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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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LAND
STATE PARKS

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

Before the House Committee on
WATER AND LAND

Tuesday, March 17, 2026
9:00 AM
State Capitol, Conference Room 411

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

Senate Bill 2972, Senate Draft 1 proposes to temporarily prohibit the taking by spearing of uhu (Scaridae) or kala (*Naso unicornis*) after sunset or before sunrise in state marine waters around the island of O'ahu until the Division of Aquatic Resources adopts regulations through the Holomua Marine Initiative process that that will recover uhu and kala populations to levels that prevent seaweed from smothering corals. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (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. Uhu and kala are important for fishers, serving as staple species for many subsistence fishers and cultural practitioners and supporting limited commercial fisheries and markets.

Fisheries managers primarily manage wild fish populations by managing the actions of people who harvest them. While creating fishing rules is in part a matter of science, the human dimension of resource management must also be considered if factors like culture,

food security, and regulatory compliance are important. Understanding this, the Department has developed a nearshore management strategy that is community driven and heavily rooted in consultation and partnership with stakeholders. This distinctly bottom-up approach is exemplified by the ongoing Holomua Marine Initiative (Holomua), which brings fishers, cultural practitioners, and community representatives to the table alongside the Department to develop management actions to address nearshore issues and set the course of nearshore management. Holomua, which in the Hawaiian language means “to progress and to move forward into the future,” is the Department’s multi-pronged strategy to manage the State’s nearshore marine resources. Partnering with stakeholders is not only a strategy, but a commitment. In light of this commitment, the Department has concerns about supporting legislation (though well-intentioned) that would pre-determine the outcome of the O’ahu Holomua process by setting management criteria and standards without consulting with the community planning team.

The Department acknowledges the concerns regarding the increased stress on coral reef ecosystems caused by depleted herbivore populations on the island of O’ahu. The potential impacts of climate change in the near future may warrant prioritizing immediate action over lengthy processes and public engagement. However, simply establishing a prohibition does not guarantee its effectiveness. The benefits of quick legislative action could be undermined by a lack of compliance due to insufficient outreach and public support. The Department firmly believes that management measures are most effective when community voices are included, transparency is upheld, and there is local support from the fishing community for those measures.

In recent years, the Department developed and began implementing a Sustainable Herbivore Management Plan and has made significant improvements in increasing protections for key herbivorous reef fish species both at the statewide and place-based levels. In February 2024, the Department adopted statewide herbivore rules. These rules notably included new statewide non-commercial bag limits for uhu and kala, new licensing/permitting requirements for commercial uhu and kala fishers and dealers, commercial uhu and kala annual catch limits (ACLs), and the prohibition of commercial take of all uhu species except ulu ‘ele‘ele and pālupaluka (redlip parrotfish, *Scarus rubroviolaceus*). Adoption of these statewide herbivore rules was the culmination of a multi-year process, which included multiple rounds of public scoping, stakeholder meetings, and statewide public hearings.

In January 2025, the Department approved the establishment of the Maunalua Bay Fisheries Management Area (FMA), a community driven effort created with support from the Department. The Maunalua Bay FMA includes a ban on night dive spearfishing in the area from the Diamond Head lighthouse to Kawaihoa Point (spitting caves, Portlock) to address what has been observed as a common practice in the area that is often associated with excessive and unlawful take of both uhu and kala. Today the Maunalua Bay FMA combines with the Waikīkī Marine Life Conservation District (MLCD) and the Waikīkī-Diamond Head Shoreline FMA to protect approximately 11 miles of O’ahu coastline from night diving.

As Holomua moves across the state, the Department continues to foster community-led place-based management, partnering with interested communities to establish island-

based rules, Community Based Subsistence Fishery Areas (CBSFAs) and FMAs. The Department maintains its commitment to improving the health of ocean resources for future generations with input from the public.

Lastly, as a practical matter, it is impossible to know whether new regulations, at the time they are first adopted, will recover uhu and kala populations to a certain level. Recovery takes time, often decades. Moreover, it is impossible to know whether certain population levels are sufficient to prevent seaweed from smothering corals. Even if herbivore numbers are healthy at the population scale, there are many factors that influence herbivore presence and abundance at smaller geographic scales, including human activity, water quality, and suitable habitat. Further, there are many species of seaweed, especially non-native seaweeds, that are unpalatable to herbivorous fish and can smother corals despite pristine herbivore populations. A prime example of this is the outbreak of the invasive seaweed *Chondria tumulosa* in Papahānaumokuākea. As such, the “sunset” provision of the measure is problematic.

Mahalo for the opportunity to comment on this measure.



To: The Honorable Mark Hashem, Chair, the Honorable Dee Morikawa Vice Chair, and Members of the Water and Land Committee.

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

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

Hearing: Tuesday, March 14, 2026 9:00 a.m. CR411

Aloha Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Morikawa, and Members of the Water and Land 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 STRONGLY SUPPORTS SB2972 SD1!

SB2972 SD1 **temporarily bans night spearing of parrotfish** (uhu) and bluespine unicorn fish (kala) in Oahu's state marine waters until new regulations are adopted by the Division of Aquatic Resources' Holomua Marine Initiative. **This bill is a temporary emergency measure to try to immediately begin to replenish populations of uhu and kala around O'ahu. The multi-year Holomua process will not begin on O'ahu for years. Our reefs can't wait any longer,** given the poor state of our reefs and ever-warming ocean threatening to bleach and kill more of our corals.

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. 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.

All herbivores are important for the health of the reef, but research shows that **herbivorous fish populations, particularly parrotfish (uhu) and bluespine unicorn (kala), have been severely depleted near human population centers in Hawai'i**. A stock assessment conducted by fisheries scientists from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration found that parrotfish are experiencing overfishing (i.e., fish are being removed faster than they are replenished). **The depletion of these natural reef caretakers makes the reefs more vulnerable to environmental stressors, leading to ecosystem degradation.**

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 protective regulations are in place!**

To protect the reefs given this emergency, **the commercial sale of parrotfish and kala also should be prohibited (as in the original bill) and enforced**. However, **this SD1 bill is at least a step forward in prohibiting the extremely un-pono practice of spearfishing uhu and kala with scuba at night while they sleep**. 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 protecting parrotfish and kala is an investment in the future of our oceans and our islands!

Please pass this bill with an extended sunset date to help preserve Hawai'i's reefs, strengthen coastal resilience, and preserve thriving marine ecosystems for future generations!

Mahalo!

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

HAWAI'I OCEAN LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE



March 17, 2026

Hawai'i State Legislature
House Committee on Water and Land

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

Aloha Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Morikawa, 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** SB 2972 SD1, relating to O'ahu coral reef restoration. This measure 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' Holomua Marine Initiative process adopts applicable regulations.

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 consume dead coral and excrete fine sand, contributing to the formation and replenishment of Hawai'i's beaches and supporting coastal stability and habitat preservation.

Research shows that herbivorous fish populations, particularly uhu, have been severely depleted near human population centers in Hawai'i. 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. Studies have also found that reefs with higher herbivorous fish populations experienced stronger coral cover trajectories before disturbances and reduced coral mortality following severe heat stress.

By establishing temporary protections while the Holomua Marine Initiative develops long-term, science-based management rules, SB 2972 SD1 takes a prudent and proactive approach to reef restoration on O'ahu. Protecting uhu and kala now is an investment in healthier reefs, stronger coastal resilience, and the future of Hawai'i's nearshore ecosystems.

For these reasons, the Ocean Legislative Task Force respectfully urges the committees to support SB 2972 SD1. 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.

SB-2972-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2026 5:31:25 PM

Testimony for WAL on 3/17/2026 9:00:00 AM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Morikawa, and WAL Committee Members,

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in strong support of this common sense bill that temporarily prohibits the nighttime spearing of any uhu or kala in state marine waters around Oahu until DAR implements the Holomua initiative that will recover populations of uhu and kala enough to prevent coral reefs from being smothered by algae.

We desperately need these reef herbivores - please support this bill!

Wil Aloha,

Lisa Bishop, MS

Friends of Hanauma Bay I President



**PUAKŌ FOR
REEFS**

A Community Dedicated to Saving Puakō Reef

Return the reef to its historic 70% coral coverage from its existing 7%.

www.Puako4reefs.org * [Puako for Reefs Facebook](#)

Story map of Puakō: [Wahi Pana -A Sacred Place](#)

HEARING FOR STATE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON WATER AND LAND

Tuesday, March 17, 2026 9:00 a.m.

Conference Room 411, State Capitol

TO: House Committee on Water and Land Chair Mark Hashem and Vice-Chair Dee Morikawa, and all members

RE: SENATE BILL 2972 SD1. Relating to Oahu Coral Reef Restoration.

Puakō For Reefs respectfully submits this testimony in strong support of SB 2972 SD1, which would temporarily prohibit the taking, only by spearing, of uhu or kala, in state marine waters, off of Oahu.

Our organization fully supports the intent and purpose of this measure. Puakō For Reefs is investing extraordinary effort to protect and restore coral reef ecosystems along the South Kohala coastline. Through millions of dollars in community donations and countless volunteer hours, we are working to remove a significant stressor, wastewater pollution, from our reefs and nearshore waters. To see these restoration efforts undermined by another preventable stressor, even on another island, is deeply concerning and discouraging for our community.

While the bill limits the prohibition to Oahu, it is important to protect all the uhu and kala that exist in nearshore waters. Uhu is a keystone species and the collapse of this one species would be a crime. The current regulatory framework, constrained by limited enforcement resources, has proven insufficient to prevent ongoing deterioration of the populations.

Several critical considerations support passage of this bill:

1. **Ecological Harm and Loss of Key Reef Species**

The reef fish most heavily targeted for spearing include uhu and kala -- herbivorous species that play a vital role in controlling algae growth. These fish are essential to coral health and reef resilience. The notion that these fish populations are limitless is demonstrably incorrect. Continued removal of key species compromises ecosystem balance and threatens long-term reef survival. Moreover, such extraction disregards longstanding local stewardship practices and Native Hawaiian values that emphasize mālama 'āina and responsible care for our ocean resources.

2. **Public Trust Responsibilities**

Hawai'i's State Constitution affirms the public trust doctrine and the State's obligation to protect natural resources for present and future generations. Strengthening protections for reef ecosystems aligns directly with these constitutional responsibilities and reflects a renewed commitment to safeguarding our shared natural heritage.

3. **Economic Reality and Public Burden**

The economic benefits of spearing uhu and kala accrue to a very small number of individuals. The broader public bears all the environmental degradation and severely diminished reef health. Virtually all residents and taxpayers shoulder these harms without any benefit.



**PUAKŌ FOR
REEFS**

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Return the reef to its historic 70% coral coverage from its existing 7%.

www.Puako4reefs.org * [Puako for Reefs Facebook](#)

Story map of Puakō: [Wahi Pana -A Sacred Place](#)

Our coral reefs are foundational to Hawai'i's cultural identity, food security, shoreline protection, and tourism-based economy. They are already under immense stress from climate change, land-based pollution, and ocean warming. Reducing preventable, extractive pressures is both prudent and necessary.

We respectfully urge you to vote in favor of SB 2972, SD1 and take a decisive step toward meaningful, long-term protection of Hawai'i's reefs and ocean waters.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Barbara Bell for Puakō for Reefs Board members and its many volunteers

Karen Anderson, Board Chair,
Stephanie Erickson, Board Treasurer,
Barbara Bell, Board Secretary, and
George Fry, Board member

**Testimony of The Nature Conservancy
Supporting SB2972 SD1, Relating to Oahu Coral Reef Restoration
Committee on Water & Land
March 17, 2026 at 9:00 am
Conference Room 411 and via Videoconference**

Dear Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Morikawa, and Members of the Committee:

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify today. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Hawai'i and Palmyra supports SB2972 SD1, which temporarily prohibits the taking by spearing of uhu or kala in state marine waters around the island of O'ahu until the Division of Aquatic Resources' Holomua Marine Initiative process adopts applicable regulations.

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. This bill would prohibit night spearing and prevent the commercial sale of illegally speared uhu and kala. It does not affect subsistence and recreational fishers who fish during the day, nor commercial fishers who use nets or traps.

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).

Ensuring that reefs have healthy herbivore populations is one of the most important and effective actions we can take to make reefs as resilient as possible in a changing world. By curbing the most harmful forms of take and strengthening enforcement against illegal harvest, this bill supports healthier reefs, stronger fisheries, and the cultural, ecological, and economic benefits that thriving coral ecosystems provide.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of SB2972 SD1.

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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SIERRA CLUB OF HAWAII

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON WATER & LAND

March 17, 2026

9:00 AM

Conference Room 411

SB2972 SD1: RELATING TO O'AHU CORAL REEF RESTORATION

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

On behalf of our over 20,000 members and supporters, the Sierra Club of Hawai'i **SUPPORTS SB2972 SD1**. This measure will help to prevent the continued depletion of reef species vital to our subsistence, cultural, recreational, scientific, and economic interests, both as a direct fishery resource, and in their role in maintaining and protecting O'ahu's highly threatened coral reefs.

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 impacts on the public interest. The coral reefs and nearshore 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.

Addressing the declines in our herbivore species, including Hawai'i's uhu and kala species, may be a key part of the strategy needed to slow and reverse the decline in O'ahu's reefs and nearshore waters. These fish species in particular can play a critical role in maintaining healthy reefs, through their control of coral-inhibiting algae. Unfortunately, our uhu and kala populations, especially on O'ahu, are far from healthy, and may be at risk of further decline or collapse themselves. Notably, the value of these fish as table fare creates a significant financial incentive to harvest them for commercial gain, and their extreme vulnerability at night has enabled significant numbers of uhu in particular to be taken with devastating efficiency, particularly through the use of SCUBA gear and spears. Without greater protections against the overharvest of uhu and kala, we risk seeing the further depletion of these species, and ever-increasing impacts to the environmental, cultural, subsistence, recreational, scientific, and economic values they provide both directly, and through their role in maintaining healthy coral reefs.

By prohibiting the nighttime take of uhu or kala by spear in O'ahu's nearshore waters, this measure provides a much-needed, targeted layer of protection that can help prevent the further decline of these critical resources, and the coral reefs that they help to maintain. **Notably, the increased abundance of uhu and kala that would be facilitated by this measure will provide greater opportunities for O'ahu's subsistence and cultural practitioners as well as recreational fishers to sustainably enjoy and share these**

resources, without having to compete with commercial operations known to harvest these species en masse at night.

Accordingly, the Sierra Club respectfully urges the Committee to **PASS** this measure. Mahalo nui for the opportunity to testify.

SB-2972-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/12/2026 8:47:20 PM

Testimony for WAL on 3/17/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Uilani Naipo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

In strong support of this measure.

SB-2972-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/13/2026 8:49:57 AM

Testimony for WAL on 3/17/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jeddie Kawahatsu	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I write in support of this bill! Please protect our herbivorous fish species for the benefit of our ocean ecosystems.

SB-2972-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/13/2026 9:55:49 AM

Testimony for WAL on 3/17/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jana Ireijo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Morikawa, and Members of the House Water & Land Committee,

My name is Jana Ireijo and I am writing in strong support of SB2972 SD1, relating to O‘ahu coral reef restoration.

Healthy coral reefs depend on herbivorous fish such as uhu and kala. These species play a critical role in keeping reefs free of algae so coral can grow and recover. Temporary protections like those proposed in this bill are an important step toward restoring reef resilience for future generations.

As someone who works closely with ocean conservation efforts and frequently collaborates with marine scientists and community organizations, I have seen firsthand how urgently our reefs need protection. Supporting herbivore recovery is one of the most effective actions we can take to help reefs heal.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass SB2972 SD1.

Mahalo for your leadership and for your work to protect Hawai‘i’s marine ecosystems.

Sincerely,

Jana Ireijo
Honolulu, Hawai‘i

SB-2972-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/13/2026 11:46:41 AM

Testimony for WAL on 3/17/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brian Bowen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha

Aloha

I am writing to endorse bill SB2972 SD1, 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 (herbivores) 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 key species 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.

SB-2972-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/13/2026 12:56:08 PM

Testimony for WAL on 3/17/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lei Fisher	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

As a Native Hawaiian from a lawai'a family, as well as a beginner spearfisher myself, I strongly support this bill. Any fisher out there knows that especially on O'ahu, the uhu is definitely around less than it used to be just a couple decades ago, and much less than our kūpuna used to see. This bill offers a great balanced approach with allowing for some protections before the Holomua process can get to O'ahu, which will likely be years from now. Our 'Ohana love to eat uhu, and I want my keiki to also have the 'ono for it, but there will be none left if we don't do something now. Please PASS this measure. Mahalo nui loa.

Lei Fisher, Hale'iwa

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.

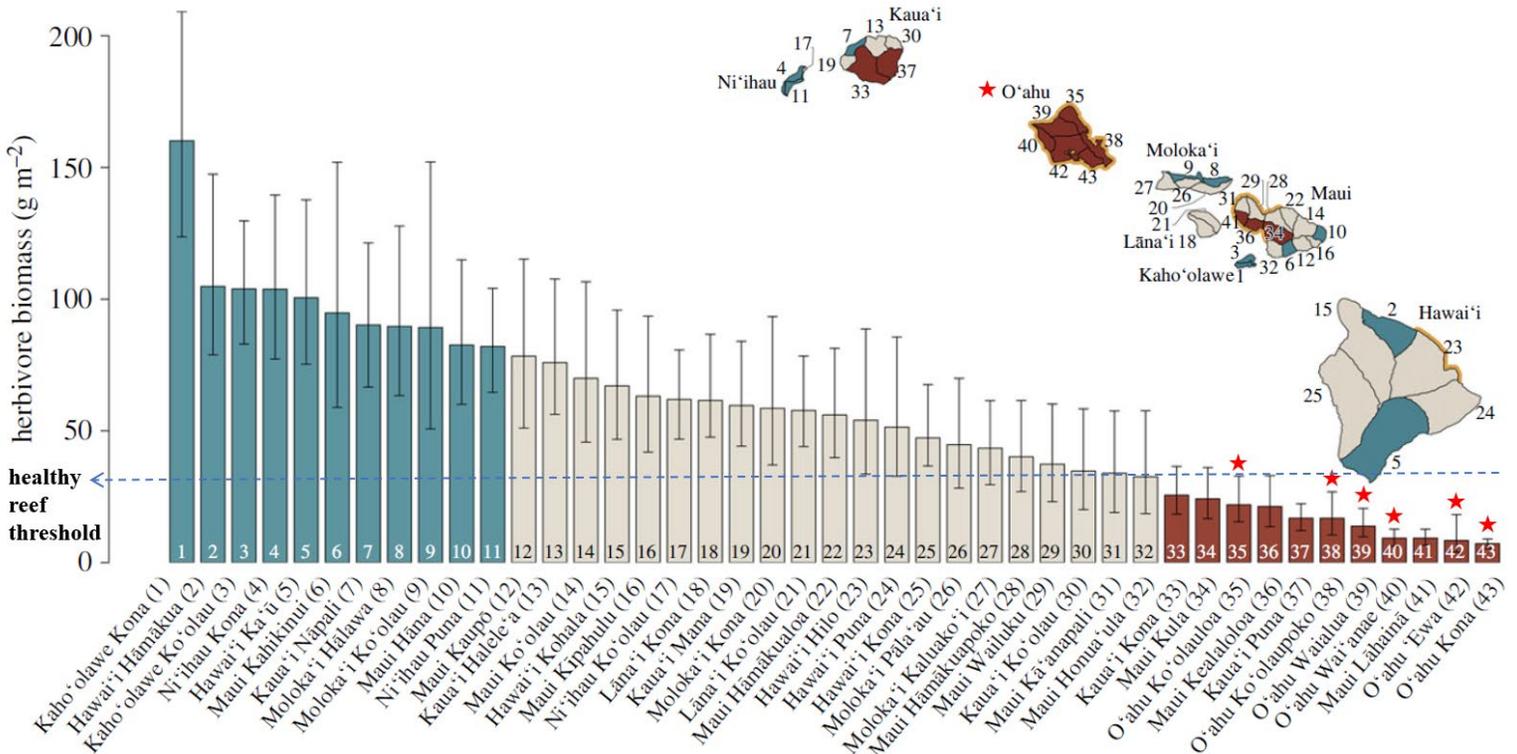
You will certainly hear the opposition berating this bill for trampling on traditional fishing rights, destroying commercial fishing, and being based on worthless data by clueless scientists and erroneous assertions by alarmist environmentalists. I have witnessed similar scenarios play-out elsewhere 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,



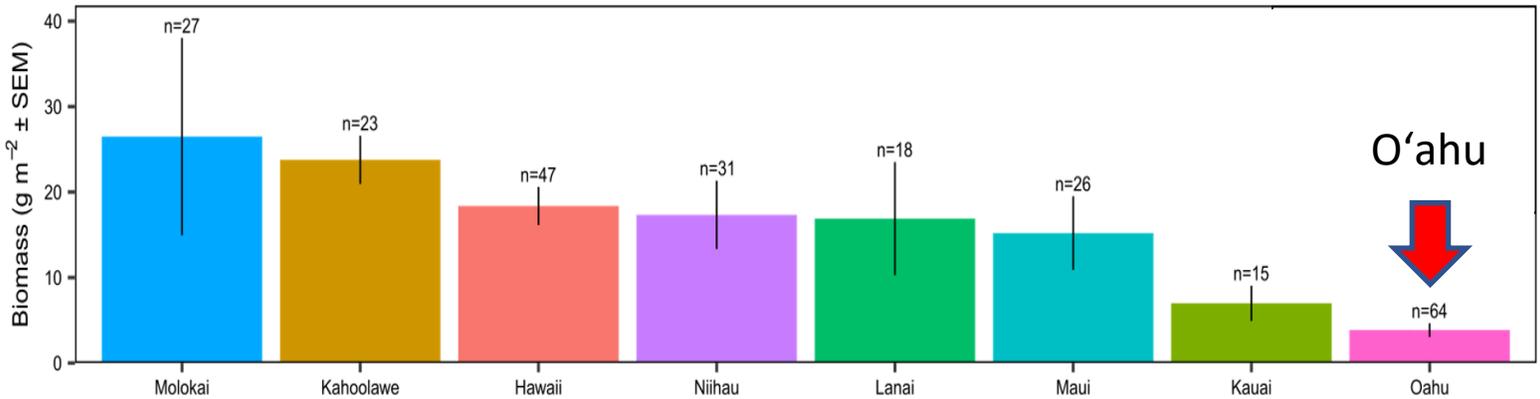
Mark Hixon [data on next page]

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).

SB-2972-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/13/2026 2:33:29 PM

Testimony for WAL on 3/17/2026 9:00:00 AM

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

Comments:

Aloha, please pass SB2972 SD1, a sensible temporary solution to the loss of Oahu's valuable coral reefs. The fishes that clean our reefs so corals can thrive are extremely depleted around Oahu, and 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. Please help save our coral reefs by passing SB2972 SD1.

SB-2972-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/13/2026 2:40:19 PM

Testimony for WAL on 3/17/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Roberts "Bob" Leinau	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This is an action that could make a real difference. I have been diving extensively in Hawaii since 1965 and steadily watched our nearshore natural resources alarmingly decline. The Department of Land and Natural Resources has not protected the ocean adequately. The ocean needs all of the help it can get..

I speak for the habitats and mostly the fish HELP!!

SB-2972-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/13/2026 3:03:11 PM

Testimony for WAL on 3/17/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alexander	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Alex Min. I was born and raised in Honolulu Hawai'i and am a fisherman who regularly harvests reef fish to feed my family and community. I spear uhu, occasionally harvest nenu, and do not target kala. These fish are not only part of our reef ecosystem, they are also part of our culture, food system, and daily life in Hawai'i. I spearfish in Maunalua Bay, a place that many surveys claim to have the lowest amount of herbivores and fish in the State.

I appreciate the intent behind this legislation and the many individuals who care deeply about reef health including myself. However, I want to speak not from a modeling or data perspective, but from the human perspective of food security, cultural practice, and the lived reality of fishing communities and their families that this bill fails to adequately consider.

There is no question that our reefs face pressures. Harvest pressure exists, but so do many other factors such as tourism intensity, coastal development, wastewater runoff, and population density on O'ahu. Fishers see these changes every day in the water. At the same time, fishers have continued to harvest these species in a way that has sustained our communities for generations. Like any sector, there are occasional bad actors who break rules, but those individuals should not justify broad restrictions that affect the entire community.

This bill also fails to recognize the human impact of further restricting access to local food. I encourage members of the committee to visit the Dillingham fish market and speak with the residents who purchase and rely on locally caught fish such as uhu, kala, and nenu to feed their families. These are not luxury products; they are a critical source of affordable protein for many working families in Hawai'i. Restricting access to these fish will directly reduce food availability for communities that are already facing high costs of living and food insecurity.

Additionally, the State has already enacted significant regulations to manage these fisheries. These include:

- **An annual commercial catch limit for uhu**, currently around 30,000 pounds statewide, which is harvested by a limited-entry group of licensed commercial fishers.
- **Daily bag limits for non-commercial fishers**, including a two-uhu-per-day limit.

These existing regulations already place meaningful controls on harvest levels even beyond the Holomua Marine Initiative. The current bill creates overlapping and redundant restrictions without clearly demonstrating that existing management measures are insufficient. Worse off, the legislator is now utilizing Holomua Marine Initiative as a weapon to close fisheries off. Who knows when Holomua will come to Oahu, this bill creates a broad overreach of legislative power and rules based on other rules and regulations.

I am troubled by the process through which this proposal has advanced. From the perspective of fishing communities, this bill raises several issues related to transparency, procedural fairness, and the administrative process.

Specifically:

- Many affected community members were not adequately informed that this restriction was being proposed, raising concerns about inadequate public notice and outreach to those most impacted from their legislators who are putting this forward.
- The bill relies on broad statements about reef decline but does not present a clear scientific record specific to O‘ahu demonstrating that nighttime spearfishing is a primary driver of herbivore decline. In my experience I see abundance of these species including Uhu as I spearfishing Maunalua Bay, where the research states is the worst in the State. I would urge you to think critically – when the scientists are comparing a take zone to a closed no take zone, you would obviously expect to see way more fish. Yet this simple comparison fails to account for the fact that, fish are learned and they will avoid divers who are competing scientific work in areas where they may be targeted.
- The legislation attempts to implement a restriction prior to the completion of the Holomua marine initiative regulatory process, effectively bypassing the standard administrative rulemaking procedures that are designed to allow stakeholder participation and scientific review.
- The bill references future regulatory actions and recovery targets that are not clearly defined, not supported by a documented scientific benchmark, and not subject to the normal environmental review process.

For these reasons, the bill appears to preempt the existing management framework rather than allowing the Holomua process to complete its work through established administrative channels.

At the end of the day, governance and regulation are important. Fishers understand that stewardship requires rules. However, as additional restrictions accumulate year after year, fishing communities are increasingly burdened by a complex and confusing regulatory landscape that makes it harder for people simply trying to feed their families.

Many of the people most affected by this bill are not professional advocates or individuals supported by grant funding or institutional positions who do not have to figure out how to provide for their next meal. These fishers are working families who depend on access to local food resources. When we restrict these fisheries without fully considering the human impacts, we risk pushing communities further toward reliance on imported food, insecurity, and reduced quality of life.

I ask the committee to consider the broader question this bill raises: if access to local fish continues to be reduced, what alternatives are we asking our communities to rely on? Imported seafood, imported meat, and highly processed food are already dominating our markets. Local fisheries should be part of the solution to Hawai'i's food security challenges, not further constrained without clear justification. And if they need to truly be constrained, clear pathways to food security, relief for our communities, and families that rely on this resource.

For these reasons, I respectfully recommend that the committee defer or cancel this bill and instead allow existing management measures and the Holomua marine initiative process to proceed through the established rulemaking framework with full stakeholder engagement. If you do not feel the State of Hawaii Department of Aquatic Resources is doing a good enough job, please fund them to meet their needs, allow fishers to be a part of the solution, and support food security.

You may hear arguments from educated and well-written individuals who are biased towards conservation and preservation and like to continuously put our fishing communities down for not being as educated as them and able to respond to their smart comments or understand their science. This has been a continuous issue across the State of Hawaii where science is used to put our communities down instead of working with us to support vibrant resources and sustainability. The most important thing is for the resource to persist to feed families and children.

I will leave you with this in conclusion, on February 27th, I speared a large Blue Uhu (parrotfish) in Maunalua Bay less than five minutes from my current home. It was one of 32 Parrotfish of large size I saw that day and of the thousands of pounds of other reef fish including over 500 nenu in one school, 100s of Kalas, and numerous other species I saw within the 1 hour timeslot I entered the water. I speared the uhu to feed my family. It provided 12 meals. I ask you to consider if the science that is wrapped in scientific jargon, and confusing long paragraphs and numbers like grams per meter squared, might not be the whole answer.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

SB-2972-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/13/2026 5:08:00 PM

Testimony for WAL on 3/17/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Douglas Perrine	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chairs Hashem and Morikawa, and Committee Members. My name is Doug Perrine, and I believe that I have experience relevant to the proposed action. As a former spearfisher on the island of Pohnpei, I was able to observe first hand the long-term impacts on reef fish communities of night spearfishing. Because of our ability to take nearly every member of the target species while the fish were sheltering in the reef at night, the fish communities we impacted often showed no recovery even a year after we had targeted a certain reef. I was also able to observe the devastating consequences of night spearfishing in Tonga, where I saw stunningly beautiful coral reefs that were almost devoid of fish, especially uhu. Both of these locations have much more extensive coral reef development than any of the Hawaiian Islands, where reef growth is greatly restricted by the steep drop-off of the bottom at only a short distance from shore. Because we have only this narrow band of reef habitat, all of our reef fish species are particularly vulnerable to any highly efficient form of harvesting. I urge you to pass SB2972 to allow some recovery of the populations of uhu and kala on Oahu in order that we, and future generations, may be able to enjoy these fish. Mahalo.

February 15, 2026

Dear Representatives:

Re: HB1750

I write in support of HB1750 regarding marine ecosystem protections.

Although a Maui resident, I was on Oahu for two years, 2019-2020, to study marine biology at UH Manoa. On the occasions when I went diving on Oahu I was shocked to see the conditions of the reefs. While Maui has suffered reef degradation, it is nothing in degree to the state of Oahu nearshore reefs. Off Waikiki the reefs are shrunken and filled with holes. Off Kailua there were some sickly corals but no robust stands. There are several causes for reef degradation, but one that can be controlled is the take of herbivorous fishes. These fishes clear off algae so that corals can settle. There should be strict limits on the take of herbivorous fishes so that reefs have a chance to grow. Night fishing for parrotfishes is particularly damaging since they are the largest herbivores on our reefs.

Night fishing with scuba has been banned in most Pacific nations for decades. It is a commonsense measure to support the environment that is key to the economy of Hawai'i.

I ask that for the sake of Hawai'i reefs and people, present and future, this bill be enacted. And that it be extended to the entire island chain.

Aloha,

Diane E Shepherd DVM diane.shepherd@outlook.com 808-283-2024

3329 Kehala Dr., Kihei, HI 9653

TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF SB 2972 SD1

Relating to Oahu Coral Reef Restoration
Before the House Committee on Water & Land (WAL)
3/17/26, 9 am

Aloha Chair Hashem and Members of the Committee,

My name is Frederick Smith. I live in the Kealakekua ahupua'a in the Kona Moku and am a graduate student at UH Hilo focusing on marine policy and science. I respectfully submit testimony in **strong support of SB 2972 SD1**.

This bill provides a narrow, temporary safeguard for O'ahu's depleted populations of uhu and kala until the Division of Aquatic Resources completes island-specific management measures through the Holomua Marine Initiative.

The scientific record developed during the Senate WLA and AEN hearings clearly demonstrates that O'ahu's herbivore biomass is the lowest in the state. This depletion is already affecting the availability of commonly harvested species such as uhu and kala that many Hawai'i residents rely on for subsistence and nearshore fishing, and it threatens the long-term productivity of these important nearshore fisheries on O'ahu if left unaddressed.

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. Importantly, large portions of reef area in every O'ahu moku already fall below the herbivore biomass threshold associated with maintaining coral-dominated reef ecosystems (Donovan et al., 2023; Attachment 1). When herbivore populations decline below this level, reefs begin to lose their ability to control seaweed growth effectively, allowing macroalgae to overtake coral and degrade reef habitat. These ecological changes ultimately reduce reef resilience and diminish the long-term productivity of nearshore fisheries that many Hawai'i residents depend on for food and subsistence fishing.

Importantly, SB 2972 SD1 does not impose a broad fishing ban or interfere with Native Hawaiian traditional and customary practices. Daytime harvest, subsistence fishing, shoreline gathering, and cultural use all remain fully intact. The bill restricts only a single, modern, high-efficiency method of take—nighttime spearfishing—which researchers, community members, and enforcement personnel have repeatedly identified as a major driver of rapid depletion of uhu and kala around O'ahu.

Nighttime spearfishing allows for highly efficient harvest of reef fish that are resting and easily located with dive lights, making it possible to remove large numbers of herbivores in a single outing, particularly when fish are harvested for market. By temporarily limiting this high-efficiency harvest method while broader management measures are developed through the Holomua process, SB 2972 SD1 helps protect the ecological functions that sustain healthy reefs

and productive nearshore fisheries over the long term. Although nighttime spearfishing occurs across multiple islands, O'ahu is experiencing the most acute impacts, and focusing regulation here makes sense given the urgency.

Because the measure preserves all daytime subsistence, cultural, and traditional practices and regulates only a single, modern, high-impact method of take, SB 2972 SD1 presents no constitutional or litigation concerns. It is a proportionate, narrowly tailored response that enhances, rather than diminishes, long-term access to these species for Native Hawaiian practitioners, subsistence fishers, and local families who depend on healthy reef ecosystems.

O'ahu's reefs are in an ecologically fragile state, and the record before the Legislature contains ample evidence of depletion and urgent need for protection. SB 2972 SD1 offers a balanced, temporary safeguard that aligns with the State's constitutional duties, supports the Holomua process, and ensures that these critical herbivores are not further diminished while comprehensive regulations are being developed.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to **pass SB 2972 SD1**.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

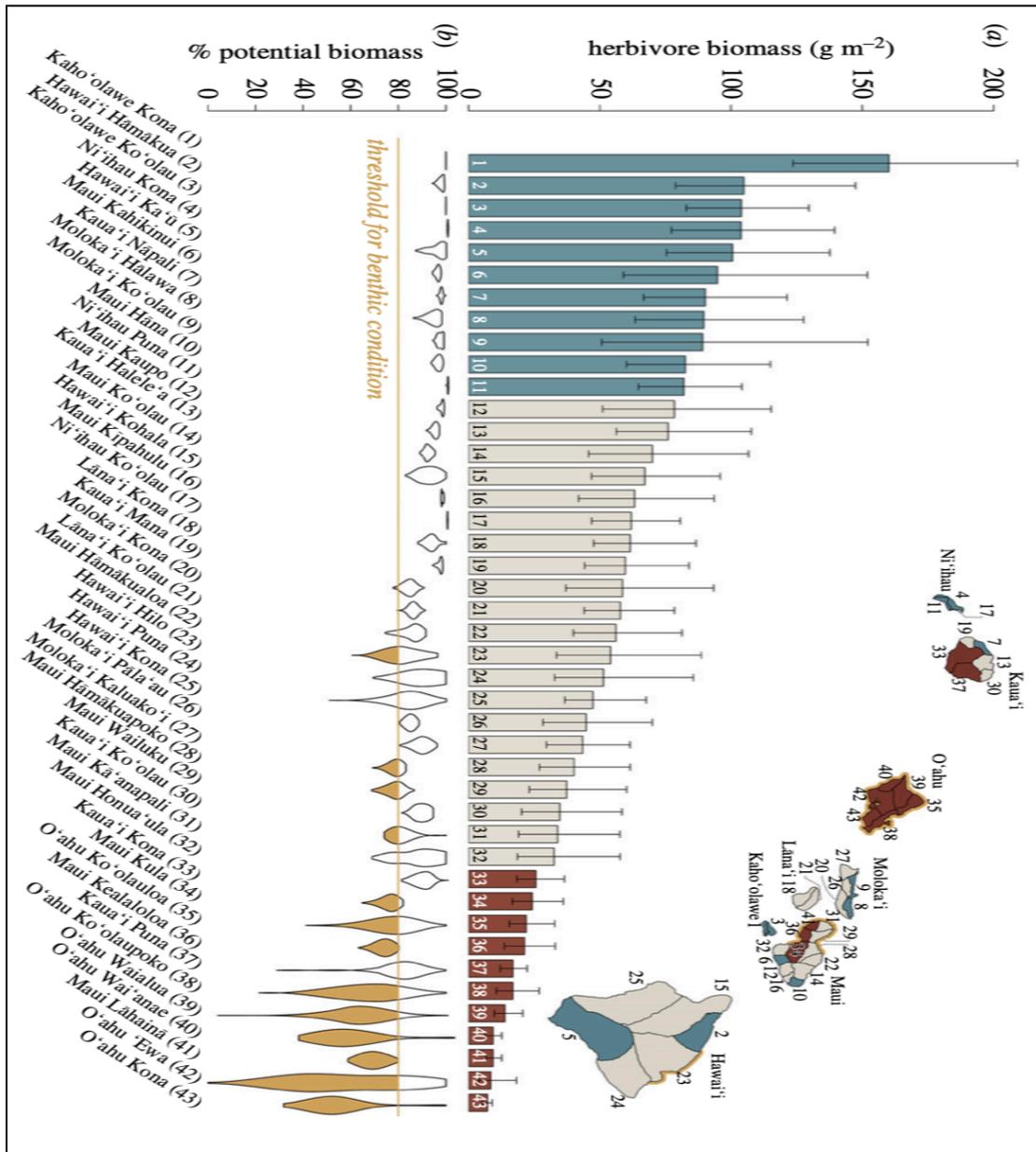
Frederick Smith

Attachment 1:

Donovan, C. J., Friedlander, A. M., Stamoulis, K. A., Sparks, R. T., DeMartini, E. E., Brown, E. K., & Williams, I. D. (2023).

Predicting herbivore biomass and identifying thresholds for coral reef ecosystem functioning across the Hawaiian Islands. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 290(1993), 20222273. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2022.2273>

Statewide reef monitoring data show that every O’ahu moku falls within the lowest quartile of herbivore biomass in Hawai’i (red), with large areas below levels associated with maintaining coral-dominated reef ecosystems (Attachment 1; Donovan et al., 2023).



SB-2972-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2026 11:52:50 AM

Testimony for WAL on 3/17/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
LEIGHTON R TAYLOR	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please pass SB2972 SD1, a sensible temporary solution to the loss of Oahu's valuable coral reefs. The fishes that clean our reefs so corals can thrive are extremely depleted around Oahu, and 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. Please help save our coral reefs by passing SB2972 SD1.

TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 2972 SD1

Measure Title: RELATING TO OAHU CORAL REEF RESTORATION.

Report Title: Fishing Regulations; Uhu; Kala; Spearing; Temporary Restrictions

Aloha Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Morikawa, and members of the House Water and Land Committee,

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. 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. Having conducted research on marine ecosystems from the poles to the tropics and to depths of thousands of meters, I have a unique perspective on the importance of the health of these ecosystems to people and nature and the gradients of human-induced and environmental impacts to these vital ecosystems.

I am writing in strong support of SENATE BILL 2972 SD1, which would temporarily prohibit 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.

Studies authored by myself and others have shown a severe decline in herbivorous fish populations across Hawai'i, some dangerously low, imperiling our coral reefs statewide. Maintenance and recovery of coral reefs require herbivores, which graze on limu and help reefs recover from climate-driven bleaching, as well as local threats from poor water quality, overfishing, and habitat loss. O'ahu's herbivore populations are in crisis with populations at less than 5% of their potential capacity. This is particularly true for large species like uhu, kala, which are important food fish and critical to reef health. A major contributor to herbivore depletion is spearing, especially at night when these species sleep on the reef and are most vulnerable. This bill would help to address this issue and aid in the recovery of these keystone species. I have worked on nearshore fisheries and coral reefs in Hawai'i and across the global for over 4 decades and have documented significant declines in fish stocks, particularly in populated islands such as O'ahu. Many locations have passed the tipping point but there is still hope for Hawai'i. This legislation is a critical step in helping to ensure we can restore severely depleted herbivore populations and build coral reef resilience in the face of climate impacts and local stressors. Restoring herbivore populations is essential for reef recovery and for the people of Hawai'i.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Alan Friedlander", is centered within a light gray rectangular background.

Mahalo, Alan Friedlander, Ph.D.

SB-2972-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2026 2:30:47 PM

Testimony for WAL on 3/17/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sarita Rich	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Hashem and members of the WAL,

I am a teacher and artist living in Honolulu, and I strongly support SB2972- SD1. I’ve been researching Hawai’i’s coral reefs since 2022 and have learned that our reefs are invaluable resources for our people as they provide food sources, jobs, stimulate our tourism and economy, protect shorelines from erosion, and offer recreation and spiritual connection. These benefits disappear when our reefs are degraded by unsustainable fishing practices.

Coral reefs all over the world are threatened by a rapidly warming planet, but reefs in Hawai’i face other dangers: sedimentation from poor land use practices, boat groundings and anchor drags, ever-increasing plastic debris, runoff of fertilizers and sewage that encourage seaweed growth that smothers corals. Fortunately, we have a natural defense in our reef healers, namely uhu (parrotfish) and kala (surgeonfish), that eat the seaweeds that smother corals. But our uhu and kala populations are being wiped out by overfishing, and we can’t wait for the Holomua Marine Initiative to fix this problem.

One action we can take now to counteract the effects of reef degradation is to protect the fish that can save our reefs. Studies in Hawai’i show correlations between protecting herbivorous fishes and coral reef health:

1) Responses of Herbivorous Fishes and Benthos to 6 Years of Protection at the Kahekili HFMA (Maui), by Williams ID, et al. (2016). This scientific paper shows how herbivore protection (including parrotfish) at the Kahekili Herbivore Fisheries Management Area led to significant increases in herbivorous fish biomass and changes in benthic communities (more crustose coralline algae, lower macroalgae). This study directly quantifies the impact of the fishing ban on herbivores — including parrotfish — and links it to benthic changes associated with reef resilience.

2) Kahekili Herbivore Fishery Management Area – Results Brief (State of Hawai’i), by Division of Aquatic Resources. This state summary report includes data that show large increases in parrotfish biomass after herbivore protection began in 2009.

3) Hawai’i DLNR Herbivore Management Plan (2021) by DLNR & DARThis comprehensive management plan includes figures showing parrotfish and herbivore biomass changes over ~10 years in the KHFMA — built on state monitoring data. The plan contains

multiple years of data and ecosystem context linking herbivore protections to healthy reef conditions.

Studies of reefs in Caribbean waters also conclude that enforcing strict, science-based fishing bans help parrotfish populations recover and can greatly increase coral resilience to stress:

“Parrotfish protection & no-take zones improve coral reef resilience,” PJ Mumbly et al. (2013)

“Fishing management thresholds for parrotfish help coral recovery,” Bozec et al. (2016)

“Global evidence linking parrotfish abundance to coral growth,” **Cramer & Norris (2017)**

“Marine protected area design improves parrotfish populations,” Pedro H. Pereira et al. (2022)

“Science-based Solutions help Bonaire’s Coral Reefs Thrive,” Fedrizzi (2025)

I urge you to pass SB2972-SD1 and fulfill our kuleana to be good stewards of our precious resources. Passing SB2972-SD1 will show the people of Hawai’i that we value our natural resources and ensure that coral reefs will thrive with their benefits accessible to future generations.

Mahalo nui loa,

Sarita Rich

Honolulu, Oahu

SB-2972-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2026 4:13:42 PM

Testimony for WAL on 3/17/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carrie Ostroski	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit my testimony in support of SB 2972 SD1. The recovery and care of our coral reef fish are vital to protecting, restoring, and regenerating our coral reefs.

Mahalo,

Carrie Ostroski, Waikoloa

Dear house,

I am a researcher at the Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology, but I am speaking today as a private citizen. I strongly support SB2972 SD1. One of my major areas of study is the effects of climate change on coral reefs in Hawai'i. The effects of ocean warming on our reefs will be severe over the next few decades, but one of the best things we can do as a community and as a state to prepare for these challenges is to build robust communities of limu-eating fish. Limu (seaweeds) are natural on our reefs, but without enough fish that eat them, the corals quickly become choked off and don't have a chance to recover after heatwaves. Recent work by my colleagues in Hawai'i has shown that the abundance of limu-eating fish on a reef is a fundamental determinant of whether that reef recovers after a heat-wave, or collapses. The challenges facing our reefs from not having enough limu-eating fish will become much more severe as we have future heatwaves, and as the climate changes.

The population of herbivorous, limu-eating fish around O'ahu has been dramatically depleted due to decades of overfishing. This is an emergency situation and we need to put measures in place now if we hope to have reefs, fisheries, coastal protection, surf breaks, and all the things we get from coral reefs around O'ahu in the future.

I am in favor of this bill because it puts rapid limits on the overfishing of uhu (parrotfish) and kala (blue-spine unicornfish), which are essential herbivores on our reefs, and because they have been so substantially overfished around O'ahu.

I know that this bill will result in substantial push-back from a vocal, yet small minority of fishermen. Most fishermen appreciate mālama 'āina (protection and care of the land and this place). Most fishermen, and most people, will understand we must take steps to protect O'ahu, our home, and ensure that it remains bountiful for generations to come.

I support this bill, and I encourage you to support it as well.

Sincerely,

Chris Jury

SB-2972-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/16/2026 3:21:17 AM

Testimony for WAL on 3/17/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Matthew Gurewitsch	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha!

My wife and I have been full-time residents of Maui for the past 15 years. We moved here for the abundant wildlife in the island chain's near-shore water. The decline of fish stocks over the time we've been here has been heart-breaking. We know, because we're in the water every day that conditions allow, keeping close track.

As a result, we are unconditionally in favor of all effective measures to protect our reefs. We respectfully urge you to pass SB2972 SD1, a sensible temporary measure to avoid further harm to Oahu's indispensable coral reefs. The herbivores that clean our reefs are vital to the health of our coral. But their stocks are at an all-time low around Oahu. It is neither traditional nor pono for night-fishers to spear them while they sleep. The state agency with the responsibility of addressing this natural resource emergency has failed to act. Please exercise your authority to help save our coral reefs! Please passing SB2972 SD1. Mahalo for listening!

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

As a resident of the Maunalua Bay area, I'm writing in **support** of SB2972 SD1.

Throughout the State, our ecosystems and environments are under threat because of climate change. Habitat loss, food chain destruction, and other weighing factors have already caused devastating effects in every aspect of our mauka to makai.

These negative impacts are especially prevalent in Maualua Bay where fishery surveys from local nonprofits that utilize both visually (using scientific methods) and vocally (from interviewing fishermen) have reported a noticeable decline in certain species of fish (including Uhu) and 60% urged for more regulation.

I urge you to pass of SB2972, which focuses on temporary fishing restrictions around O'ahu as part of efforts to aid coral reef restoration and address the above issues.

Specifically, **SB 2972 SD1** would:

- **Temporarily prohibit the taking of uhu (parrotfish) and kala (bluespine unicornfish) by spearfishing in state marine waters around the island of O'ahu** after sunset and before sunrise.
- **Prohibit the commercial sale of uhu and kala taken by spearing** on O'ahu.
- These prohibitions would remain in effect **only until the Division of Aquatic Resources' Holomua Marine Initiative process adopts new regulations** designed to help recover populations of these key reef species to levels that can prevent excess seaweed growth on coral reefs.

Mahalo nui for the opportunity to testify.

Kind regards,
Paul Bernstein
Aina Haina

TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 2972 SD1

March 16, 2026

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

I recently retired as NOAA's research coordinator for the Papahānaumokuākea National Marine Sanctuary, and maintain affiliate faculty status with UH Manoa. I am testifying today as a private citizen. I have spent over 40 years studying Hawaii's coral reef ecosystems, and have also been an avid recreational diver and fisher for all of my adult life. In this time span, I have witnessed the serious degradation of our coral reefs. Specifically, we have over-harvested herbivorous fishes, the so-called "lawnmowers of the reef", to levels so low that we are at risk of losing our coral reefs entirely in coming years. In the wake of a major perturbation, such as a tsunami or major hurricane, herbivorous fishes are needed to keep the algae in check until new corals can settle on the reef and grow. Without herbivores such as uhu (parrotfish) and kala (surgeonfish), the algae takes over and corals may never recover.

The scientific data documenting this precipitous drop in herbivore abundance is incontrovertibly documented in the scientific literature (see testimony and data provided separately by Drs. Mark Hixon, Alan Friedlander, and others). Herbivore abundances on O'ahu's reefs are BELOW FIVE PERCENT of the pristine stocks in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. This constitutes an emergency by any definition of the word, and requires immediate action. We are literally one coral bleaching event away from losing a majority of our coral reefs.

Coral reefs are critically important to modern Hawaiian society. A recent study put their valuation in the hundreds of millions of dollars a year in terms of the protection they provide from storms and coastal inundation. As residents of this state, many (if not most) of us partake of ocean recreation, whether it involves swimming, diving, fishing, surfing, paddling, sailing, or just sitting on a sandy beach while enjoying the sunset. Coral reefs make all of these things possible. These ecosystem services are also a large draw for tourism, the economic engine upon which our state is heavily dependent. Finally, during recent economic and social upheavals due to the COVID pandemic, coral reef fisheries also provided a measure of food security for many local families.

SB2972 is a temporary measure to begin restoration of Oahu's fish populations immediately. Coral reef restoration truly requires a multi-pronged approach, one that ultimately must be inclusive of watershed restoration, cessation of pollution, etc. However, given the urgency of herbivore depletion on our reefs. I strongly support SB2972 as a measure that can be quickly, inexpensively, and effectively deployed

ASAP. At risk of sounding alarmist, I believe very strongly that urgent action is needed.
I thus ask for your support on SB2972.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Randall Kosaki". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "R".

Randall Kosaki, Ph.D.

SB-2972-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/16/2026 7:35:05 AM

Testimony for WAL on 3/17/2026 9:00:00 AM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair Hashem and members of the WAL,

My name is Jesse Rich, and I am a concerned citizen of Honolulu who strongly supports SB2972 SD1 as a necessary 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 D1 represents a science-based, proactive step that prioritizes long-term environmental health for current and future generations.

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

Jesse Rich

Honolulu, Oahu