



**TESTIMONY OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
KA 'OIHANA O KA LOIO KUHINA
THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, 2026**

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:

H.B. NO. 1572, RELATING TO AQUACULTURE DEVELOPMENT.

BEFORE THE:

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

DATE: Friday, February 6, 2026

TIME: 9:01 a.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 325

TESTIFIER(S): Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or
Kelcie K. Nagata or Christopher J.I. Leong, Deputy Attorneys
General

Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

The Department of the Attorney General provides the following comments.

The purpose of this bill is to require the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to establish a Restorative Aquaculture Development Program, establish three pilot demonstration sites for restorative aquaculture, and convene a Restorative Aquaculture Advisory Council.

As a technical drafting matter, the bill does not specify whether the members of the advisory council are to serve without compensation, as recommended by the Hawaii Legislative Drafting Manual (item 10 on page 71).

Accordingly, we recommend adding a new subsection to section 4, beginning after page 15, line 2, as follows:

(c) The members of the restorative aquaculture advisory council shall serve without compensation but shall be reimbursed for expenses, including travel expenses, necessary for the performance of their duties.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR | KE KIA'ĀINA

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR | KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII'
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
KA 'OIHANA KUMUWAIWAI 'ĀINA

P.O. BOX 621
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DAWN N.S. CHANG
CHAIRPERSON
BOARD OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
COMMISSION ON WATER RESOURCE
MANAGEMENT

RYAN K.P. KANAKA'OLE
FIRST DEPUTY

CIARA W.K. KAHAHANE
DEPUTY DIRECTOR - WATER

AQUATIC RESOURCES
BOATING AND OCEAN RECREATION
BUREAU OF CONVEYANCES
COMMISSION ON WATER RESOURCE
MANAGEMENT
CONSERVATION AND COASTAL LANDS
CONSERVATION AND RESOURCES
ENFORCEMENT
ENGINEERING
FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE
HISTORIC PRESERVATION
KAHOOLAWE ISLAND RESERVE COMMISSION
LAND
STATE PARKS

Testimony of
RYAN K.P. KANAKA'OLE
Acting Chairperson

Before the House Committee on
AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

Friday, February 6, 2026
9:01 AM
State Capitol, Conference Room 325

In consideration of
HOUSE BILL 1572
RELATING TO AQUACULTURE DEVELOPMENT

House Bill 1572 proposes to require the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to: (1) Establish a four-year Restorative Aquaculture Development Program to reduce aquaculture permit processing time, support aquaculture infrastructure expansion, increase the aquaculture workforce, and pursue federal aquaculture grants; (2) Establish three pilot demonstration sites for restorative aquaculture; and (3) Convene a Restorative Aquaculture Advisory Council. It also requires reports to the Legislature and appropriates funds. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) appreciates the intent of this measure and provides the following comments.**

The Department has long implemented and supported restorative aquaculture work, including native species propagation, restoration of traditional aquaculture systems, and indigenous knowledge-based resource management through direct management, research, community partnerships, and technical assistance. To ensure effectiveness and continuity of ongoing efforts, any new programs or advisory councils established under this measure should complement existing departmental roles rather than duplicate or supplant them.

Regarding section 2 of the measure, the Department respectfully requests that implementation of a restorative aquaculture development program explicitly recognize and reinforce the Department's existing role, expertise, and leadership, while providing the

autonomy and resources necessary to continue this critical work for Hawai'i's cultural, ecological, and food security priorities.

Mahalo for the opportunity to comment on this measure.



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Agriculture & Food Systems
Friday, February 6, 2026, at 9:01 a.m.

By

Darren T. Lerner, PhD
Director, Sea Grant College Program,
School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology
and

Vassilis L. Syrmos, PhD
Interim Provost
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

HB 1572 – RELATING TO AQUACULTURE DEVELOPMENT.

Chair Chun, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i Sea Grant College Program (Hawai'i Sea Grant) supports HB 1572.

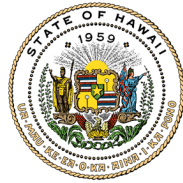
Aquaculture development is a vital step in improving Hawai'i food systems by increasing the amount of food grown in-State and reducing the dependency on food import. The establishment of an aquaculture restorative development program, as proposed, will increase the profitability and commercial output of Hawaii's aquaculture system, specifically through an advisory council that will pursue federal funds for aquaculture development, as well as through revitalization and novel creation of commercial aquaculture operation. This bill increases the capacity of the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to support commercial aquaculture development is an important step in both reversing the decreases in the State's aquaculture industry over the last decade, and expanding Hawai'i's food security.

Improvements of local agriculture, including through sustainable aquaculture development, are avenues to both retain and expand the local economy structures through aquaculture production, job creation, and economic viability analysis. The proposed bill will expand aquaculture Hawai'i through multiple means, thereby expanding agricultural profits. In doing so, at least 250 direct jobs in aquaculture and related value-chain sectors, thereby establishing career paths in emerging industries, especially in rural areas and underserved communities. Furthermore, over the last decade, aquaculture profits have declined, and the proposed bill has potential to reverse these profit margins by demonstrating economic viability of restorative aquaculture through production metrics, market development, and value-chain analysis supporting long-term private sector participation

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor



State of Hawai'i
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & BIOSECURITY
KA 'OIHANA MAHI'AI A KIA'I MEAOLA
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SHARON HURD
Chairperson
Board of Agriculture & Biosecurity

DEAN M. MATSUKAWA
Deputy to the Chairperson

**TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE AND BIOSECURITY**

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2026
9:01 AM
CONFERENCE ROOM 325**

**HOUSE BILL NO. 1572
RELATING TO AQUACULTURE DEVELOPMENT**

Chair Chun, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill No. 1572. The bill requires the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (DAB) to: (1) Establish a four-year Restorative Aquaculture Development Program to reduce aquaculture permit processing time, support aquaculture infrastructure expansion, increase the aquaculture workforce, and pursue federal aquaculture grants; (2) Establish three (3) pilot demonstration sites for restorative aquaculture; and (3) Convene a Restorative Aquaculture Advisory Council. Requires reports to the Legislature. It also appropriates funds. The DAB supports this measure.

HB1572 addresses Hawaii's critical food security challenge while delivering measurable environmental outcomes. Hawaii currently imports more than 90 percent of its seafood, creating vulnerability to supply chain disruptions. Restorative aquaculture, operations that demonstrably improve environmental conditions alongside food production, provides a direct pathway to increase local supply. The bill specifies quantified targets: restoration of 200 acres of coastal habitat, water quality improvement demonstrations at three (3) sites, and 2,500 tons of annual carbon dioxide sequestration by 2030. These are not aspirational goals, but operational metrics tied to federal monitoring protocols. Native species production, fish and seaweed, generates local food while supporting cultural restoration and ecosystem services that benefit all Hawaiian communities.

HB1572 creates 250 direct jobs and establishes workforce development infrastructure for Hawaii's blue economy. The bill prioritizes Native Hawaiian practitioners and small-scale producers by dedicating 25 percent of infrastructure and

workforce funding to these communities, removing long-standing barriers to participation. Shared hatchery facilities, aggregation infrastructure, and coordinated permitting reduce capital and regulatory barriers that currently prevent commercial operations from reaching scale. Apprenticeship and training programs ensure accessible career pathways in rural communities where economic opportunity is limited. The \$10 million federal grant strategy leverages outside investment without proportional state budget exposure, multiplying the impact of appropriated resources.

Federal recognition of Hawaii's restorative aquaculture potential demonstrates market validation and funding partnership. In January 2026, Congress appropriated \$500,000 directly to the Hawaii DAB for a regenerative aquaculture feasibility study - explicitly validating the ADP's strategic direction and the policy framework in this bill. This federal earmark was part of a broader \$5.275 million aquaculture and marine resource investment package, signaling bipartisan federal commitment to Hawaii aquaculture development. HB1572 operationalizes this federal support through specific performance objectives: reducing permit processing to 12-15 months, establishing 25 new operations, restoring 15 traditional fishponds, and pursuing additional competitive federal grants from NOAA, USDA, NSF, and the Department of Energy. Independent third-party evaluation by December 2027 ensures program effectiveness and accountability. The restorative aquaculture advisory council, comprising industry operators, environmental experts, Hawaiian practitioners, research institutions, and government agencies, provides transparent governance preventing the permitting delays and inter-agency conflicts that have historically undermined Hawaii's aquaculture ventures. This bill demonstrates professional program management, rigorous evaluation, and strategic federal partnership aligned with national aquaculture development priorities.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF THE HAWAII' AQUACULTURE & AQUAPONICS ASSOCIATION
COMMENTING ON HB 1572

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

The Hawai'i Aquaculture & Aquaponics Association (HAAA) offers comments on HB 1572

HAAA represents commercial, restorative, research, and community-based aquaculture operations across the State. Our members include finfish, shellfish, seaweed, hatcheries, aquaponics, and emerging ocean-based systems. We support responsible growth of Hawai'i's aquaculture sector in all its forms.

We first want to correct the historical production data referenced in the findings section of the bill. The preamble states that aquaculture production peaked in 2018 and has declined since that time. Published State statistics show that production exceeded 2018 levels in 2019, 2021, and 2022, with 2022 representing the highest recorded value at approximately \$89.6 million. More recent data indicate a decline, with reported production of approximately \$53 million in 2024, but the statement that 2018 was the peak year is not accurate. We respectfully request that the findings be amended to reflect the correct historical record.

HAAA supports the development of restorative aquaculture in Hawai'i. Seaweed cultivation, shellfish production, and other ecosystem-based approaches can provide environmental benefits while contributing to local food systems and economic activity.

However, the bill states that the program shall prioritize restorative aquaculture operations over nonrestorative commercial aquaculture. We are concerned that this language creates an unnecessary division within the industry and may unintentionally disadvantage existing commercial producers. Commercial aquaculture operations in Hawai'i contribute to food production, employment, technology development, workforce training, and tax revenue. Many also provide environmental benefits and operate under strict regulatory oversight.

If the goal is to restore and grow Hawai'i's aquaculture industry, we must recognize that commercial aquaculture is not only an economic driver, but a critical contributor to local food production and food security. Prioritizing one segment at the exclusion of another risks limiting both economic growth and our ability to produce fresh, locally raised seafood for Hawai'i's residents. A balanced approach that supports restorative aquaculture while also strengthening commercial production, innovation, and workforce development will generate greater overall impact. Funds made available under Act 96, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2025 should support the full spectrum of responsible aquaculture activities across the State.

HAAA respectfully requests that the Legislature correct the production data in the findings section and amend the language that prioritizes one sector over another. Restorative and

commercial aquaculture are not competing concepts. They are complementary parts of a resilient and diversified aquaculture industry for Hawai'i.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

Hawai'i Aquaculture & Aquaponics Association



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February 6, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

TESTIMONY ON HB 1572
RELATING TO AQUACULTURE DEVELOPMENT

Conference Room 325 & Videoconference
9:01 AM

Aloha Chair Chun, Vice-Chair Kusch, and Members of the Committee:

I am Brian Miyamoto, Executive Director of the Hawai'i Farm Bureau (HFB). Organized since 1948, the HFB is comprised of 1,800 farm family members statewide and serves as Hawai'i's voice of agriculture to protect, advocate, and advance the social, economic, and educational interests of our diverse agricultural community.

The Hawai'i Farm Bureau provides comments on HB 1572.

Hawai'i's aquaculture sector is an important part of the State's agricultural economy and food system. Our favorable climate, geographic isolation, and strong local demand for seafood position Hawai'i well to support a range of aquaculture activities, including innovative and restorative approaches that can contribute to food production, environmental stewardship, and economic development.

We have previously supported legislative efforts to explore and expand restorative aquaculture, including research and pilot projects examining seaweed and shellfish production, water-quality benefits, and ecosystem services. These approaches can complement broader aquaculture production and help diversify opportunities within the industry.

At the same time, it is important that efforts to expand restorative aquaculture are implemented in a way that strengthens the overall aquaculture sector. However, the bill's directive to prioritize restorative aquaculture over other forms of commercial aquaculture raises some concern that, if not implemented carefully, it could unintentionally create divisions within the industry or disadvantage existing producers who are contributing to local food production.

Hawaii's aquaculture industry includes a wide range of operations, which include commercial producers, small-scale farms, research facilities, and community-based systems, all of which contribute to local food production, employment, and innovation. A balanced approach that supports multiple production models will help ensure long-term success.

HB 1572 represents an opportunity to invest in aquaculture research, infrastructure, and coordination at a time when the State is seeking to grow local food production, diversify the economy, and improve resilience. As this measure moves forward, we encourage continued coordination with producers and industry stakeholders to ensure the program supports practical implementation and complements existing operations.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this measure.

Officers

Kaipo Kekona
State President



Christian Zuckerman
Vice-President

Maureen Datta
Secretary

Reba Lopez
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Chapter Presidents

Kelii Gannet
Kohala, Hawai'i

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Gina Lind
Hāna, Maui

Mason Scharer
Haleakalā, Maui

Kaiea Medeiros
Mauna Kahālāwai,
Maui

Kaipo Kekona
Lahaina, Maui

Kilia Avelino-Purdy
Moloka'i

Negus Manna
Lāna'i

India Clark
North Shore, O'ahu

Christian Zuckerman
Wai'anae, O'ahu

Rachel LaDrig
Waimānalo, O'ahu

Vincent Kimura
Honolulu, O'ahu

Natalie Urminka
Kaua'i

Aloha Chair Chun, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the House Agriculture & Food Systems Committee,

The Hawai'i Farmers Union is a 501(c)(5) agricultural advocacy nonprofit representing a network of over 2,500 family farmers and their supporters across the Hawaiian Islands. **HFU supports HB1572.**

HB1572 proposes a comprehensive framework to invigorate Hawaii's aquaculture industry through a focus on restorative practices that enhance ecosystem services, emphasize indigenous methodologies, and support local food systems.

By investing in infrastructure and workforce development, this bill pivots Hawaii away from extractive industrial models and toward restorative aquaculture that provides measurable ecosystem services and local food.

The emphasis on reducing permit processing times, expanding infrastructure, and building aquaculture workforce aligns with creating sustainable local economies. However, specific details on streamlining the permitting process should incorporate feedback from stakeholders to avoid bureaucratic delays.

Prioritizing traditional systems such as loko i'a supports cultural preservation and sustainable agricultural practices. Ensuring that funding and resources are properly allocated to these areas is crucial for authentic implementation.

HB1572 represents a meaningful step towards revitalizing Hawaii's aquaculture, helping transform Hawaii's blue economy from a conceptual goal into an economically viable reality.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Hunter Heavilin
Advocacy Director
Hawai'i Farmers Union



HAWAI'I

FOOD+
POLICY

Honolulu, HI 96813
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LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

LATE

February, 2026

To: Chair Cory Chun, Vice Chair Matthias Kusch and the House Committee on Agriculture and Food Systems

Subject: **HB1572**, Relating to Aquaculture Development

Aloha,

I am writing in support of HB1572. This bill works to establish a four-year Restorative Aquaculture Development Program in order to help work through an array of challenges like aquaculture permit processing time, aquaculture infrastructure, workforce, and help to pursue federal grants. It will also help to establish three pilot demonstration sites for restorative aquaculture and convene a Restorative Aquaculture Advisory Council which requires reports to the legislature.

Restorative aquaculture is an underutilized and under supported sustainable resource for the state in many ways. Aquaculture has the potential to provide a source of food and medicine while supporting restoration of the ecosystem and sequestration of carbon, combating climate exchange and providing social and economic opportunities to the public. Seaweed is a primary producer and therefore all other forms of life are reliant upon their survival including humans. In addition, this program has the potential to support the cultural connection to Native Hawaiians and Native limu species.

In order to acquire the many benefits of aquaculture we must first invest in appropriate programs and infrastructure development. The state should set aside appropriate funds to support sustainable infrastructure and cultural revitalization.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to pass HB1572. Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Mahalo,

Carlin McFadden & the Food+ Policy Team

#fixourfoodsystem

The Food+ Policy internship develops student advocates who learn work skills while increasing civic engagement to become emerging leaders. We focus on good food systems policy because we see the importance and potential of the food system in combating climate change and increasing the health, equity, and resiliency of Hawai'i communities.

In 2026, the cohort of interns are undergraduate and graduate students and young professionals working in the food system. They are a mix of traditional and nontraditional students, including parents and veterans, who have backgrounds in education, farming, public health, nutrition, and Hawaiian culture.

Cindy Freitas

makainanqi@gmail.com

TESTIMONY IN STRONG OPPOSITION

HB 1572 (2026) – Relating to Aquaculture Development

He Mele komo a he mele aloha no na kupuna o ke au i hala Aloha mai kakou.

Aloha,

My name is Cindy Freitas and I'm a Native Hawaiian descended of the native inhabitants of Hawai'i prior to 1778 and born and raised in Hawai'i.

I am also a practitioner who still practice the cultural traditional customary practices that was instill in me by my grandparents at a young age from mauka (MOUNTAIN TO SEA) to makai in many areas.

I submit this testimony in **STRONG OPPOSITION** to **HB 1572**.

While the bill is presented as a restorative and climate-positive aquaculture initiative, it **expands coastal and marine development without including the legal, environmental, cultural, and public-trust safeguards required under Hawai'i law**. The problem is not the concept of aquaculture the problem is **what this bill leaves out**.

1. No Environmental Review Safeguards

HB 1572 prioritizes reducing permit processing time and establishing aquaculture development zones, yet it **does not explicitly require compliance with HRS Chapter 343 environmental review**, nor does it address cumulative impacts across multiple sites statewide.

Streamlining permits without clear environmental guardrails invites shortcutting, litigation, and irreversible harm to nearshore ecosystems.

2. No Public Trust Findings or Protections

Nearshore waters are **public trust resources** under the Hawai'i Constitution. HB 1572 authorizes expanded aquaculture infrastructure and use of coastal waters **without any findings that these uses serve the public trust**, and without balancing competing trust uses such as fishing, navigation, and customary practices.

This is a constitutional omission.

3. No Mandatory Cultural Impact Assessments

Although the bill references Native Hawaiian systems, loko i'a, and traditional practices, it **does not require Cultural Impact Assessments**, lineal descendant consultation, or enforceable protections for customary and traditional rights.

Advisory councils are not a substitute for constitutionally required cultural review.

4. No County Consent or Veto Authority

HB 1572 centralizes decision-making at the state level while **excluding counties from having consent, veto, or appeal authority** over site selection, development zones, or infrastructure placement.

Counties are responsible for coastal infrastructure, emergency response, and land-use compatibility—yet they bear impacts without control.

5. No Biosecurity or Disease Containment Framework

The bill expands aquaculture operations but **fails to establish mandatory biosecurity standards, disease-response protocols, or shutdown authority** if outbreaks occur.

This omission puts wild fisheries, subsistence practices, and fragile ecosystems at serious risk.

6. No Liability or Indemnification Provisions

HB 1572 does not clarify:

- Who is liable for environmental damage
- Who pays for cleanup or restoration
- Whether bonding or financial assurances are required

Risk is shifted to the public, while benefits accrue to private operators.

7. No Meaningful Community Consent or Due Process

The bill relies on advisory councils and reporting, but **does not require public hearings tied to site selection, contested case rights, or community consent**.

Communities most affected by aquaculture siting are given no enforceable role in decision-making.

8. No Limits on Scale, Density, or Cumulative Footprint

HB 1572 sets development targets but **places no upper limits on density, clustering, or cumulative impacts** within embayments or regions.

Expansion is incentivized without brakes.

9. No Long-Term Sustainability or Exit Plan

The program sunsets in 2030, yet the bill **does not address what happens to infrastructure, operations, or communities afterward**, especially if anticipated federal funding does not materialize.

This risks stranded projects and long-term liabilities.

10. No Independent Enforcement Authority

HB 1572 emphasizes reporting and evaluation but **contains no enforcement mechanism** to halt, revoke, or penalize projects that cause harm or fail to meet standards.

Reporting without enforcement is not accountability.

Conclusion: STRONG OPPOSE

HB 1572 accelerates aquaculture development while omitting:

- Environmental review safeguards
- Public trust analysis
- Cultural impact protections
- County consent
- Biosecurity and liability frameworks
- Meaningful public process
- Limits on scale and cumulative impact

These are not minor gaps they are **structural and constitutional deficiencies**.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to **STRONGLY OPPOSE HB 1572**.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Mahalo

Cindy Freitas

HB-1572

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 1:16:42 PM

Testimony for AGR on 2/6/2026 9:01:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Glen Kagamida	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

SUPPORT

HB-1572

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 7:39:24 AM

Testimony for AGR on 2/6/2026 9:01:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Johnnie-Mae L. Perry	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry Support

1572 HB RELATING TO AQUACULTURE DEVELOPMENT.

LATE

HB-1572

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 8:47:53 PM

Testimony for AGR on 2/6/2026 9:01:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dee Green	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support HB1572.

This bill helps rebuild Hawai‘i’s aquaculture industry by supporting restorative practices that improve ocean health, strengthen local food production, and create jobs. It prioritizes native species, traditional fishponds, and Native Hawaiian practitioners.

This is a practical, balanced step toward food security, climate resilience, and community-based stewardship.

I urge you to pass HB1572.