

JAN 28 2026

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# A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO CORAL REEF RESILIENCE.

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

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that coral reefs are  
2 critically valuable to the State and its residents. Coral reefs  
3 provide coastal protection from erosion caused by rising sea  
4 levels and larger ocean swells caused by warmer oceans, and they  
5 produce sand that helps to replenish beaches. Coral reefs also  
6 sustain fisheries, create recreational opportunities, support  
7 tourism, and provide important spiritual connections.

8 However, Hawaii's reefs have experienced substantial  
9 decline and face catastrophic failure in the years and decades  
10 to come unless the State intervenes and makes significant  
11 changes to coral reef management. More specifically, this  
12 decline has been driven by sedimentation and the run-off of  
13 excess nutrients from sewage and fertilizers; increasing  
14 climate-driven ocean warming and acidification, which  
15 destabilizes reef ecosystems and causes more frequent and severe  
16 coral bleaching; unaddressed overfishing and recreational



1 overcrowding; and the commercial extraction of marine species,  
2 among other factors.

3 The legislature further finds that the National Oceanic and  
4 Atmospheric Administration has defined twenty-five per cent live  
5 coral cover as the absolute minimum necessary to maintain a  
6 healthy reef ecosystem and physical structure. Live coral cover  
7 on coral reefs around the State currently range from less than  
8 one per cent to sixty-nine percent. Many reef species are also  
9 at critically low levels of less than five or ten per cent of  
10 their naturally occurring potential. In addition, entire  
11 species have already disappeared from some areas.

12 The ecological resilience of coral reefs, in terms of both  
13 resistance to and recovery from various threats, depends  
14 critically on the diversity of species, with each species  
15 playing a role that contributes to the ecosystem; and the health  
16 of herbivorous fish that eat seaweeds and other benthic algae,  
17 which keeps reef surfaces clean so corals can thrive. Among  
18 herbivorous fish species, data shows that a minimum total fish  
19 biomass of at least forty grams per square meter is necessary to  
20 sustain Hawaii's coral reef ecosystems. However, many reefs,  
21 especially those on the island of Oahu and parts of the islands



1 of Kauai and Maui, are already well below this minimum  
2 threshold.

3 Multiple analyses, studies, and decades of real-world  
4 degradation demonstrate that, with its current trajectory,  
5 Hawaii will likely lose the majority of its remaining coral reef  
6 ecosystems in the coming decades.

7 The legislature believes that significant and immediate  
8 action is needed to protect and restore Hawaii's coral reef  
9 ecosystems and the diversity and biomass of the marine species  
10 within those ecosystems to levels far closer to their naturally  
11 occurring potential. These actions will help ensure that coral  
12 reefs are robustly prepared to absorb significant losses and  
13 survive the worst events and impacts that they will face in the  
14 years and decades to come, thereby ensuring the survival of this  
15 critical resource for Hawaii's future generations.

16 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to:

17 (1) Require the division of aquatic resources of the  
18 department of land and natural resources to manage the  
19 aquatic life and aquatic resources of the State with  
20 the highest priority being to protect, restore, and



1 maintain ecosystem integrity using the best scientific  
2 data available; and  
3 (2) Require the division of aquatic resources to develop  
4 plans and take actions necessary to substantially  
5 improve coral reef resilience around the island of  
6 Oahu, which is the island with the most endangered  
7 reefs.

8 SECTION 2. Chapter 187A, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is  
9 amended by adding a new section to part I to be appropriately  
10 designated and to read as follows:

11 "§187A-      **Reef ecosystem resilience.** (a) The division  
12 shall restore and maintain reef ecosystems and each indigenous  
13 species within the reef ecosystem to a level that is not less  
14 than eighty per cent of the ecosystem or indigenous species'  
15 natural biomass potential within each respective moku, as  
16 determined by the best available science.

17 (b) The division shall expand and maintain live coral  
18 cover at not less than twenty-five per cent on reefs that have  
19 historically supported naturally occurring live coral cover, as  
20 determined by the best available science.

21 (c) The division shall:



1       (1) Collaborate with institutions and organizations having  
2       demonstrated expertise and experience with Hawaii  
3       coral reef science to achieve the goals of this  
4       section;

5       (2) Ensure qualitative measurement of progress each year  
6       using the best available science; and

7       (3) Incorporate the requirements of this section into all  
8       of its plans and decisions.

9       (d) The department may adopt rules pursuant to chapter 91  
10      necessary to achieve the goals of this section.

11      (e) No later than twenty days prior to the convening of  
12      each regular session, the division shall submit a report to the  
13      legislature on the division's progress in meeting the  
14      requirements of subsections (a) and (b), including any measures  
15      of progress collected pursuant to subsection (c) (2)."

16      SECTION 3. Section 187A-1, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is  
17      amended by adding two new definitions to be appropriately  
18      inserted and to read as follows:

19      ""Division" means the division of aquatic resources of the  
20      department.



1        "Moku" refers to a traditional type of land district that  
2        is larger than an ahupuaa."

3        SECTION 4. Section 187A-2, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is  
4        amended to read as follows:

5        **"§187A-2 Powers and duties of department.** The department  
6        shall:

- 7        (1) Manage and administer the aquatic life and aquatic  
8        resources of the State[?], with the highest priority  
9        being to protect, restore, and maintain ecosystem  
10        integrity, including restoring and maintaining reef  
11        ecosystem resiliency pursuant to section 187A- ;
- 12        (2) Establish and maintain aquatic life propagating  
13        station or stations;
- 14        (3) Establish, manage, and regulate public fishing areas,  
15        artificial reefs, fish aggregating devices, marine  
16        life conservation districts, shoreline fishery  
17        management areas, refuges, and other areas pursuant to  
18        title 12;
- 19        (4) Subject to this title, import aquatic life for the  
20        purpose of propagating and disseminating the same in  
21        the State and the waters subject to its jurisdiction;



1 (5) Distribute, free of charge, as the department deems to  
2 be in the public interest, aquatic life, for the  
3 purpose of increasing the food supply of the State;  
4 provided that when, in the discretion of the  
5 department, the public interest shall not be  
6 materially interfered with by so doing, the department  
7 may propagate and furnish aquatic life to private  
8 parties, upon such reasonable terms, conditions, and  
9 prices determined by the department;

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

17 (7) Enforce all laws relating to the protecting, taking,  
18 killing, propagating, or increasing of aquatic life  
19 within the State and the waters subject to its  
20 jurisdiction; and



5 SECTION 5. The division of aquatic resources of the  
6 department of land and natural resources shall develop plans and  
7 take all appropriate actions necessary to significantly increase  
8 coral reef resilience around the island of Oahu pursuant to  
9 section 187A- , Hawaii Revised Statutes, including attaining  
10 the following goals:

11 (1) By July 1, 2027, increase the amount of live coral  
12 cover to no less than twenty-five per cent on reefs  
13 that have historically supported naturally occurring  
14 live coral cover;

15 (2) By July 1, 2027, increase the density of herbivorous  
16 fish inhabiting reefs to at least:

17 (A) Forty grams per square meter; or

18 (B) Eighty per cent of the potential biomass of the

19 respective moku, as determined by the best

20 available science; and



6 SECTION 6. If any provision of this Act, or the  
7 application thereof to any person or circumstance, is held  
8 invalid, the invalidity does not affect other provisions or  
9 applications of the Act that can be given effect without the  
10 invalid provision or application, and to this end the provisions  
11 of this Act are severable.

12 SECTION 7. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed  
13 and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.

**14** SECTION 8. This Act shall take effect upon its approval.

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INTRODUCED BY:





S.B. NO. 3201

**Report Title:**

DLNR; DAR; Aquatic Resources; Coral Reef Resilience; Ecosystem Resilience; Reports to Legislature

**Description:**

Requires the Division of Aquatic Resources of the Department of Land and Natural Resources to: (1) manage and administer aquatic life and resources, with the highest priority being to protect, restore, and maintain ecosystem integrity, using the best scientific data available; (2) restore and maintain reef ecosystems and indigenous species to a level that is not less than 80% of their natural biomass potential; and (3) expand and maintain live coral cover at not less than 25% on reefs that have historically supported naturally occurring live coral cover. Requires the Division of Aquatic Resources to develop plans and take actions to increase reef resilience around the island of Oahu by certain dates. Requires 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.*

