

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

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

Before the House Committee on  
JUDICIARY & HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

Thursday, April 2, 2026  
2:00 PM  
State Capitol, Conference Room 325

In consideration of  
SENATE BILL 2972, SENATE DRAFT 1, HOUSE DRAFT 1  
RELATING TO OAHU CORAL REEF RESTORATION

Senate Bill 2972, Senate Draft 1, House Draft 1 proposes to require the Department of Land and Natural Resources' (Department) Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR) to begin the Holomua Marine Initiative process no later than 7/1/2026 to address coral reef restoration on Oahu. **The Department appreciates the intent of this measure and provides the following comments.**

The Department recognizes the importance of herbivorous reef fish species in maintaining both ecosystem health and reef resilience. Coral reef herbivore populations in Hawai'i's nearshore waters are impacted by a multitude of factors, including but not limited to the negative impacts of coastal development, watershed degradation, and fishing pressure. In addition, seaweed smothering corals is also influenced by a multitude of factors including pollution, coral loss due to ocean heatwaves, invasive seaweed, and limited herbivory. Because these impacts are largely related to human population density, O'ahu herbivores face greater challenges than less populated neighbor islands.

The Department is currently undertaking a wholistic, community-driven nearshore management strategy called the Holomua Marine Initiative (Holomua). Holomua, which in the Hawaiian 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. 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 Hawai'i island this May. Given these prior commitments and DAR's limited staff capacity, it would be irresponsible and counterproductive for DAR to attempt to begin the Holomua process on O'ahu by July 1, 2026. After the Holomua management planning process is underway on Hawai'i island, DAR plans to initiate Holomua on O'ahu, and this could feasibly occur in the summer of 2027.

Mahalo for the opportunity to comment on this measure.

**SB-2972-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/31/2026 3:16:24 PM

Testimony for JHA on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Lisa Bishop	Friends of Hanauma Bay	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Committee members,

Thank you for hearing this bill, and for allowing us the opportunity to testify.

Friends of Hanauma Bay supports the intent of SB2972 SD1 HD1 but strongly recommends that language be added which "temporarily prohibits the taking by spearing of uhu or kala in state marine waters around the island of O'ahu, and prohibits the commercial sale of uhu and kala so taken, until the Division of Aquatic Resources' (DAR) Holomua Marine Initiative process adopts applicable regulations." This was the original language in the bill.

Simply directing DAR to begin the Holomua initiative around Oahu on July 1, 2026 does nothing to guarantee the safety of these critical reef herbivores during the extraordinarily lengthy process. These critical reef herbivores need protection now, and throughout the Holomua process, if they are to survive and thrive around Oahu.

We therefore urge you to pass this bill, amended with the original language, to save our uhu and kala.

With Aloha,

Lisa Bishop, MS

Friends of Hanauma Bay I President

**SB-2972-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/31/2026 3:45:54 PM

Testimony for JHA on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
George "Bud" Antonelis. PhD	Na Kama Kai	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The final legislative hearing for [SB2972](#) to save key herbivores on Oahu's coral reefs —

I respectfully request that the original wording of the bill be restored so that the focus is **immediate action to recover herbivores on Oahu**, the most overfished of the main Hawaiian Islands. The previous committee had gutted the original provisions and added new wording to start the Holomua process on Oahu this year, which is not only impossible, it would also not result in any action for years.

PLEASE RESTORE THE ORIGINAL WORDING

# HAWAI'I OCEAN LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE



April 2, 2026

Hawai'i State Legislature  
House Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs

Re: Testimony in **SUPPORT** for SB 2972 SD1 HD1, Relating to Oahu Coral Reef Restoration

Aloha Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and esteemed members of the committee,

The Ocean Legislative Task Force—a coalition of more than 150 individuals across over 20 organizations statewide—supports the intent of SB 2972 SD1 HD1, relating to O'ahu coral reef restoration, and respectfully urges the committee to reinstate the original language of the measure (SB 2972).

As introduced, this bill established temporary, targeted restrictions on the spearing of uhu and kala and prohibited their commercial sale—providing immediate, science-based protections for herbivorous fish populations on O'ahu. However, the current version no longer reflects these critical provisions. The bill was previously amended in a way that removed meaningful, near-term action and replaced it with language that would significantly delay implementation, despite the urgent need for intervention.

Uhu and kala play a keystone role within coral reef ecosystems. By grazing on algae and seaweed that would otherwise overwhelm corals, they help maintain the delicate balance necessary for reefs to thrive—an especially critical function in the face of climate stressors such as coral bleaching and pollution. Larger uhu also contribute to sand production, supporting beach formation, coastal stability, and habitat preservation.

Research shows that herbivorous fish populations, particularly uhu, have been severely depleted near human population centers in Hawai'i, with O'ahu experiencing some of the greatest pressures. Without these natural reef caretakers, coral reefs struggle to recover from environmental stress, leading to ecosystem degradation that affects marine biodiversity, shoreline protection, and community well-being. Our reefs cannot afford further delay.

The Division of Aquatic Resources' Holomua Marine Initiative represents a community-driven effort to design island-based marine management strategies. The initiative brings together local fishers, cultural practitioners, scientists, and broader community members to shape management approaches based on the unique needs, values, and experiences of each place. Through extensive engagement, participants contribute knowledge that directly informs proposed management actions. This process is intended to ensure that resulting recommendations are grounded in community input and reflect the priorities of

*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.*

those most closely connected to these resources. As this work continues, it is important that space is maintained for this process to unfold as intended, and we look forward to the forthcoming recommendations that will help guide sustainable reef management statewide.

Restoring the original language of SB 2972 would reestablish immediate, targeted protections while allowing the Holomua Marine Initiative to continue developing long-term, community-informed solutions. This balanced approach ensures that urgent action is taken now, while still supporting a thoughtful and inclusive process for future management.

For these reasons, the Ocean Legislative Task Force respectfully urges the committee to fully restore the original wording of SB 2972 and advance the measure with its initial protections intact.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this important measure.

*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.*



To: The Honorable David Tarnas, Chair, the Honorable Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair, and Members of the Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs Committee.

From: Hawai'i Reef and Ocean Coalition (by Ted Bohlen)

Re: **Hearing SB2972 SD1 HD1 RELATING TO OAHU CORAL REEF RESTORATION.**

Hearing: Thursday, April 2, 2026 2:00 p.m. CR325

Aloha Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs Committee!

The Hawai'i Reef and Ocean Coalition (HIROC) is a group of scientists, educators, filmmakers and environmental advocates who have been working since 2017 to protect Hawaii's coral reefs and ocean.

**The Hawai'i Reef and Ocean Coalition COMMENTS that SB2972 SD1 HD1 should be amended to temporarily ban night spearfishing of parrotfish and kala (uhu and bluespine unicorn fish). Oahu's herbivore populations are in crisis and cannot wait several years for new rules adopted after completion of a Holomua Marine Initiative process, even if that process starts in 2026.**

**Parrotfish and kala are critical species for the health of Hawai'i's coral reefs!**

These "lawnmower" fish graze on algae and seaweed that can smother coral. They scrape the reef free of all algae and other coral-competitors so that new corals can settle and grow to repair reefs, thereby helping to maintain the delicate balance necessary for reefs to thrive. They clean the reefs of rapidly growing, reef-smothering algae fertilized by sewage and fertilizers. **Unfortunately, parrotfish**

**and kala are extremely depleted around Oahu** (as shown by analysis of surveys by Donovan, C.J. et al., 2023 Proceedings of the Royal Society B). Herbivore abundance on Oahu is at **less than 5% of potential capacity** (compared to pristine stocks in the northwestern Hawaiian Islands). See, testimony of Randall Kosaki, recently retired as NOAA's research coordinator for Papahānaumokuākea National Marine Sanctuary and Alan Friedlander, recently retired Chief Scientist at National Geographic Society's Pristine Seas program.

The original bill SB2972 **temporarily banned night spearing of parrotfish and kala** in Oahu's state marine waters until new regulations are adopted by the DLNR's Division of Aquatic Resources after a Holomua process. **This bill is a temporary emergency measure to try to immediately begin to replenish populations of uhu and kala around O'ahu. Our reefs can't wait for completion of a multi-year Holomua process**, given the poor state of our reefs and ever-warming ocean threatening to bleach and kill more of our corals.

Parrotfish and kala feeding on algae are **especially critical in the face of climate stressors such as warmer oceans and pollution**. Research indicates that reefs with increased herbivores see less coral mortality following severe heat stress compared to reefs with reduced fish populations.

We need our reef saviors – the herbivores – to keep present and future dead reef surfaces clean so new coral larvae can settle, survive, and grow **NOW. The bill's restrictions should not sunset at least until the Holomua Marine Initiative is completed on Oahu and new regulations are in place!**

To protect the reefs given this emergency, **the commercial sale of parrotfish and kala speared at night also should be prohibited** and enforced where feasible. **Spearfishing uhu and kala with scuba at night while they sleep is neither traditional nor pono and should be prohibited now.** This focus on night spearfishing is based on the experience of law enforcement officers familiar with the situation around O'ahu.

**The degradation of coral reef ecosystems affects not only marine life, but humans as well. Healthy coral reefs provide essential shoreline protection against storm waves and coastal erosion, support fisheries that sustain local**

**livelihoods, and hold cultural, recreational, and economic significance for all Hawai'i's people. The largest parrotfish even help replenish Hawai'i's beaches by eating dead coral and pooping fine sand!**

**This bill's temporary protection of parrotfish and kala is an investment in the future of our oceans and our islands!**

**Please pass SB2972 or a similar bill to protect Hawai'i's reefs, enhance coastal resilience, and sustain marine ecosystems for the future.**

**Mahalo!**

**Hawai'i Reef and Ocean Coalition (by Ted Bohlen)**



The Nature Conservancy, Hawai'i and Palmyra  
923 Nu'uuanu Avenue  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96817

Tel (808) 537-4508  
nature.org/HawaiiPalmyra  
hawaii@tnc.org

**Testimony of The Nature Conservancy  
Commenting On SB2972 SD1 HD1, Relating to Oahu Coral Reef Restoration  
Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs  
April 2, 2026 at 2:00 pm  
Conference Room 325 and via Videoconference**

Dear Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee:

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify today. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Hawai'i and Palmyra respectfully comments on SB2972 SD1 HD1, which requires the Department of Land and Natural Resources' Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR) to begin the Holomua Marine Initiative process no later than 7/1/2026 to address coral reef restoration on O'ahu.

Herbivorous fishes such as uhu and kala are essential to the resilience of coral reefs in Hawai'i. These species graze seaweed and keep reef surfaces clear so new corals can settle and grow, helping reefs recover from bleaching, storms, and pollution. Larger uhu also contribute to sand production, supporting beaches and coastal stability. Protecting these species is one of the most direct and effective ways to strengthen reef ecosystems that support fisheries, tourism, shoreline protection, and cultural practices.

There is strong scientific evidence that herbivore populations in Hawai'i are depleted. Communities across the state have voiced concerns that many species of herbivores are not as abundant as they used to be, and in-water surveys conducted by many organizations across the state show that herbivore populations in many areas are below what could and should be present on those reefs. A stock assessment conducted by fisheries scientists from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration found that both the surgeonfish kala and parrotfish uhu are experiencing overfishing (i.e., fish are being removed faster than they are replenished).

TNC strongly supported the original language of this bill, which included clear, near-term protections to curb harmful harvest practices and prevent further depletion of these critical species. While we also support the Holomua Marine Initiative as an inclusive, community-driven process to guide long-term nearshore management, the amended version of this bill removes meaningful protections and would delay action at a time when reefs around O'ahu cannot afford further decline. We believe that Holomua should continue to be implemented at a pace aligned with DAR's capacity and that allows the full community-based process to thoughtfully and meaningfully unfold. Restoring the original bill language would allow the State to act now, while Holomua continues its important work, ensuring healthier reefs, stronger fisheries, and the cultural, ecological, and economic benefits that thriving coral ecosystems provide.

Mahalo for the opportunity to comment on SB2972 SD1 HD1.

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*Guided by science, TNC is a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of the lands and waters upon which all life depends. The Conservancy has helped protect more than 200,000 acres of natural lands in Hawai'i and Palmyra Atoll. We manage 84,000 acres in 13 nature preserves and 18 managed areas and have supported over 50 coastal communities to help protect and restore the nearshore reefs and fisheries of the main Hawaiian Islands.*

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Date of hearing: 2 April, 2026

To: Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and the House Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs

Subject: **SB 2972 SD1 HD1**, Relating to O'ahu Coral Reef Restoration

Aloha,

Hawai'i Food+ Policy is testifying in **support of SB 2972 SD1 HD1** which temporarily restricts the night spear fishing of Uhu (parrotfish, family Scaridae) and Kala (bluespine unicornfish, *Naso unicornis*) on O'ahu. Our reefs hold immense ecological and socioeconomic importance. Uhu and Kala serve as the essential caretakers by grazing on algae, they ensure the reef remains a productive habitat<sup>1</sup>. A healthy reef is also a self-sustaining food source.

Spearing at night is a highly efficient method because these fish are stationary and resting. This allows for rapid depletion of the breeding population with very little effort i.e. overfishing. By prohibiting night-spearing, we can ensure that these fish have a temporary refuge, allowing the population to stabilize<sup>2</sup>.

We also want to note that in the amendments to this bill, the language prohibiting the commercial sale of uhu or kala that were caught by spearing has been deleted. This enables the potential for the taking of fish beyond the means of sustenance. By removing the commercial profit motive, we reduced the incentive for mass-harvesting. This would have ensured that the hunting activities were focused on fishing for self, families, and immediate communities to put food on their own tables, rather than for export or high-end commercial markets.

We would like to suggest that original language be added back to the bill reading as, "temporarily prohibits the taking by spearing of uhu or kala in state marine waters around the island of O'ahu, and prohibits the commercial sale of uhu and kala so taken, until the Division of Aquatic Resources' (DAR) Holomua Marine Initiative process adopts applicable regulations. There is also a comment by the legislature in the bill stating "that the population of coral reef herbivores, while declining throughout the State, are especially threatened by the impacts of the high human population density of the island of Oahu." While the focus of this legislation may be in preventing nighttime spearfishing activities, in an effort to restore fish populations, a temporary prohibition on the commercial sale of these same species we intend to protect may be beneficial. We also suggest the committee consider a temporary prohibition of commercial sale of uhu and kala taken by spear fishing during this rehabilitation period in addition to adding the prohibition on harvesting.

Not only is this bill about species conservation, it is about protecting the long-term viability of O'ahu's reefs. As food system advocates, our priority is the long-term health and resilience of Hawai'i's local food systems. With these comments, we support the committees in passing SB2972 SD1 HD1.

Mahalo,

Brandon Kinard & the Food+ Policy Team

#fixourfoodsystem

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[1] Brijis, J., Tran, L. L., Moore, C., Souza, T., Schakmann, M., Grellman, K., & Johansen, J. L. (2025). Outlasting the Heat: Collapse of Herbivorous Fish Control of Invasive Algae During Marine Heatwaves. *Global change biology*, 31(8), e70438. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gcb.70438>

[2] *Coral reefs could feed millions if we stop overfishing them*. Earth.com. (n.d.-b). <https://www.earth.com/news/coral-reefs-could-feed-millions-if-we-stop-overfishing-them/>

**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-2972-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/31/2026 2:33:01 PM

Testimony for JHA on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Jeddie Kawahatsu	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am requesting that the original wording of SB2972 be fully restored.

O‘ahu is the most overfished of the main Hawaiian Islands. Its reefs cannot wait. The original bill offered sensible, science-backed, targeted measures to begin recovering herbivore populations now — before it's too late.

*Thank you for your support!*

**SB-2972-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/31/2026 3:06:16 PM

Testimony for JHA on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Matthew Gurewitsch	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Morikawa, and members of the WAL,

I have read the detailed testimony of Mark Hixon , the Hsiao Endowed Professor of Marine Biology at UH Mānoa, testifying on this matter as a private citizen. His experience goes back to the 1970s, and he has provided data to back up his support for SB2972. As a nonscientist who has been a year-round resident of Maui for 15 years, I applaud his dedication and endorse his recommendations without reservation. My wife and I are in the ocean every day, and nothing is clearer than the decline of our reefs and the herbivores needed to keep them healthy. How is it even possible that in Hawaii a case needs to be made (again and again and again!) for our native wildlife. We should be ashamed of ourselves.

In particular, I urge you to reinstate the original wording of SB2972. Our waters, our reefs, and our fish stocks are stressed to the breaking point. Watered-down measures will not help us. The original bill offered sensible, science-backed, targeted measures to begin recovering herbivore populations now — before it's too late.

Mahalo for your attention. I implore you to do the right thing. Look into your hearts. You know what's pono.

**SB-2972-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/31/2026 4:20:02 PM

Testimony for JHA on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Dennis Mahaffay	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please vote for [SB2972](#). We need the original wording fully restored. O‘ahu is the most overfished of the main Hawaiian Islands. Our reefs cannot wait. The original bill offered sensible, science-backed, targeted measures to begin recovering herbivore populations now. Mahalo, Dennis Mahaffay

**SB-2972-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/31/2026 4:51:32 PM

Testimony for JHA on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Brian Bowen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha

I am writing to endorse bill SB2972 SD1 HD1, a vital step forward to protect our reef fishes. By way of introduction, I have over 30 years of experience doing research on reef fishes. The fishes that clean our reefs will prevent algal overgrowth and allow healthy coral reefs to thrive. Unfortunately these herbivore fishes, like parrotfishes, are extremely depleted around Oahu. Night spearfishing of these reef saviors while they sleep is neither traditional nor pono. The state agency with the responsibility of addressing this natural resource emergency has failed to act due to limited resources. Please help save our coral reefs by passing SB2972 SD1 HD1.

**SB-2972-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/31/2026 5:05:48 PM

Testimony for JHA on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Kuwabara, Jeff	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose the amended bill because it removed the ban on spearing uhu and kala at night. These are some of the most important herbivores that help the reef recover from stressful bleaching events by keeping algae overgrowth at bay. These fish sleep on the reef at night and are sitting ducks to spearfishers, making them especially vulnerable to overfishing. I do support the original version of the bill, please restore the original language to include protections for these important species.

Aloha Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Morikawa, and members of the WAL,

I am an Associate Professor of Marine Biology at The Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology, within UH Mānoa testifying today as a private citizen.

I have studied coral reefs around the world for over 25 years, and I have focused my research on Hawai'i's coral reefs in particular for the past eight years.

I am also the parent of a child who would happily spend all day, every day fishing, and I want him and the rest of our community here on O'ahu to be able to fish – and actually catch fish – in perpetuity. That cannot happen if we continue to overharvest fish from our reefs far faster than the reefs can replenish them.

I have seen reefs that are healthy because they have had very little in the way of human impacts, and it saddens me as both a citizen and a scientist to see that O'ahu's reefs are at the far other end of the spectrum of reef health. By and large, they are truly shadows of once-vibrant, productive ecosystems.

To use the words of my colleague, Dr. Mark Hixon: it is a scientific fact that abundant and diverse herbivorous fishes – especially parrotfishes (uhu), surgeonfishes (kala, kole, etc.), and chubs (nenu) – are critically important for eating seaweeds that would otherwise smother and kill corals. With high levels in our coastal waters of leached sewage and run-off fertilizers, which stimulate the rapid growth of seaweeds, these fishes are more important than ever as the primary natural resilience mechanism on our reefs.

Unfortunately, the most important these fishes – uhu and kala – are severely overfished around O'ahu and some other regions.

As the climate continues to change, sewage continues to pollute our reefs, and people continue to need and want to fish, it is imperative that we take steps immediately to curb the most lethal, destructive forms of fishing – e.g., night spearfishing of sleeping reef fishes. If we do, we can help protect the rights of our future generations to continue to fish as people have done for all of human history here on O'ahu.

SB2972 SD1 is a temporary emergency measure to immediately begin to replenish populations of uhu and kala around O'ahu until the Holomua process is completed, which will take years to even begin here on O'ahu.

I urge you to pass SD2972 SD1 and lobby for its passage. I also strongly advise that the bill's original language to ban the sale of speared fish is reinstated.

Mahalo,

Dr. Elizabeth Madin

**SB-2972-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/31/2026 5:47:42 PM

Testimony for JHA on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Marissa Blake	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and esteemed members of the committee,

My name is Marissa Blake. I am an Oahu resident, an avid freediver, and a dedicated ocean advocate. I am writing to respectfully urge the committee to fully restore the original language of SB 2972 and advance the measure with its initial protections intact. As originally introduced, this bill established temporary, targeted restrictions on the spearing of uhu and kala and prohibited their commercial sale.

Unfortunately, the current version has been stripped of these critical near-term protections and replaced with language that will cause significant delays. O'ahu is already the most overfished of the main Hawaiian Islands. Our local reefs cannot afford to wait years for protection. We need to act now.

In my time spent in the water, I see firsthand how vital uhu and kala are as keystone species and essential herbivores. They graze on algae to prevent coral overgrowth, a process that is absolutely necessary for our reefs to recover from stressors. Beyond reef health, uhu also produce the sand that supports our beaches and coastal stability. Without these fish, our marine ecosystems are at risk of further degradation and reduced shoreline protection.

I fully support community-driven efforts like the Holomua Marine Initiative. However, restoring the original language of this bill allows us to put targeted, immediate protections in place right now while keeping space open for that inclusive community process to develop sustainable solutions for the future.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this critical measure.

Marissa Blake

**SB-2972-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/31/2026 7:10:49 PM

Testimony for JHA on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Daniela Escontrela	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support the passing of this bill. I am also requesting that the original wording of [SB2972](#) be fully restored. The bill was previously gutted by an earlier committee, replacing meaningful, immediate protections with language that would delay action for years — and may not even be legally feasible. O‘ahu is the most overfished of the main Hawaiian Islands. Our reefs cannot wait. The original bill offered sensible, science-backed, targeted measures to begin recovering herbivore populations now — before it's too late.

**SB-2972-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/31/2026 7:46:28 PM

Testimony for JHA on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jesse Rich	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Tarnas and members of the JHA,

My name is Jesse Rich, and I am a concerned citizen of Honolulu who strongly supports **the original provisions** of SB2972 as a temporary emergency measure to replenish Oahu’s uhu and kala fish populations. These species play a critical role in controlling algae growth and maintaining healthy coral reefs, which are foundational to Hawai‘i’s marine ecosystems, local fisheries, cultural practices, and economy.

Our reefs are under increasing stress from climate change, warming waters, and pollution. Protecting herbivorous fish is one of the most immediate and effective actions we can take to give coral reefs a chance to recover and remain resilient. SB2972—in its original form—represents a science-based, proactive step that prioritizes long-term environmental health for current and future generations. The current wording of this bill does not do enough to protect the herbivores and needs to be restored to the more specific, more stringent terms that were omitted in favor of a more general statement that beginning the Holomua Marine Initiative process, which takes YEARS to complete, would be a solution to this problem. I reject the current version of SB2972 and strongly support the original version.

Mahalo for your consideration and for your commitment to protecting Hawai‘i’s reefs,

Jesse Rich

# TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS – SB 2972 SD1 HD1

## Relating to O‘ahu Coral Reef Restoration

### Before the House Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs (JHA)

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

My name is Frederick Smith. I am a Hawai‘i resident living in the Kealakekua ahupua‘a in the Kona moku and a graduate student at UH Hilo focusing on marine policy and science. **I respectfully submit testimony in support of SB 2972 only if the original SD1 provisions are restored. As currently drafted in HD1, I oppose the bill.**

I recognize and appreciate the Committee’s interest in ensuring that the Legislature does not unnecessarily direct or interfere with agency decision-making. The original SD1 version of SB 2972 is consistent with that principle. It does not override or replace the Division of Aquatic Resources’ authority, nor does it dictate the substance of future rules. Instead, it provides a limited, temporary safeguard that supports DAR’s existing Holomua Marine Initiative by maintaining key herbivore populations until the agency completes its rulemaking process.

As originally drafted, SB 2972 SD1 established a narrow, temporary, and targeted safeguard by prohibiting the nighttime spearing of uhu and kala on O‘ahu until the Division of Aquatic Resources implements island-specific management measures through the Holomua Marine Initiative. This approach was both scientifically justified and legally appropriate, addressing an immediate and well-documented depletion of herbivorous reef fish while maintaining full protection for subsistence, cultural, and daytime fishing practices.

The HD1 version shifts the bill’s focus away from an interim management safeguard and instead ties its effect to accelerating the Holomua Marine Initiative on O‘ahu. However, the Holomua process is not expected to begin on O‘ahu for several years and will not result in near-term management action. As a result, the current version does not address the ongoing depletion of herbivore populations that the original bill was intended to mitigate.

To better align the bill with existing Department of Land and Natural Resources processes, the measure should retain the original SD1 framework, which provides a temporary and narrowly tailored safeguard until DAR completes island-specific rulemaking through the Holomua Marine Initiative. The Division of Aquatic Resources has already established Holomua as the appropriate long-term pathway for nearshore management, and the original version of the bill supports that process by providing a reasonable interim measure rather than attempting to accelerate it in a way that does not reflect or respect DAR’s current implementation timelines.

Statewide reef monitoring data compiled from thousands of surveys conducted by DAR and NOAA scientists show that every O‘ahu moku falls within the lowest quartile of herbivore biomass statewide, with large portions of reef area already below levels associated with maintaining healthy, productive coral reef ecosystems (Donovan et al., 2023). Without interim

management measures, the continued depletion of key herbivores such as the uhu and kala will further degrade reef conditions and reduce the long-term productivity of nearshore fisheries that many Hawai'i residents rely on.

Because the original SD1 approach preserves all daytime subsistence, cultural, and traditional practices and regulates only a single, modern, high-efficiency method of take until Holomua rulemaking can occur, it represents a proportionate and narrowly tailored response that minimizes impacts on customary and subsistence users while addressing a clearly documented problem.

Restoring these provisions would provide immediate, limited protection while maintaining alignment with DAR's long-term management process.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to **restore the original SD1 language and pass that version.**

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Frederick Smith

Captain Cook, Hawai'i Island

Aloha Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and members of JHA,

I am the Hsiao Endowed Professor of Marine Biology at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, offering testimony as a private citizen. I have studied Hawai'i's coral reefs since the 1970s and have personally witnessed their demise over the decades, especially on O'ahu.

I am submitting only comments on SB2972 SD1 HD1 because I strongly believe that the current version of this bill should be rejected and the original version supported. I understand that WAL was well-intentioned replacing the original provisions of this bill with instructions for DAR to begin the Holomua process on O'ahu this year. However, neither the scientists who support the original bill nor DAR support this revision. Here, I offer scientific justification for restoring the original provisions.

I know that the JHA Chair and Vice Chair are well aware of and appreciate the crisis facing O'ahu's coral reefs in terms of severe herbivore depletion. For those JHA members desiring detailed background, I have appended my testimony to WAL regarding the original bill.

My colleagues in the scientific community and I have been working closely with DAR over the years to guide them with peer-reviewed science. The data clearly indicate that drastic measures must be taken immediately to recover O'ahu herbivore populations before they collapse. The analyses presented by Donovan et al. (2023) as well as the 2024 NOAA coral reef surveys around O'ahu (see attached prior testimony) would stimulate immediate remedial action in other parts of the United States and other developed nations. Not so in Hawai'i. I cannot overemphasize the dismay of the scientists serving on DAR's Herbivore Working Group when the head of fisheries at DAR (a non-scientist) said he saw no crisis. Instead, DAR has locked itself into an extremely slow and clearly flawed Holomua process that gives disproportionate power to the loudest local voices in the room – the voices of the status quo. More importantly, the Holomua process is far too slow to address this crisis before the next coral bleaching event takes-out our remaining coral reefs, allowing seaweeds to proliferate with almost zero herbivory to keep dead reef surfaces clean so new corals can settle and grow.

I believe that sometimes outside powers must come to bear when an agency is not embracing its kuleana. The originally introduced version of SB2972 is a **sensible, temporary, and focused** means of starting to replenish O'ahu's herbivore populations based on the recommendations of DOCARE officers working with scientists. I've been told that the original SB2972 is supported by high-level personnel at DAR. Unfortunately, the bill was gutted by WAL, and neither DAR nor the scientific community believe the present version (SB2972 SD1 HD1) will bolster the resilience of O'ahu's coral reefs. I urge JHA to make an exception to past hands-off-DAR policy and restore the original version of SB2972. It is no exaggeration that the future of our coral reefs is at stake.

Thank you for your consideration,



Mark Hixon  
Honolulu, HI

attachment

Aloha Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Morikawa, and members of the WAL,

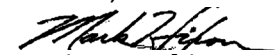
I am the Hsiao Endowed Professor of Marine Biology at UH Mānoa, testifying today as a private citizen. Because SB2972 SD1 has no introductory paragraph, please consider my take on its history and justification. I have studied Hawai'i's coral reefs since the 1970s, so I have personally witnessed the **degradation of our reefs over the decades**. It is a scientific fact that abundant and diverse **herbivorous fishes** – especially parrotfishes (uhu), surgeonfishes (kala, kole, etc.), and chubs (nenuē) – **are critically important for eating seaweeds that would otherwise smother and kill corals**. With high levels in our coastal waters of leached sewage and run-off fertilizers, which stimulate the rapid growth of seaweeds, these fishes are more important than ever as the primary natural resilience mechanism on our reefs, **literally our reef saviors**. Unfortunately, the most important these fishes – **uhu and kala** – **are severely overfished around O'ahu** and some other regions (**see data appended** to the end of this letter). In my experience and those of my scientific colleagues, **these extremely low standing stocks would result in immediate emergency actions in other parts of the world**.

**Until Hawai'i decides to address coastal water quality issues by cutting-off the sources of sewage and fertilizers, the best option we have to save our reefs is to replenish herbivore populations**. Unfortunately, efforts and bills to do so have languished since at least the turn of the millennium due to a vocal and intimidating minority of the fishing community. During 2025, the Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR) convened an Herbivore Working Group of about a dozen scientific and enforcement experts at the request of marine scientists, including myself, increasingly concerned about the future of O'ahu's coral reefs in particular. Unfortunately, DAR chose not to act on our concerns, citing insufficient capacity, fear of breaking the trust of the fishing community, and reasserting that the Holomua Marine Initiative is the only way to address these issues. At least one DAR employee, not a scientist, did not even perceive an emergency. The experts were flabbergasted, especially given that the multi-year Holomua process will not begin on O'ahu for years. **Our degraded reefs simply cannot wait any longer to be restored**, given their poor state and the ever-warming ocean threatening to bleach and kill more of our corals. We need our reef saviors – the herbivores – to keep present and future dead reef surfaces clean so new coral larvae can settle, survive, and grow NOW.

**SB2972 SD1 is a temporary emergency measure** to immediately begin to replenish populations of uhu and kala around O'ahu until the Holomua process is completed. The focus on prohibiting night spearfishing is based on the experience of law enforcement officers familiar with the situation around O'ahu. Spearfishing fish while they sleep at night is clearly neither traditional nor pono. Reinstating the original bill language to ban sale of speared fish is advised.

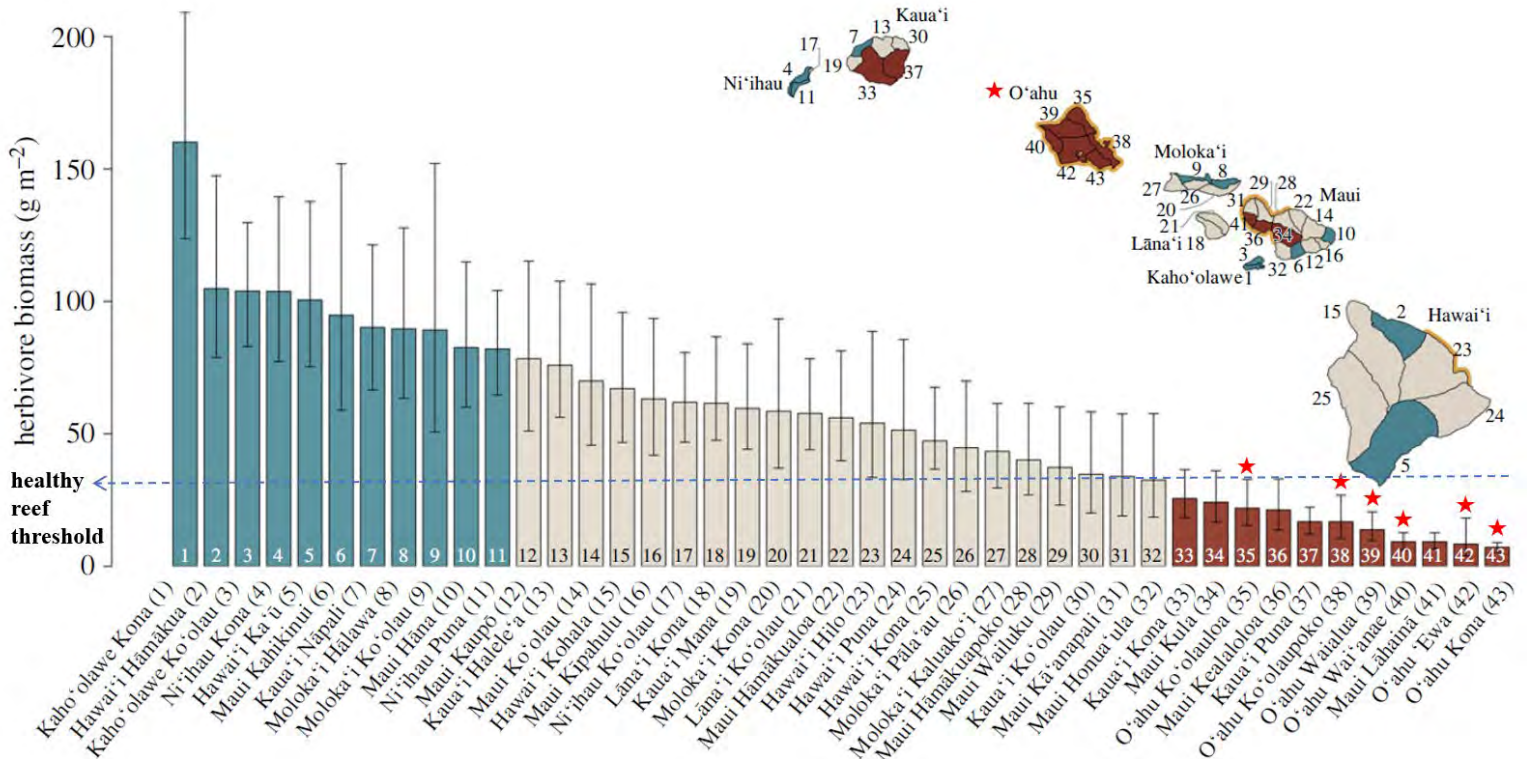
You will certainly hear the opposition berating this bill for trampling on traditional fishing rights, destroying commercial fishing, and being based on worthless data by clueless scientists and erroneous assertions by alarmist environmentalists. I have witnessed similar scenarios play-out elsewhere in the world multiple times. In all cases, **ignoring the science has resulted in collapsed fisheries and ecosystems**. I urge you to pass SB2972 SD1 and lobby for its passage.

Mahalo,



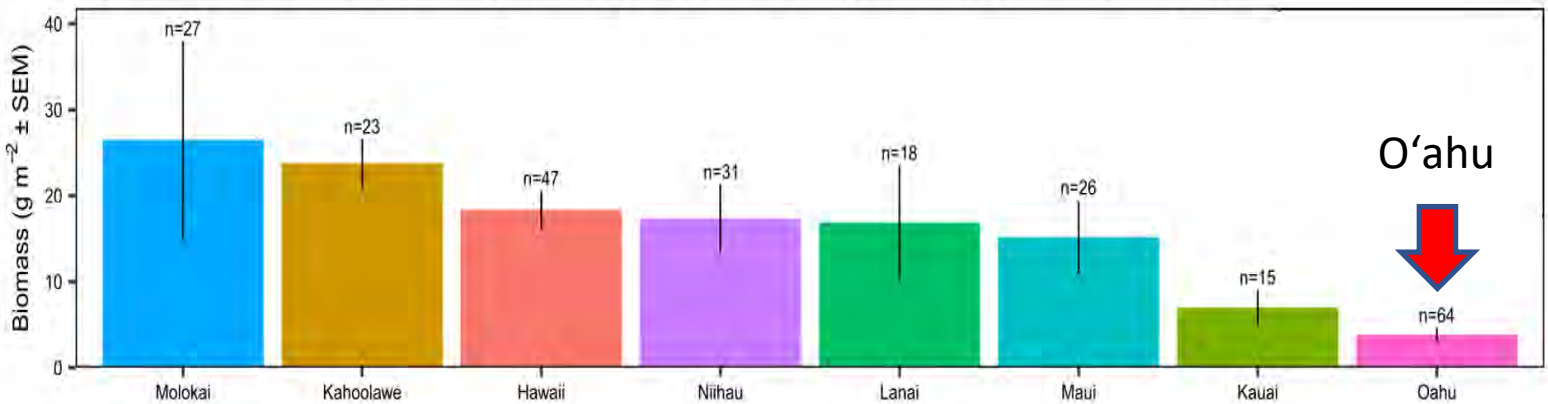
Mark Hixon [data on next page]

# Scientific Survey Data: Extreme Depletion of Herbivorous Fishes Around O'ahu



Abundance of herbivorous fishes (grams of fish per square meter of reef) in each moku of the main Hawaiian Islands. Red stars indicate the extreme depletion of herbivores around O'ahu (10,000s of surveys analyzed by Donovan et al. 2023 *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*). The "healthy reef threshold" is the approximate abundance of herbivores necessary for reefs to remain healthy (Brock 1979 Univ Wash PhD thesis).

## 2024 total herbivores: *uhu*, *nenue*, *kala*, other surgeonfishes (*manini*, *kole*, etc)



Abundance of herbivorous fishes (grams of fish per square meter of reef) around each of the main Hawaiian Islands from NOAA's 2024 surveys (n is the number of survey sites per island). Note the extremely low abundance of herbivores around O'ahu (far right) despite the high number of surveys (n = 64) distributed around the *entire* island (not just polluted areas).

Comment on SENATE BILL 2972 SD1 HD1

Relating to O'ahu Coral Reef Restoration  
Before the House Committee on Judicial and Hawaiian Affairs  
April 2, 2026, 2:00 pm

Aloha Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and members of JHA,

Over the past 40 years, I have spent thousands of hours underwater from South Point to Kure Atoll working to identify and address major issues in fisheries and marine conservation throughout Hawai'i and the broader Pacific region. I recently retired as Chief Scientist for the National Geographic Society's Pristine Seas program and am currently an affiliate researcher at the Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology. Having conducted research on marine ecosystems from the poles to the tropics and to depths of thousands of feet, I have a unique perspective on the importance of a healthy ocean to the people of Hawai'i, as well as the impacts to these vital ecosystems and the essential services they provide.

I am submitting only comments on SB2972 SD1 HD1 because I strongly believe that the current version of this bill should be rejected and the original version supported. The original wording of the bill should be restored so that the focus is on **immediate action to recover herbivores on O'ahu**, the most overfished of the main Hawaiian Islands. The change in the bill to instead start the Holomua process on O'ahu this year is not possible and would also not result in any action for years, if at all. There is strong consensus among managers and scientists that the original bill provides actionable short-term strategies to begin to replenish O'ahu's herbivore fish populations.

The original bill would have temporarily prohibited the taking by nighttime spearing of uhu or kala in state marine waters around the island of O'ahu and prohibit the commercial sale of uhu and kala so taken. These measures, while temporary, are a first step in helping to restore the populations of these species, which have become so low that we are in danger of losing them and the coral reefs on which they depend. The ocean provides so much to the people of Hawai'i, such as food security, recreation, and cultural identity, but the health of Hawai'i's marine environment is at a critical juncture. The originally introduced version of SB2972 is a sensible, temporary, and focused means of starting to replenish O'ahu's herbivore populations and is a step forward in protecting, restoring, and maintaining the health of Hawai'i's marine environments, which means so much to so many.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alan Friedlander". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored, slightly textured background.

Mahalo, Alan Friedlander, Ph.D.

**SB-2972-HD-1**

Submitted on: 4/1/2026 12:50:09 PM

Testimony for JHA on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Hope	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I respectfully urge the committee to restore the original bill language pass this bill which provides the strongest and most comprehensive framework for meaningful reef restoration on O‘ahu.

Aloha Chair David Tarnas and the Members of the Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs Committee,

I support SB 2972. I also request that it be amended back to its original wording, which includes amending back to make it effective upon its enactment.

Delaying its effective date for decades defeats the whole purpose of SB 2972, which is to provide temporary protections for uhu (parrotfish) and kala on the Island of Oahu for at least a short period of time, so that there can be time to craft longer-term solutions for protecting these important fish that are rapidly being decimated on Oahu, and which are critically important for protecting Oahu's reefs and beaches.

At the December 2023 Board of Land and Natural Resources (BLNR) meeting, the Board gave verbal direction to the DLNR staff to work to prepare (and expose to public comment under the "sunshine laws") rules to prohibit the nighttime spearing of uhu (parrotfish), and take other steps to help restore populations of these fish, especially on Oahu. This direction from the BLNR was recorded and placed on the on the public DLNR website.

That work by the DLNR Division of Aquatic Resources is part of the Holomua marine initiative, that has not yet been completed, so the uhu need temporary protection until the Holomua marine initiative can be completed and approved by the BLNR

### **The Critical Importance of Uhu (Parrotfish)**

According to scientists at the University of Hawaii, approximately 70% of the white sand in Hawaii comes from uhu (parrotfish). Parrotfish feed on the algae that grow on the surface of many reefs. In this process of eating, the parrotfish teeth also chew off a small bit of the coral, which is ground up further by special grinding teeth, and eventually expelled (pooped out) as white sand. A single large parrotfish can produce 2,000 pounds of white sand, or more, per year!

In addition to parrotfish helping us preserve our beaches by producing about 70% of all the white sand in Hawaii, scientists also tell us that parrotfish are good for the health of our coral reefs. In addition to removing the algae that sometimes smother and kill our coral reefs, the small bite marks on the coral actually stimulate new coral growth, which helps corals be more resilient against warming ocean water and pollution.

### **The Remaining Uhu (Parrotfish) Stocks are Being Rapidly Depleted**

Uhu (parrotfish) are already listed as a "depleted" species by the National Marine Fisheries Service. They have been overfished in Hawaii, and especially Oahu, in a way that is not sustainable on a long-term basis.

The scientific evidence is also consistent with my personal observations, and the observations of my friends who spearfish and surf. On both the North Shore and the South Shore of Oahu, we used to see many parrotfish, now we see very few.

## **Spearfishing at Night Makes it Way Too Easy to Find and Kill Uhu (Parrotfish)**

Parrot fish tend to be wary of humans in the daytime. At night, however, parrotfish are typically in a “sleep-like” state, and frequently sleeping under rock overhangs or in crevices, and particularly vulnerable to spearfishing at night. When an underwater hunter finds a sleeping parrotfish and shines a light on it at night, it typically does not swim away, which makes it an easy target, just swim up to it and spear it.

Many South Pacific islands have similar species and sub-species of parrotfish, to those found in Hawaii. And on many of those South Pacific islands, parrotfish have been absolutely decimated by excessive spearfishing at night. On Guam, at least one sub-species of parrotfish is now extinct.

Here in Hawaii, all too often, especially on Oahu, people will spearfish for uhu (parrotfish) at night, with lights, and kill literally dozens of parrotfish, even though the legal “bag limit” per day is 2 parrot fish.

I urge you to support SB 2972, with an effective date upon its enactment, and help stem the overfishing of herbivorous fishes, including the critically important uhu (parrot fish).

Mahalo for considering the ideas in this testimony,

Ken Martyn, Waialua, Hawaii

References supporting the scientific statements made in this testimony, are listed below:

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/exploringourfluidearth/physical/coastal-interactions/beaches-and-sand/weird-science-parrotfish-and-sand>

<https://ocean.si.edu/ocean-life/fish/tough-teeth-and-parrotfish-poop>

<https://www.nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/animals-we-protect/parrotfish/#:~:text=Parrotfish%20live%20in%20reefs%20all,in%20the%20coral%E2%80%94at%20night.>

<https://fishpono.org/>



**SB-2972-HD-1**

Submitted on: 4/1/2026 5:54:06 PM

Testimony for JHA on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Phil Rarick	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I wish to support this bill in the original format. DLNR DAR is not at this time up and running with the Holomua initiative. Keep it simple and pass in HRS the prohibition banning night diving / spearing of Uhu and Kala fish in the waters surrounding Oahu. This needs to be done in a bill for an act vs Hawaii Administrative Rule.

Thank you for your consideration.

**SB-2972-HD-1**

Submitted on: 4/1/2026 6:48:16 PM

Testimony for JHA on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Malia Nolan	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha. PLEASE restore the original wording of SB2072! This bill was gutted by an earlier committee and meaningful, immediate protections removed with language that will make this a fantasy-land bill that won't be enacted for years, like so many of Hawaii's laws that are lip-service and zero action. Be brave. Take a stand for something true and HELP US save Oahu's reefs. Prevention is ESSENTIAL NOW, as without prevention we will have a collapse on our hands that no amount of committee meetings will help. Now is the time to act. Our reefs cannot wait. The original bill offered sensible, science-backed, targeted measures to begin recovering herbivore populations now — before it's too late.