

## **Farewell Comments – Michael Buck 6/20/2023**

As I wrap up 8 years as a Water Commissioner, I'd like to share some written thoughts for current and future Water Commissioners. It is not an easy job. It takes time. You are a trustee, with specific public trust responsibilities, highlighted but not prioritized. You are bound by the Water Code, which is one of the most innovative and aspirational pieces of water legislation ever written, but its implementation is challenging. The Hawaii Supreme Court has stated, The Commission on Water Resource Management *“must not delegate itself to the role of a mere ‘umpire passively calling balls and strikes for adversaries appearing before it,’ but instead must take the initiative in considering, protecting, and advancing public rights in the resource at every stage of the planning and decisionmaking process”*. Those are high expectations.

You will have a dedicated cohort of stakeholders analyzing, and at times, offering their opinions on every decision you make. You will have testifiers strictly advocating for their preferred outcome, not supporting your final decision of balancing public trust responsibilities. Your staff does a great job in trying to present reasonable recommendations, but the tough decisions will be left to you. While you have access to the best science available, on many occasions you must make your decisions based on incomplete data. Most of your deliberations and decisions will be made in public, after many hours of public testimony, and without any previous discussion among yourselves. You will also be confronted, and at times blamed, for the historical trauma and grief suffered by native Hawaiians for past water use issues that you cannot change.

So why do people aspire to be a Water Commissioner? While not speaking for others, I believe my own personal reasons for serving are like many past, present, and hopefully future Commissioners. You love Hawaii and want to give back to the place that is your home. You have specific life experiences and skill sets that you feel are useful. You can contribute and make a significant positive impact on the economic, social, and environmental future of Hawaii. You can right past wrongs, and bring life back to the waters, land, and culture of Hawaii. It is a privilege to serve.

Mahalo to all the Commissioners I have served with, all the DLNR staff who work so hard, all the past Commissioners who have provided the solid foundation for us, and all the dedicated and vigilant water stakeholders who watch over us.