on islands in the middle of the ocean and do not have the facilities to handle a pandemic. To welcome so many thoughtless and rude visitors is a really big stretch for us now. Who is going to get to pay for the damages wrought by the droves of visitors, while we are still on restrictions? Unfortunately the tax paying residents get to do that. Ten million visitors was way too many, but these hordes of unruly visitors is way too much.!"

Gina Jones:

"No parking, disrespecting the reefs, plastic garbage all over and inside the ocean, higher rents, too much traffic, and wasted city, county, and state resources for search and rescue. Residents pay state taxes so why are we getting the back burner???"

Ki'i Kahoohanohano:

"We are being inundated with herds of tourists in ALL of the most sacred and enjoyable sites throughout our state. The lands and waters were beginning to heal from YEARS of OVERTOURISM, and now we have numbers like never before at the same time making a dreadful impact. There is no oversight or anyone watching the roads, trails, oceans and streams and it is straight up dangerous for the 'āina as well as the visitors! Please understand that balance is crucial and we are in desperate need of more balance."

Carole Lanialoha Lee:

"I'm signing for our Kānaka who continues to mālama the 'āina on behalf of so many who live Stateside. I sign because I live surrounded by those "Tourists" who know not what it means to mālama anything. My 'ohana are down there doing the hard work. Right now. Fighting COVID, Cancer, trying to carry our Kānaka forward. Steep Fines to those Tourists, Mechanisms in place to protect the Kānaka and 'āina from careless and senseless destruction. Monitor and Police THAT! Because when they return to their own homes, there is no remorse for their actions, they continue to brag and laugh about their actions, they say Aloha, but they do not by any means "Live Aloha" without that understanding."

Ku Kahakalau:

"I am signing this because Waipi'o is being inundated again with tourists , causing dangerous driving conditions for us local taro farmers, resulting in excessive trash and feces all over the valley and tourists trespassing and desecrating sacred sites. Waipi'o needs help!!!"

Steve Wilson:

"My name is Steve Wilson, and I reside in East Maui near Hana. I love my Hana home, and for many decades, I have experienced Maui and have enjoyed my Hana existence, however recently, especially over the last few years, I have witnessed a huge increase of visitors, and a

downward trend in the quality of the average visitor, as well as the overall aloha of the island, with the worst part being the year or two prior to the pandemic, and most recently and more so this year since travel has resumed. Tensions are running high for both visitors and residents.

You have made past mention that Maui needs to be more assertive by seeking a higher quality of tourism. I agree. I must say we all like that direction! We are also pleased with many of the recent changes of the fee and tax structure that targets tourism.

We shouldn't really blame each other, but the anger on both sides is a result of the over-tourism, not what we are or do to each other. As residents, we often mention the issues of entitlement, litter, disrespect, trespassing and the like. We used to not really get upset about it. On the other hand, the visitor complains about our lack of aloha, our privileged attitudes, our need for their money, the price-gouging. It's really none of that. What that is, is simply the fallout of the frustrations each side is feeling for the lack of expectations that is being experienced; the compounded blight of over-tourism saturation. A social disease destined to get worse. This has done nothing more than degrade the quality of life for the resident, and degrade the quality of the Hawaiian travel experience for the visitor. It affects and hurts everyone. The ONLY way to address this situation is to either lessen the number of visitors, or increase the size of Maui. Nonetheless, the overcrowding is fostering this frustration, and ultimately will result in violence and repeated violence, and being known for violence is the one thing the Maui economy does not need.

I was elated to read your (Mayor Victorino's) recent press release where you stated, "Solving it will require a new mindset and willingness to try new ideas". Indeed, the changes that will be required will need to be "outside the box". It's a new world order. They may be painful, and they may create some collateral damage, but the outcome cannot be anything but positive. One thing is for certain, and that is I truly believe that Maui will not suffer a major loss of tourism if managed properly. It is here to stay at any price. That has already been proven...but we need to protect it. We cannot forge into the future with our eyes closed and ears covered."

Carol Rosetta:

"I am feeling the stress of being treated like a worker by tourists always on like it's their own private resort. Not to mention damage to ecosystems and commodification of Hawaiian culture. We lack infrastructure sewage treatment roads etc. to handle the volume of tourists. Vacation rentals are out of control. These are not local people renting out an 'ohana, these are vultures from mainland cashing in cancel and revoke permits make them only in resort areas. Enough !!"

Angela Huntemer:

"This island cannot support more than a few million tourists every year. The situation has to be managed. STOP marketing, Shut down HTA, Green fee \$100 minimum, mandatory visitor education on flight over, limit rental cars and flights for non-residents, moratorium on hotel rooms and TVRs, highly trafficked and sensitive places need to be managed and paid for, bring back the round island bus route on O'ahu. So many things we could do. Our fragile ecosystems need to be protected and restored. There are so many ways we can do this. The goose that laid the golden egg is being killed."