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GOVERNOR | KE KIA'ĀINA

SYLVIA LUKE  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR | KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



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

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RYAN K.P. KANAKA'OLE  
FIRST DEPUTY

CIARA W.K. KAHAHANE  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR - WATER

AQUATIC RESOURCES  
BOATING AND OCEAN RECREATION  
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HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
KAHOOLAWE ISLAND RESERVE COMMISSION  
LAND  
STATE PARKS

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

Before the House Committee on  
FINANCE

Tuesday, March 3, 2026  
10:00 AM  
State Capitol, Conference Room 308

In consideration of  
HOUSE BILL 2599, HOUSE DRAFT 1  
RELATING TO AQUATIC PROTECTION

House Bill 2599, House Draft 1 proposes to require the Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR) of the Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) to manage the aquatic life and aquatic resources of the State, giving the highest priority to protecting, restoring, and maintaining ecosystem integrity and use the best scientific data available. It would also require DAR to set goals to substantially increase coral-reef resilience around O'ahu and to develop a framework to meet those goals, with annual reports to the Legislature. **The Department supports this bill and offers the following comments.**

Coral reef ecosystems statewide, and particularly on O'ahu, have experienced significant degradation due to long-term, cumulative impacts from multiple sources, including coastal development, watershed degradation, recreational and commercial overuse, invasive species, fishing pressure, and warming ocean temperatures. While halting or reversing this decline can seem daunting—especially given global climate stressors—coral reef ecosystems are inherently resilient, and evidence shows they can recover when adverse impacts are reduced. In most cases, however, there is no single solution. Threats to ecosystem health vary by location, and identifying the most effective management actions requires a careful understanding of local ecosystem drivers and dynamics. To support this, managers must rely on the best available science, integrating both western scientific approaches and local ecological knowledge.

DAR understands the importance of ecosystem-based management, as well as the importance of involving local resource users, and has developed a wholistic nearshore

management strategy called the Holomua Marine Initiative (Holomua). Holomua, which in the Hawaiʻian language means “to progress and move forward into the future,” brings local fishers, cultural practitioners, and community representatives together with scientists and resource managers to collaboratively develop island-scale management actions aimed at improving the health of nearshore resources. Importantly, these actions extend beyond fishing regulations to address other key drivers of ecosystem integrity, including water quality and quantity, land-based sources of pollution, commercial and recreational use, and degraded habitats. Addressing these issues requires coordination across multiple agencies and authorities and depends on strong partnerships to achieve shared goals for nearshore ecosystem health and coral reef resilience.

Holomua was first launched on Maui in October 2022 as a pilot management planning process. The Maui planning team is currently finalizing its proposed management plan and draft rules for Maui, and DAR will be launching the Holomua process on Hawaiʻi island this summer. It may be another two years before the Holomua process is launched on Oʻahu.

The requirement for DAR, by July 1, 2027, to publish goals to increase coral reef resilience on Oʻahu by December 2030 and to create a framework for meeting these goals is ambitious, but it would help expedite the Holomua management planning process when it comes Oʻahu. Temporary rulemaking authority could also be a useful tool for DAR to implement expedited management actions if deemed appropriate. The Department appreciates the requirement to include recommendations for additional funding, positions, and legislation in each annual report and hopes the Legislature will provide the necessary support for DAR’s Holomua efforts.

Mahalo for the opportunity to comment on this measure.

# HAWAI'I OCEAN LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE



March 3, 2026

Hawai'i State Legislature  
House Committee on Finance

Re: Testimony in **STRONG SUPPORT** for HB 2599 HD1, Relating to Aquatic Protection

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and esteemed members of the committee,

The Ocean Legislative Task Force—a coalition of more than 150 individuals across over 20 organizations statewide—**strongly supports** HB 2599 HD1, relating to aquatic protection. This measure requires the Division of Aquatic Resources within the Department of Land and Natural Resources to prioritize ecosystem integrity in managing Hawai'i's aquatic resources, use the best available science, and establish coral-reef resilience goals for O'ahu with a framework and annual reports to the Legislature.

Healthy coral reefs and nearshore ecosystems are vital to Hawai'i's cultural heritage, food security, shoreline protection, and economy. Yet our reefs continue to face unprecedented threats from climate change, pollution, invasive species, and unsustainable use. HB 2599 HD1 provides a long-overdue statutory directive that elevates the protection, restoration, and maintenance of ecosystem integrity to the highest priority in aquatic resource management.

By centering the use of the best available scientific data and requiring measurable coral-reef resilience goals and a clear implementation framework, this measure will improve transparency, accountability, and effectiveness in state aquatic management. Annual reporting to the Legislature will ensure ongoing evaluation of progress and adaptive decision-making grounded in the latest science.

For kanaka maoli and visitor ocean users alike, healthy reefs are not optional—they are essential. HB 2599 HD1 strengthens the State's ability to steward these irreplaceable ecosystems, protect reef-dependent species, and safeguard the ecological services that sustain island communities.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in strong support of HB 2599 HD1.

*The Hawai'i Ocean Legislative Task Force advocates for measures that advance cesspool conversion and wastewater management, protect Hawai'i's coral reefs and reef fish, ensure transparent and sustainable implementation of the Green Fee program and long-term environmental staffing, and support other measures that strengthen Hawai'i's coastal and marine ecosystems.*

**HB-2599-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/27/2026 3:04:09 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 10:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Cathy Goeggel	Animal Rights Hawai'i	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

We are in strong support. Mahalo.

**HB-2599-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 2:34:31 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 10:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Jenny Yagodich	Malama Pūpūkea-Waimea	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

SUPPORT for HB2599 HD1

Aloha,

This bill takes an important step by prioritizing ecosystem health and resilience, using science and long-term planning to guide management. Strengthening reef resilience will help our nearshore environments better withstand climate change, pollution, and other stressors, while supporting natural recovery rather than continued decline.

Mahalo,

Jenny Yagodich, Director of Educational Programs & Makai Watch Coordinator, Mālama Pūpūkea-Waimea



## HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

March 3, 2026

10:00 AM

Conference Room 308

### In **SUPPORT** of **HB2599 HD1**: RELATING TO AQUATIC PROTECTION

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Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of our more than 20,000 members and supporters, the Sierra Club of Hawai'i **SUPPORTS** HB2599 HD1, which provides the Department of Land and Natural Resources' Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR) with much-needed direction in its mission to uphold the public trust in our nearshore resources.

Hawai'i's nearshore ecosystems - particularly around O'ahu - are experiencing rapid declines driven by land-based pollution, climate-driven bleaching, sedimentation, invasive species, and cumulative overuse. These declines have had and will continue to have a significant and growing impact on the vast public interest in our ocean waters. The coral reefs and ecosystems we are witnessing being degraded are essential to our cultural and ecological integrity, food security, climate resilience, and economy, including by supporting subsistence and nearshore fisheries, protecting shorelines from erosion and sea-level rise, maintaining biodiversity and habitat integrity, and sustaining recreation and tourism. Without intervention, many of O'ahu's impaired reef ecosystems will continue to degrade or collapse in the coming decades, to the significant detriment of present and future generations.

Unfortunately, despite the public trust's mandate that our natural and cultural resources be proactively protected for both present and future generations, and not "passively allow[ed] to fall into ruin,"<sup>1</sup> DAR does not appear to have a consistent and coordinated plan to address the pronounced and ongoing declines in O'ahu's nearshore resources. For example, despite its stated commitment to supporting marine resource management through community collaboration, DAR has instead dedicated significant amounts of its very limited staff time and resources to develop proposed regulations for the reopening of the aquarium collection industry – an industry and a proposal that has been strongly and continuously opposed by the very communities it is purporting to partner with.

HB2599 HD1 accordingly provides DAR with a much-needed vision and direction for its future work, by:

1. Prioritizing ecosystem integrity in the management of Hawai'i's aquatic resources;
2. Requiring DAR to use the best available science to guide decisions; and
3. Establishing clear coral-reef resilience goals for O'ahu, supported by a framework and annual progress reports to the Legislature.

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<sup>1</sup> Ching v. Case, 449 P.3d 1146 (Hawai'i 2019).



This mandate aligns with modern ecosystem-based management approaches and provides needed structure for DAR's long-term resilience planning.

Importantly, HB2599 HD1 does not impose new rules or restrictions on fishers and other ocean users, does not mandate closures or create enforcement requirements, and does not require appropriations this fiscal year. This bill simply clarifies DAR's priorities, encourages improved coordination, and provides for greater transparency and accountability in its fulfillment of the public trust, without creating unfunded mandates or regulatory burdens. While primarily focused on O'ahu, where the situation has grown particularly dire, this measure could create replicable strategies that can also benefit our neighbor islands – hopefully, before they experience similar levels of degradation and decline.

Hawai'i must take proactive steps now to preserve our nearshore ecosystem systems for future generations. HB2599 HD1 supports that goal by ensuring DAR has a clear, science-guided directive and a transparent reporting structure that may benefit the public for decades to come. For these reasons, the Sierra Club of Hawai'i respectfully urges the Committee to **PASS** HB2599 HD1.

Mahalo for your consideration and for your commitment to Hawai'i's marine resources.

**HB-2599-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 7:03:21 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 10:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Ted Bohlen	Hawaii Reef and Ocean Coalition	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

STRONG SUPPORT!

**HB-2599-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/28/2026 7:44:41 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 10:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Douglas Perrine	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I believe HB2599 provides an excellent framework for management of the marine environment. By all accounts the nearshore environment around Oahu is sorely degraded, so I support HB2599 to expedite improved management of this precious resource.

**HB-2599-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 12:49:49 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
William Caron	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in **strong support** of HB2599, a critical measure that would reorient the management priorities of the Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR) toward protecting, restoring, and maintaining ecosystem integrity, with a specific focus on substantially increasing coral reef resilience around O‘ahu.

**Why Is This Important?**

Our coral reefs are the rainforests of the sea. They sustain marine life, protect our shorelines from wave erosion, support our local fishing and tourism economies, and hold profound cultural significance for our communities. Yet these vital ecosystems are under unprecedented threat from climate change, ocean acidification, land-based pollution, and physical damage. The time for passive management is over. We need active, science-driven restoration and a clear commitment to ecosystem health.

HB2599 does two essential things.

**First, it establishes a clear and binding management priority.** The bill requires DAR to manage aquatic life and aquatic resources giving the **highest priority to protecting, restoring, and maintaining ecosystem integrity** and to use the **best scientific data available** in doing so. This may seem like common sense, but it represents a fundamental shift.

Too often, management decisions have been reactive, piecemeal, or balanced against extractive interests without a clear statutory mandate to prioritize the health of the ecosystem itself. This bill provides that mandate. It says that when decisions are made about our aquatic resources, the primary question must be: what is best for the long-term health and resilience of the ecosystem?

**Second, it sets a specific, actionable goal for O‘ahu.** The bill requires DAR to set goals to substantially increase coral reef resilience around O‘ahu and to develop a framework to meet those goals, with annual reports to the Legislature. This is not an abstract aspiration; it is a concrete directive. It recognizes that O‘ahu's reefs—facing intense pressure from urbanization, recreational use, and runoff—require targeted, measurable action. And by requiring annual reporting, the bill ensures transparency and accountability. The Legislature and the public will be able to track progress, or the lack thereof, and hold DAR accountable for results.

## **The Science Supports This Approach**

Recent research underscores both the urgency and the feasibility of active reef restoration. Studies on Hawaiian reefs have documented challenges such as juvenile corals settling on unstable rubble, which inhibits their survival. Destabilized substrate, often caused by storms or physical damage, can prevent reef recovery even when coral larvae are present. This highlights the need for active interventions—substrate stabilization, herbivore protection, and other science-based restoration techniques—to complement natural recovery processes.

HB2599 positions DAR to lead in this work. By requiring the use of the best scientific data available, the bill ensures that management decisions and restoration goals are grounded in evidence, not guesswork. And by focusing on ecosystem integrity, it moves beyond a narrow species-by-species approach to a holistic vision of reef health.

## **Herbivores Matter**

While the bill's text as summarized focuses broadly on ecosystem integrity and coral resilience, we know from years of scientific study that herbivorous fishes—like parrotfish and surgeonfish—play a critical role in reef health. They graze on algae that would otherwise overgrow and smother corals. Protecting and restoring herbivore populations is one of the most effective strategies for building coral reef resilience. HB2599's ecosystem integrity mandate should be interpreted to include robust protection for these vital species.

## **Accountability and Transparency**

The annual reporting requirement is a key feature of this bill. It ensures that the goals set by DAR are not just filed away and forgotten. Each year, the Legislature and the public will receive an update: What goals were set? What progress has been made? What obstacles have arisen? What adjustments are needed? This creates a continuous feedback loop of planning, action, evaluation, and improvement.

## **A Commitment to Future Generations**

Our keiki and their keiki deserve to inherit healthy, thriving reefs. They deserve to know the wonder of swimming above a living coral garden, not a graveyard of rubble. HB2599 is a commitment to them. It says that we will not stand by while our reefs decline; we will act, we will prioritize, and we will measure our progress.

I urge this committee to pass HB2599 and give DAR the clear mandate and direction it needs to protect, restore, and maintain the health of our coral reefs for generations to come.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of FIN,

I am the Hsiao Endowed Professor of Marine Biology at UH Mānoa, testifying as a private citizen in **conditional support of HB2599-SD1**. I have studied Hawai'i's coral reefs since the 1970s, so I have personally witnessed the degradation of our reefs over the decades. It is truly sad that some fishers and members of state agencies are in denial regarding the need for immediate action to restore our reefs and fisheries. Overwhelming data in peer-reviewed scientific journals and the consensus of the marine science community is that many Hawaiian coral reef ecosystems have collapsed or are very close to collapse, especially around O'ahu. Fortunately, abundant data also show that local actions can strongly enhance the ecological resilience (recovery and resistance) of our reefs, even in the face of ever-worsening ocean warming and coral bleaching. Unfortunately, after decades of neglect, the absence of immediate and substantial remedial action is now a major issue that must be faced. Our reefs simply cannot wait 3-5 years for the Holomua Marine Initiative to play-out on O'ahu.

I believe HB2599-SD1 is a step in the right direction for saving our coral reefs if and only if the following sentence in the bill is truly implemented (emphasis of key words added): "The legislature further finds that *immediate action* is needed to protect and restore coral reefs around the State and especially around the island of O'ahu." I fear that the details of this bill will allow DAR to continue to delay meaningful action. This is why I hope the committee will choose to amend this bill to include explicit benchmarks, similar to the approach taken by SB3201-SD1, yet with more realistic targets and timelines as detailed below in my appended testimony on that bill. An example of much needed immediate action for Oahu is SB2972-SD1, which would begin replenishment of key fish populations that allow corals to flourish.

Please, Hawaii's coral reefs are suffering terribly, especially around Oahu, and they will continue to degrade unless immediate remedial action is taken, especially with the ever-warming ocean causing increased coral bleaching. We can no longer afford to wait years for the Holomua Marine Initiative to finally be implemented on Oahu.

Mahalo for your consideration,



Mark Hixon

appended: testimony in conditional support of SB3201-SD1

## APPENDIX

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of WAM,

I am the Hsiao Endowed Professor of Marine Biology at UH Mānoa, testifying as a private citizen in **conditional support of SB3201-SD1**. I have studied Hawai'i's coral reefs since the 1970s, so I have personally witnessed the degradation of our reefs over the decades. It is truly sad that some fishers and members of state agencies are in denial regarding the need for immediate action to restore our reefs and fisheries. Overwhelming data in peer-reviewed scientific journals and the consensus of the marine science community is that many Hawaiian coral reef ecosystems have collapsed or are very close to collapse, especially around O'ahu. Fortunately, abundant data also show that local actions can strongly enhance the ecological resilience (recovery and resistance) of our reefs, even in the face of ever-worsening ocean warming and coral bleaching. Unfortunately, after decades of neglect, the absence of immediate and substantial remedial action is now a major issue that must be faced. Our reefs simply cannot wait another 3-5 years for the Holomua Marine Initiative to play-out on O'ahu.

If target percentages are re-inserted and realistic timelines established, then SB3201-SD1 would address the present lack of immediate strong action to save our coral reefs by establishing explicit benchmarks and schedules for remedial regulations. Here are my recommended amendments based on peer-reviewed scientific studies:

- In Section 2(a), the species that must be increased in abundance to enhance reef recovery are not every indigenous species, as presently worded, but rather the herbivorous fishes that keep reef surfaces clean of benthic algae so corals can settle, survive, and grow. These critically important and often depleted fishes include the parrotfishes (uhu, Family Scaridae), certain surgeonfishes (especially kala, Family Acanthuridae), and chubs (nenu, Family Kyphosidae). SB2972-SD1 is an example of such immediate remedial action. Regarding target abundances for herbivorous fishes, the best available science indicates that these species must be at a density of about 30-40 grams of fish per square meter of reef to enhance coral growth. O'ahu, for example, presently has an herbivore density of less than 10 grams per square meter. Note that percentages of unfished biomass are not realistic targets because of a lack of relevant data for most species.
- Regarding Section 2(b), the goal of increasing live coral cover to 25% would certainly increase the productivity and resilience of our reefs, yet given that the average statewide is about 15% live coral cover, and the fact that our corals grow slowly, this goal will take many years to accomplish. A realistic timeline is on the order of decades, not years.
- I believe Section 5(3) "to increase the density of all other indigenous species not otherwise specified" by some percentage is unrealistic because we will never have sufficient population dynamics data for all species.

I imagine you will hear the opposition berating this bill for trampling on traditional fishing rights, destroying commercial fishing, and being based on worthless data by clueless scientists and erroneous assertions by alarmist environmentalists. I have witnessed this scenario play-out elsewhere in the world multiple times. In all cases, ignoring the science resulted in collapsed fisheries and ecosystems, some of which will never recover. I urge you to pass this bill with realistic amendments and lobby for its passage into law. Our keiki will never forgive us if we simply let our reefs die.

Mahalo for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Hixon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Mark Hixon

**HB-2599-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 9:34:31 AM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 10:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Carrie Ostroski	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chairs, Vice Chairs and members of the Committee on Finance,

I write in support of HB2599 relating to aquatic protection. This is important to not only to protect and preserve vital nearshore and reef efforts for restoration and resilience already underway, but also to perpetuate informed decisions, set goals to increase coral-reef resilience, and increase reliable information and accountability.

Mahalo for your work and support of HB2599.

Carrie Ostroski

Waikoloa, cwostroski@gmail.com

**HB-2599-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/3/2026 7:53:20 AM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 10:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Hannah Rozendo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and valued Members of the Committee,

My name is Hannah Rozendo, and I respectfully submit testimony in strong support of HB2599, HD1. While I am a marine ecologist professionally, this testimony is personal and not representative of my employer.

From both a scientific and place-based perspective, healthy coral reef ecosystems are foundational to Hawaii’s environmental resilience, food security, shoreline protection, and cultural continuity. Reefs around Oahu are facing amplified stress from pollution, human overuse and misuse, and climate change impacts. Without clear, measurable management goals and sustained accountability for DAR, reef decline will continue.

HB2599 HD1 takes an important step by directing DAR to prioritize ecosystem health, establish measurable reef resilience goals by 2030, and report regularly on progress. Grounding management decisions in the best available science and requiring transparency will strengthen long-term outcomes.

As a marine ecologist, I strongly support this proactive and science-based approach to aquatic resource management. Protecting and restoring reef systems today is essential for the well-being of future generations.

Please pass this important measure. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support. Aloha,  
Hannah