

RE: Testimony in Opposition – Item E, Hāne’oo ‘Āina (Ke Ao Hāli’i)

BLNR Meeting Date: March 27, 2026

Aloha Chairperson and Members of the Board of Land and Natural Resources,

My name is Caroline Emmsley-de Jetley. I am born and raised in Hāna, and I currently reside in the Mokae Ahupua’a on Hāne’oo Road. I am writing in opposition to the proposed grant award to Ke Ao Hāli’i (KAH) for the acquisition of approximately 115.576 acres in Hāne’oo, Hāna, Maui.

The reasons for my opposition are as follows:

1. Lack of Demonstrated Stewardship

There are ongoing concerns regarding how lands currently managed by this organization are being maintained. Observations of land clearing, disturbance, and restricted access raise questions about whether these lands are being responsibly cared for.

Large pasture areas have become overgrown with invasive trees and dense brush that are not being maintained. This creates a serious fire risk, particularly in Hāna, where dry conditions and strong winds can allow fires to spread rapidly.

This level of overgrowth reflects a lack of proper land management and places nearby homes, lands, and cultural resources at risk.

2. Consistency Between Claimed Public Benefits and Actual Conditions

This proposal references public benefits such as shoreline access and open space. However, the subject parcels are inland and do not provide direct shoreline access.

This raises concerns about how these public benefits are being represented in the funding request.

There are documented examples on lands associated with this group where access routes have been locked, gated, or restricted. While those examples are not located on the Hāne’oo parcels, they demonstrate a pattern of restricted access that raises concerns about how these lands may be managed.

Without clear requirements and oversight, there is no guarantee that any claimed public benefits will be realized or maintained for the community.

3. Conflict of Interest and Representation of Support

There are concerns regarding potential conflicts of interest associated with this project. Individuals affiliated with the applicant also appear to be connected to organizations providing letters of support, including groups such as Maui Nui Makai Network.

When individuals are both connected to the applicant and affiliated with supporting organizations, it raises questions about whether these letters represent independent support or coordinated advocacy.

This creates the appearance that the nonprofit is supporting itself through affiliated networks, which undermines the credibility of the application and the representation of true community support.

4. Use of Public Funds

This project seeks a significant amount of State and County funding. Public funds—derived from taxpayers—should only be used where there is clear accountability, transparency, and demonstrated public benefit. There is concern that this project does not provide a clear or direct public use to justify the level of funding being requested. Public funds should not be used to acquire land based on representations of public benefit that are unclear, unsupported, or not guaranteed.

CONCLUSION

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the Board deny this funding request.

This proposal raises serious concerns regarding a lack of transparency, unclear intended use of the lands, and the use of State and County tax dollars to acquire lands that do not demonstrate a clear public use or community benefit.

Public funds should not be used to support projects where the purpose, access, and benefit to the community are not clearly defined and guaranteed.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Respectfully submitted,
Caroline Emmsley-de Jetley