

Act 97 and Empowering Communities

Very powerful political leaders in the State of Hawaii have decided to “fast track” commercial development of state and Hawaiian lands, using such land for resorts, geothermal exploitation, and other uses. Three initiatives were calculated to streamline commercial exploitation of state lands by removing local community input to regulatory processes.

The legislature passed Act 55 establishing the Public Land Development Corporation and Act 97 doing away with the geothermal sub-zones. Along with these new acts, important state leaders pushed the Office of Environmental Quality Control (OEQC) to exempt geothermal exploratory drilling from environmental impact statements or environmental assessments (EIS/EA). Act 55, Act 97, and the push for exemptions does the following:

- **Allowed geothermal development and exploration in all state land (including conservation zones and so-called ceded lands) for geothermal development and exploration (ACT 97)*.**
- **Required only a drilling permit from the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) for geothermal exploratory (drilling). Local communities would have no realistic opportunity to provide comment on exploratory drilling (ACT 97).**
- **Disestablished geothermal sub-zones, meaning all exploration and exploitation of geothermal could be accomplished without local consideration of social and environmental issues (ACT 97).**
- **Stripped the county of the responsibility to issue permits for geothermal exploitation. All permit processes and approvals would occur in Honolulu (ACT 97).**
- Pushed for a “no hearing needed” to exempt exploratory drilling from EIS/EA. In a turn around, by one vote, the Board decided that a hearing was needed. Note that this exemption could be reestablished by an administrative process in Honolulu with 6 days notice. (QEDC Exemptions).
- *Allowed the State to force land owners adjacent to geothermal development to install the utilities needed by the geothermal developer, and force the land owners to pay for it or lose their land. (In lower Puna where many land owners live “off the grid,” such a cost could easily be over a quarter of a million dollars.) (ACT 55)!*
- *Allowed the State to designate areas for industrialization and geothermal exploitation, and allowed the state to guarantee risk for such activities (ACT 55).*

Empowering communities may be inconvenient to commercially developing the state, but Puno Pono Alliance feels community involvement is the foundation of good government. Please join us in pushing for repeal Act 55 and Act 97.

These are initial battles in a conflict about the nature of our state’s government.

* Puno Pono Alliance thinks that the State and Federal Governments will open Hawaii to Enhanced Geothermal exploration. Doing so would allow hydraulic fracturing of “hot rock,” a process analogous to “fracking,” and geothermal exploration of land on all islands in nearly all locations.

If you wish to stay informed about community action and receive the Puna Pono Alliance Newsletter and Bob Petricci's Updates, email newsletter@punapono.com with NEWSLETTER in the subject line.

Puna Pono Alliance needs funds to keep up the fight for Puna. Please contribute by credit card or PayPal at punapono.com/contribute or by check to PO Box 492668, Keeaau, HI 96749.

If you want to help in other ways please call (808) 339-4344.