

Ola i Ka Wai: Life at the Intersection of Water Science, Policy, and Indigeneity in Hawai‘i

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Globally, an immense body of literature exists that advocates for, and details the benefits of indigenous community involvement in biodiversity conservation. However, in Fiji, only a handful of these proffer a sentence or two regarding protected areas that are established for cultural reasons. Very little is known regarding the types of Culturally Protected Water Bodies (CPWB) that are done nor do we know its benefits and challenges. In this talk, I will share about five CPWBs known to Fiji that are associated with milestones from human conception to death. The three key findings on CPWBs in Fiji are (a) contemporary biodiversity conservation planning rarely considers CPWBs and is partially responsible for its displacement and rapid erosion. This stems from and exacerbates the fact that (b) CPWBs are not as widely known, even among indigenous Fijians, and especially by staff of conservation NGOs. CPWBs are (c) place-based (i.e. only done in clan waters) and is therefore affected by out-migration plus other governance and societal issues. However, the successful harvest of small sized, short term CPWBs have historically reaffirmed the correlation in indigenous Fijians that natural resources need to be managed in order to produce more. This cultural practice may have contributed to the widespread adoption of larger, longer term 'community conservation areas' for the purpose of enhancing biodiversity and food security, of which 400+ currently exist in Fiji.