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# A BILL FOR AN ACT

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RELATING TO AQUATIC PROTECTION.

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:**

1       SECTION 1. The legislature finds that coral reefs provide  
2 extremely valuable goods and services for the State and its  
3 residents, including coastal protection from erosion due to  
4 increasing sea levels and larger ocean swells as the ocean  
5 warms; sand production that replenishes beaches; and fisheries,  
6 recreation, tourism, and spiritual connection. Many reefs  
7 around the island of Oahu are widely known to be among the most  
8 degraded in Hawaii. This situation is due to poor historical  
9 agricultural and development land use practices, unchecked  
10 ungulate populations that lead to erosion and sedimentation, and  
11 run-off of excess nutrients from sewage and fertilizers.  
12 Furthermore, increasing ocean warming is now causing more  
13 frequent and severe coral bleaching events that kill corals and  
14 are predicted to be annual events by about 2040. Ocean  
15 acidification and other pollutants also adversely affect corals.  
16 All of these factors, coupled with heavy fishing pressure and  
17 recreational overcrowding on the island of Oahu, contribute to



1 degraded reefs and lower numbers of herbivorous fishes to keep  
2 coral-reef degradation in check.

3 The legislature further finds that immediate action is  
4 needed to protect and restore coral reefs around the State and  
5 especially around the island of Oahu.

6 Therefore, the purpose of this Act is to:

7 (1) Require the division of aquatic resources of the  
8 department of land and natural resources to manage the  
9 aquatic life and aquatic resources of the State,  
10 giving the highest priority to protecting, restoring,  
11 and maintaining ecosystem integrity and using the best  
12 scientific data available; and

13 (2) Require the division of aquatic resources of the  
14 department of land and natural resources to set goals  
15 to substantially improve coral-reef resilience around  
16 Oahu and develop a framework to meet those goals with  
17 annual reports to the legislature.

18 SECTION 2. Section 187A-2, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is  
19 amended to read as follows:

20 "**§187A-2 Powers and duties of department.** The department  
21 shall:



- (1) Manage and administer the aquatic life and aquatic resources of the State~~[+]~~, with the highest priority given to protecting, restoring, and maintaining ecosystem integrity, including by collaborating with other relevant agencies to restore and maintain good condition of the water that encompasses these ecosystems;
- (2) Establish and maintain aquatic life propagating station or stations;
- (3) Establish, manage, and regulate public fishing areas, artificial reefs, fish aggregating devices, marine life conservation districts, shoreline fishery management areas, refuges, and other areas pursuant to title 12;
- (4) Subject to this title, import aquatic life for the purpose of propagating and disseminating the same in the State and the waters subject to its jurisdiction;
- (5) Distribute, free of charge, as the department deems to be in the public interest, aquatic life, for the purpose of increasing the food supply of the State; provided that when, in the discretion of the



1 department, the public interest shall not be  
2 materially interfered with by so doing, the department  
3 may propagate and furnish aquatic life to private  
4 parties, upon such reasonable terms, conditions, and  
5 prices determined by the department;

6 (6) ~~[Gather]~~ Use the best available science to gather and  
7 compile information and statistics concerning the  
8 habitat and character of, and increase and decrease  
9 in, aquatic resources in the State, including the care  
10 and propagation of aquatic resources for protective,  
11 productive, and aesthetic purposes, and other useful  
12 information, which the department deems proper;

13 (7) Enforce all laws relating to the protecting, taking,  
14 killing, propagating, or increasing of aquatic life  
15 within the State and the waters subject to its  
16 jurisdiction; and

17 (8) Formulate and from time to time recommend to the  
18 governor and legislature such additional legislation  
19 necessary or desirable to implement the objectives of  
20 title 12."



SECTION 3. (a) No later than July 1, 2027, the division of aquatic resources of the department of land and natural resources shall:

(1) Publish goals to significantly increase coral-reef resilience around the island of Oahu by December 31, 2030; and

(2) Create a framework for meeting these goals and the qualitative measurement of progress each year by using the best available science. The framework shall include but not be limited to the following criteria:

(A) Water quality and quantity;

(B) Herbivore biomass;

(C) Fisheries management;

(D) Enforcement;

(E) Coral restoration; and

(F) Recreational-use impacts.

(b) Prior to adopting the framework required by subsection (a) (2), the division of aquatic resources of the department of land and natural resources shall coordinate with other relevant management agencies in the State and hold at least one public hearing on Oahu regarding the framework.



(c) The division of aquatic resources of the department of land and natural resources may adopt temporary administrative rules related to the framework required by subsection (a)(2), with the approval of the board of land and natural resources and without regard to chapter 91 and chapter 201M, Hawaii Revised Statutes; provided that the temporary administrative rules shall be repealed by December 31, 2030, unless the division of aquatic resources of the department of land and natural resources adopts the rules pursuant to the regular rulemaking process.

(d) No later than December 1, 2026; December 1, 2027; December 1, 2028; and December 1, 2029, the division of aquatic resources of the department of land and natural resources shall submit to the legislature a report regarding the implementation of this section.

Each annual report shall include any recommendations for additional funding, additional positions, or proposed legislation.

SECTION 4. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.

SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect upon its approval.



H.B. NO. 2599

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INTRODUCED BY:

*Rindelchigwa*  
JAN 28 2026



# H.B. NO. 2599

**Report Title:**

DLNR; Division of Aquatic Resources; Aquatic Life; Herbivores; Coral-reef Resilience; Reports

**Description:**

Requires the Division of Aquatic Resources of the Department of Land and Natural Resources to manage the aquatic life and aquatic resources of the State with the highest priority given to protecting, restoring, and maintaining ecosystem integrity and use the best scientific data available. Requires the Division of Aquatic Resources of the Department of Land and Natural Resources to set goals to substantially increase coral-reef resilience around Oahu and develop a framework to meet those goals, with annual reports to the Legislature.

*The summary description of legislation appearing on this page is for informational purposes only and is not legislation or evidence of legislative intent.*

