

September 3, 2026
Item IV.D

MEMO TO: KIRC Commissioners

FROM: Michael K. Nāho‘opi‘i, Executive Director

SUBJECT: Reestablish the Kaho‘olawe Cultural Working Group and Assign Task to Develop
Funerary Practices Policy for Kaho‘olawe Island Reserve

RECOMMENDED MOTION:

- (1) Reestablish the Kaho‘olawe Culture Working Group (CWG) by appointing no more than two Commissioner;
- (2) Task the CWG to develop and recommend for Commission approval a Funerary Practices Policy for the Kaho‘olawe Island Reserve.

BACKGROUND & SUMMARY:

The Cultural Working Group (CWG) was established to assist and advise the KIRC Culture Resources Program Coordinator with projects relating to protecting Native Hawaiian cultural resources and revitalization of traditional practices within the Kaho‘olawe Island Reserve (Reserve). The CWG may consist of cultural practitioners, lineal descendants and KIRC Commissioners. No more than two Commissioners may be assigned to CWG to prevent any Chapter 92 HRS violations.

DISCUSSION:

The Reserve continues to experience a range of funerary-related activities and burial considerations that require thoughtful coordination, cultural sensitivity, and consistent approaches across agencies and partner organizations. To support this need, the KIRC staff recommends reestablishing the Cultural Working Group with the immediate task of developing a policy for Commission approval regarding funerary practices and burial-related matters specific to Kaho‘olawe. This group will work toward developing shared protocols grounded in cultural, historical, and experiential knowledge while ensuring alignment with legal requirements and stewardship commitments.

The CWG will address three primary areas:

1. **Modern Funerary Practices Associated with Kaho‘olawe**
This includes ash-scattering, commemorative ceremonies, celebration-of-life activities, and other contemporary forms of honoring kūpuna and loved ones connected to the island. The goal is to develop an unified understanding of appropriate procedures, communication pathways, and cultural expectations for these practices.
2. **Reinterment Matters**
Situations may arise from legacy archaeological work, previous discoveries, or older documentation requiring clarification or updated treatment. The CWG will establish a

clear process for reviewing, assessing, and responding to such cases in a culturally respectful and coordinated way, where reinterment may be a consideration or desired.

3. Unanticipated Discoveries

Natural processes such as erosion, landslides, flooding, and high surf—as well as project-related ground disturbance may expose iwi or cultural materials. The CWG will develop a standard approach for inadvertent discoveries, including steps for communication, documentation, and collaboration among partner agencies - including cultural protocols for safety, and appropriate protective measures or temporary mitigations to the identified site at risk.

Overall, the Working Group aims to create a shared framework that draws from traditional stewardship practices, legacy protocols, and current cultural expertise. The intent is to ensure clear communication, consistency, cultural integrity, and respectful treatment of all funerary and burial-related matters within the Reserve.

LEGAL AUTHORITY:

§6K-6 Responsibilities and duties of the commissionIn carrying out its duties and responsibilities, the commission:

- ..(8) Shall carry out those powers and duties concerning the island reserve otherwise conferred upon the island burial councils and the department with regard to proper treatment of burial sites and human skeletal remains found in the island reserve;