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Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor



SHARON HURD
Chairperson
Board of Agriculture & Biosecurity

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State of Hawai'i
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**TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE AND BIOSECURITY**

**BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT AND
THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM**

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2026
3:00 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 224**

**SENATE BILL NO. 2349
RELATING TO AQUACULTURE DEVELOPMENT**

Chairs Gabbard and DeCoite, Vice Chairs Richards and Wakai, and Members of the Committees:

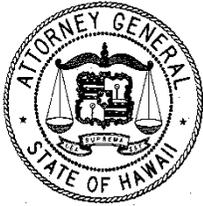
Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill No. 2349. The bill requires the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (DAB) to: (1) Establish a four-year Restorative Aquaculture Development Program to reduce aquaculture permit processing time, support aquaculture infrastructure expansion, 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.

SB2349 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.

SB2349 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 Department of Agriculture 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. SB2349 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.



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

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:

S.B. NO. 2349, RELATING TO AQUACULTURE DEVELOPMENT.

BEFORE THE:

SENATE COMMITTEES ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT AND ON
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

DATE: Friday, February 6, 2026

TIME: 3:00 p.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 224

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

Chairs Gabbard and DeCoite and Members of the Committees:

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.



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment
and
Senate Committee on Economic Development and Tourism
Friday, February 6, 2026, at 3:00 p.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

SB 2349 – RELATING TO AQUACULTURE DEVELOPMENT.

Chairs Gabbard and DeCoite, Vice Chairs Richards and Wakai, and Members of the Committees:

The University of Hawai'i Sea Grant College Program (Hawai'i Sea Grant) supports SB 2349.

Aquaculture development is a vital step in improving Hawai'i's food systems by increasing the amount of food grown in-State and reducing the dependency on food imports. The establishment of an aquaculture restorative development program, as proposed, will increase the profitability and commercial output of Hawai'i's aquaculture system, specifically through an advisory council that will pursue federal funding for aquaculture development, as well as through revitalization and novel creation of commercial aquaculture operations. 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.



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e-mail info@hfbf.org; www.hfbf.org

February 6, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

TESTIMONY ON SB 2349
RELATING TO AQUACULTURE DEVELOPMENT

Conference Room 224 & Videoconference
3:00 PM

Aloha Chairs Gabbard and DeCoite, Vice-Chairs Richards and Wakai, and Members of the Committees:

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 SB 2459.

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.

Hawai'i'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.

SB 2349 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.



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Aloha Chairs Gabbard & DeCoite, Vice Chairs Richards & Wakai, and Committee Members,

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 SB2349.**

SB2349 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.

SB2349 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

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF THE HAWAI'I AQUACULTURE & AQUAPONICS ASSOCIATION
COMMENTING ON SB 2349

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

The Hawai'i Aquaculture & Aquaponics Association (HAAA) offers comments on SB 2349

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



02/05/2026

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

Subject: Testimony in Support of HB2459, Relating to the Food and Product Innovation Network

Aloha,

We are in strong support of SB2349, which would establish a four-year Restorative Aquaculture Development Program through the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity. This bill also calls for pilot demonstration sites, the creation of a Restorative Aquaculture Advisory Council, and requires reporting to the Legislature — all of which are essential steps toward responsibly growing Hawai'i's aquaculture sector.

Unlike many terrestrial agricultural products, aquaculture crops can be grown locally year-round and provide high-quality, nutritious protein for our families and communities which presents a perfect opportunity to increase self-reliance and reduce food insecurity on the island.

Despite these opportunities, the aquaculture sector in Hawai'i continues to face significant barriers that slow growth and limit local production. One of the biggest challenges is the lengthy and complex permitting processes required to establish or expand aquaculture facilities. Permit timelines that stretch multiple years increase project costs, discourage investment, and reduce Hawai'i's competitiveness relative to other states and regions. SB2349 directly addresses this barrier by streamlining permit processing and investing in workforce training and infrastructure support.

SB2349 positions Hawai'i to seize these opportunities by investing in the infrastructure, workforce, and coordinated planning necessary for responsible growth. It presents the right balance between supporting industry innovation and protecting our precious natural resources.

For the health of our communities, the resilience of our local food system, and the futures of those seeking careers in agriculture and aquaculture, we respectfully urge the Committee to support SB2349.

Mahalo nui loa for your time and consideration,
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.

SB-2349

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 1:19:50 PM

Testimony for AEN on 2/6/2026 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

SUPPORT

SB-2349

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 11:55:47 AM

Testimony for AEN on 2/6/2026 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry Support

2349 SB RELATING TO AQUACULTURE DEVELOPMENT.