

JAN 28 2026

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Division" means the division of aquatic resources of the 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[~~7~~], 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



1 (8) Formulate and from time to time recommend to the
2 governor and legislature such additional legislation
3 necessary or desirable to implement the objectives of
4 title 12."

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




1 (3) By July 1, 2028, increase the density of all other
2 indigenous species not otherwise specified in this
3 section to at least eighty per cent of the potential
4 biomass of the respective moku, as determined by the
5 best available science.

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.

15
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.

