STAND. COM. REP. NO. 3370

Honolulu, Hawaii

MAR 30 2026

RE: H.B. No. 2599
H.D. 1
S.D. 1

Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi
President of the Senate
Thirty-Third State Legislature
Regular Session of 2026
State of Hawaii

Sir:

Your Committee on Water, Land, Culture and the Arts, to which was referred H.B. No. 2599, H.D. 1, entitled:

"A BILL FOR AN ACT RELATING TO AQUATIC PROTECTION,"

begs leave to report as follows:

The purpose and intent of this measure is to require the Division of Aquatic Resources of the Department of Land and Natural Resources to:

(1) Manage the aquatic life and aquatic resources of the State, giving the highest priority to protecting, restoring, and maintaining ecosystem integrity and using the best scientific data available; and

(2) Set goals to substantially increase coral-reef resilience around Oahu and develop a framework to meet those goals, with annual reports to the Legislature.

Your Committee received testimony in support of this measure from the Department of Land and Natural Resources; Hawai'i Ocean Legislative Task Force; Big Island Reef Keepers Hui; The Nature Conservancy, Hawai'i and Palmyra; Sierra Club of Hawai'i; Mālama Pūpūkea-Waimea; and eight individuals.

Your Committee received comments on this measure from one individual.

Your Committee finds that coral reefs provide multiple, valuable benefits to the State and its residents, including coastal protection, sand production, recreation, tourism, spiritual connection, and the foundation of marine ecosystems. Unfortunately, the combination of human interference and ocean warming have degraded the coral reefs around Oahu and depopulated the species of fish that mitigate coral-reef degradation. Your Committee believes that immediate action is necessary to protect and restore coral reefs around the State, particularly around Oahu. This measure will kickstart the rejuvenation of one of the State's most important natural resources by mandating science-based management and goal-setting for the resilience of coral reefs.

Your Committee has amended this measure by:

(1) Inserting language requiring the Department of Land and Natural Resources to manage and administer the aquatic life and aquatic resources of the State, giving the highest priority to protecting, restoring, and maintaining ecosystem integrity, and maintaining reefs and each native species within them at levels no less than the best peer-reviewed science suggests is able to comfortably withstand the worst coral bleaching events and other likely threats to reef ecosystem health in the subsequent five decades, including but not limited to collaboration with other relevant agencies to restore and maintain good condition of the water that encompasses these ecosystems;

(2) Specifying that the Department of Land and Natural Resources shall use the best available peer-reviewed science to gather and compile information and statistics concerning the habitat and character of, and increase and decrease in, aquatic resources in the State, including the care and propagation of aquatic resources for protective, productive, and aesthetic purposes, and other useful information, which the Department deems proper;

(3) Clarifying that, no later than July 1, 2027, for the island of Oahu, and no later than July 1, 2029, for the other islands, the Division of Aquatic Resources of the Department of Land and Natural Resources shall:

(A) Develop and publish goals to significantly increase coral-reef resilience to maintain reefs and each native species within them at levels no less than the best peer-reviewed science suggests is able to comfortably withstand the worst coral bleach events and other likely threats to reef ecosystem health in the subsequent five decades; and

(B) Create a framework for meeting these goals and the qualitative measurement of progress each year by using the best available peer-reviewed science;

(4) Clarifying that, before adopting the framework required by subsection (a)(2) of this measure, 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 the respective island for which the framework is being developed regarding the framework;

(5) Inserting language authorizing the Division of Aquatic Resources of the Department of Land and Natural Resources to adopt temporary administrative rules or take immediate action related to any part of the framework required by subsection (a)(2) of this measure, or in preparation for or responding to an emergency or critical situation, such as a bleaching event or other adverse impact on a coral reef or species, with the approval of the Board of Land and Natural Resources and without regard to chapters 91 and 201M, Hawaii Revised Statutes; provided that the temporary administrative rules shall be repealed no later than five years after their adoption, or upon the adoption of rules by the Division of Aquatic Resources of the Department of Land and Natural Resources pursuant to chapter 91, Hawaii Revised Statutes, whichever is sooner;

(6) Clarifying that, no later than December 1, 2026, and December 1 of each year thereafter, the Division of Aquatic Resources of the Department of Land and Natural Resources shall submit to the Legislature a report regarding the implementation, progress, and results of section 3 of this measure, and that each annual report shall include any findings and recommendations, including proposed legislation;

(7) Amending section 1 to include additional legislative findings and reflect its amended purpose;

(8) Making it effective upon its approval; and

(9) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity and consistency.

As affirmed by the record of votes of the members of your Committee on Water, Land, Culture and the Arts that is attached to this report, your Committee is in accord with the intent and purpose of H.B. No. 2599, H.D. 1, as amended herein, and recommends that it pass Second Reading in the form attached hereto as H.B. No. 2599, H.D. 1, S.D. 1, and be referred to your Committee on Ways and Means.

Respectfully submitted on
behalf of the members of the
Committee on Water, Land,
Culture and the Arts,

CHRIS LEE, Chair

The Senate
Thirty-Third Legislature
State of Hawai'i

Record of Votes
Committee on Water, Land, Culture and the Arts
WLA

Bill / Resolution No.:*	Committee Referral:	Date:
HB 2599 HD1	WLA, WAM	3.23.2026

☐ The Committee is reconsidering its previous decision on this measure.

If so, then the previous decision was to: _____

The Recommendation is:

☐ Pass, unamended 2312 ☑ Pass, with amendments 2311 ☐ Hold 2310 ☐ Recommit 2313

Members	Aye	Aye (WR)	Nay	Excused
LEE, Chris (C)	✓			
INOUYE, Lorraine R. (VC)	✓			
CHANG, Stanley	✓			
LAMOSAO, Rachele	✓			
DECORTE, Samantha	✓			
TOTAL	5			

Recommendation: ☑ Adopted ☐ Not Adopted

Chair's or Designee's Signature:

Lorraine R. Inouye

Distribution: Original — File with Committee Report; Yellow — Committee; Pink — Drafting Agency

*Only one measure per Record of Votes

Revised: 01/21/26