

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

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR | KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



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

P.O. BOX 621
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96809

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

RYAN K.P. KANAKA'OLE
FIRST DEPUTY

CIARA W.K. KAHAHANE
DEPUTY DIRECTOR - WATER

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

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

Before the Senate Committees on
WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE ARTS
and
AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

Wednesday, February 11, 2026
1:00 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 224

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

Senate Bill 2972 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, and to prohibit the commercial sale of any uhu or kala that has been taken by spearing. These prohibitions would remain in effect 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.

Mahalo for the opportunity to comment on this measure.

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/7/2026 3:30:31 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair Lee, Chair Gabbard, and members of the Committees,

We strongly support this important bill that is critical to the protection and preservation of the population of uhu and kala around Oahu!

Mahalo for hearing SB2972, and for providing us the opportunity to testify in strong support of its passage.

With Aloha,

Lisa Bishop, MS

Friends of Hanauma Bay I President



To: The Honorable Chairs Senators Chris Lee and Mike Gabbard, the Honorable Vice Chairs Lorraine Inouye and Herbert M. "Tim" Richards III, and Members of the Water, Land, Culture and the Arts and Agriculture and Environment Committees.

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

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

Hearing: Wednesday February 11, 2026, 1:00 p.m., room 224

Aloha Chairs Lee and Gabbard, Vice Chairs Inouye and Richards, and Members of the Water, Land, Culture and the Arts and Agriculture and Environment Committees!

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!

This bill temporarily bans night spearing of uhu (parrotfish) and kala (bluespine unicorn fish) in Oahu's state marine waters, and prohibits their commercial sale until new regulations are adopted by the Division of Aquatic Resources' Holomua Marine Initiative.

Parrotfish, also known as uhu, 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 is **especially critical in the face of climate stressors such as warmer oceans and pollution.**

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). All herbivores are important for the health of the reef, but research shows that **herbivorous fish populations, particularly uhu and kala, have been severely depleted near human population centers in Hawai'i. The depletion of these natural reef caretakers makes coral reefs more vulnerable to environmental stressors, leading to ecosystem degradation.** Reefs with increased

herbivores see less coral mortality following severe heat stress compared to reefs with reduced fish populations.

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 excreting 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 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)

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 10:19:36 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
George "Bud" Antonelis. PhD	Testifying for Na Kama Kai	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hawaii's coral reefs provide food, coastal protection, sand for our beaches, and many opportunities for recreation, tourism, and spiritual connection. Reefs around the island of Oahu are among the most degraded in the state, mostly because of leaching sewage and fertilizer runoff stimulating growth of seaweeds that smother and kill corals. The natural means of addressing these threats is to ensure that there are plenty of herbivorous fishes (especially parrotfishes or uhu, and surgeonfishes like kala) that eat these seaweeds so corals can flourish. Unfortunately, these species are severely overfished around the island of Oahu.

This bill would begin the process of replenishing uhu and kala populations around Oahu by implementing regulations recommended by scientists and law enforcement officers. I urge you to pass this bill so our keiki can enjoy the many benefits of healthy coral reefs.

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 11:17:25 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marissa Blake	Testifying for Fish Pono - Save Our Reefs	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Marissa Blake, and I have been a resident of O‘ahu for seven years. As an avid freediver, ocean advocate, and witness to the changing health of our nearshore waters, I am writing in **strong support of SB 2972**.

Our ocean life is in a state of rapid decline. We are at a critical juncture where many of us in the ocean community fear it may already be too late to save our local reefs unless we take bold, immediate action. Protecting our herbivorous fish is not just an environmental issue, it is a matter of respect for Hawai‘i’s culture and a necessity for the future generations who deserve to inherit a thriving ecosystem.

As a freediver, I see the "quiet" decline of our reefs every time I enter the water. Specifically, I want to highlight the following observations:

- **Lack of Education:** There is a significant gap in public knowledge regarding the roles certain species play. Even among those who love the ocean, many do not realize that herbivores like Uhu and Kala are the "janitors" of the reef, essential for keeping coral free of suffocating algae.
- **Targeting of Vulnerable Species:** I have personally been in the water with friends who spearfish and have watched them target Uhu simply because they are an "easier" fish to kill. Because they are slow-moving and less elusive than other species, they are being disproportionately harvested without regard for their vital ecological function.
- **The Future of Our Planet:** Our reefs are the foundation of our islands’ coastal protection and food security. If we lose the herbivores that maintain the coral, we lose the reef itself.

We needed to take action years ago. SB 2972 provides the necessary framework to educate the public and implement the protections these species desperately need to recover. I urge the committee to pass this measure to ensure our oceans remain resilient for the future of our planet.

Mahalo for your time and for the opportunity to testify on this vital matter.

Marissa Blake



SIERRA CLUB OF HAWAII

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WATER, LAND, AND CULTURE AND THE ARTS SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

February 11, 2026

1:00 PM

Conference Room 224

In **SUPPORT** of **SB2972: RELATING TO O'AHU CORAL REEF RESTORATION**

Aloha Chair Lee, Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Inouye, Vice Chair Richards, and Members of the Committees,

On behalf of our over 20,000 members and supporters, the Sierra Club of Hawai'i **SUPPORTS SB2972**. 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 commercial sale of speared uhu or kala on O'ahu, as well as 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, particularly at night.**

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

HAWAI'I OCEAN LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE



February 11, 2026

Hawai'i State Legislature
Senate Committee on Water, Land, Culture and the Arts
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment

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

Aloha Chairs Lee and Gabbard, Vice Chairs Inouye and Richards, and esteemed members of the committees,

The Ocean Legislative Task Force—a coalition of more than 150 individuals across over 20 organizations statewide—**strongly supports** SB 2972, 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 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.

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.

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

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.

**Testimony of The Nature Conservancy
Supporting SB2972, Relating to Oahu Coral Reef Restoration
Committee on Water, Land, Culture and the Arts
Committee on Agriculture and Environment
February 11, 2026 at 1:00 pm
Conference Room 224 and via Videoconference**

Dear Chairs Lee and Gabbard, Vice Chairs Inouye and Richards, and Members of the Committee:

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify today. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Hawai'i and Palmyra supports SB2972, 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' Holomua Marine Initiative process adopts applicable regulations.

Herbivorous fishes such as uhu and kala are essential to the resilience of Hawai'i's coral reefs. 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.

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.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Duke E. Ah Moo Kris Billeter Anne S. Carter Ka'iulani de Silva Daniel J. Dunn Dave Eadie Jan Elliott Matt Emerson
Hon. Judith Epstein Dr. Alan M. Friedlander Benjy Garfinkle Puni Jackson David Lassner Brett MacNaughton (Chair)
Janet Montag Alicia Moy Katherine G. Richardson John R. Sabas Bradley E. Smith Julie Smolinski Vern Yamanaka

Ihupani Advisory Council: Christopher J. Benjamin Kenton T. Eldridge Eiichiro Kuwana
Duncan MacNaughton Jean E. Rolles Crystal K. Rose Nathan E. Smith

Founders: Samuel A. Cooke Herbert C. Cornuelle



Date of hearing: 11 February, 2026

To: Chair Chris Lee, Vice Chair Lorraine R. Inouye and the Senate Committee on Water and Land, Culture and the Arts and Chair Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair Herbert M. Richards, III, and the Senate Committee Agriculture and Environment

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

Aloha,

Hawai'i Food+ Policy is testifying in **support of SB 2972** which temporarily restricts the night spear fishing and commercial sale of Uhu (parrotfish, family Scaridae) and Kala (bluespine unicornfish, *Naso unicornis*) on O'ahu.

Our coral reefs are the "gardens" of our ocean, and hold immense ecological and socioeconomic importance. Uhu and Kala serve as the essential caretakers of these gardens; by grazing on algae, they ensure the reef remains a productive habitat for all¹. A healthy reef is a self-sustaining food source. We must continue to value and support the natural symbiotic relationship between the herbivorous fish and the reef as it is key for the preservation of the biological machinery that produces our food. Short-term restrictions ensure long-term food sovereignty of Hawai'i.

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 stabilize².

This bill also prohibits the commercial sale of speared Uhu and Kala, but it does not ban fishing for food. By removing the profit motive, we reduce the incentive for mass-harvesting. This ensures that the remaining fish are available for local families who fish to put food on their own tables, rather than for export or high-end commercial markets.

Not only is this bill about species conservation, it is about protecting the long-term viability of O'ahu's reefs. As food advocates, our priority is the long-term health and resilience of Hawai'i's local food systems. With these comments, we urge the committees in Water & Land and Agriculture & Environment to pass SB2972.

Mahalo,
Brandon Kinard & the Food+ Policy Team
#fixourfoodsystem

[1] Brijs, 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.

LATE

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 8:15:48 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Godfrey Akaka	Testifying for The Native Hawaiian Gathering Rights Association	Oppose	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

The NHGRA is in strong opposition to SB2972. The narrative that stopping fishing will change the weather or improve reef growth is not sound science. Rather it is a therapy and a fear tactic used to take away our basic human right to harvest food from our ocean. This is absolute government over reach and subject to litigation should this bill pass. Furthermore this bill is in direct conflict to Native Hawaiian Gathering Rights and the decimation of our traditional and customary practices.

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 10:53:21 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Hawaii's coral reefs provide food, coastal protection, sand for our beaches, and many opportunities for recreation, tourism, and spiritual connection. Reefs around the island of Oahu are among the most degraded in the state, mostly because of leaching sewage and fertilizer runoff stimulating growth of seaweeds that smother and kill corals. The natural means of addressing these threats is to ensure that there are plenty of herbivorous fishes (especially parrotfishes or uhu, and surgeonfishes like kala) that eat these seaweeds so corals can flourish. Unfortunately, these species are severely overfished around the island of Oahu. This bill would begin the process of replenishing uhu and kala populations around Oahu by implementing regulations recommended by scientists and law enforcement officers. I urge you to pass this bill so our keiki can enjoy the many benefits of healthy coral reefs.

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 11:09:32 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hope DelosSantos	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Coral reefs sustain Hawaii by protecting our coasts, creating beaches, supporting tourism, and offering cultural and recreational value. Oahu's reefs are heavily damaged due to sewage and fertilizer pollution fueling algae that suffocates corals. Restoring populations of reef-grazing fish—particularly parrotfish (uhu) and surgeonfish (kala)—is critical, as these species control harmful algae growth. However, overfishing has decimated these populations around Oahu. This bill adopts expert-recommended regulations to rebuild uhu and kala numbers. Please support it to preserve healthy reefs for future generations.

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 11:29:01 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Philip Fernandez	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose this bill.

This bill purports to protect uhu and kala. It should be strongly noted that regulation for uhu and kala were approved by DLNR and went into effect, see <https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/dar/announcements/new-rules-for-uhu-manini-kole-kala-and-kona-crab-now-in-effect/>

This bill is redundant.

The herbivore rules now in effect protect uhu and kala, in fact, in 2025 uhu and kala fisheries were closed early due to reaching the annual catch limit that was developed based on scientific studies. These rules were vetted by scientists, managers, and the fishing community.

To pass this bill will ignore the hard multi-year effort that resulted in a solid herbivore plan that was agreed by all parties involved.

Please oppose this bill and do not allow it to go forward.

Aloha,

Hawaii's coral reefs provide food, coastal protection, sand for our beaches, and many opportunities for recreation, tourism, and spiritual connection. Reefs around the island of Oahu are among the most degraded in the state, mostly because of leaching sewage and fertilizer run-off stimulating growth of seaweeds that smother and kill corals. The natural means of addressing these threats is to ensure that there are plenty of herbivorous fishes (especially parrotfishes or uhu, and surgeonfishes like kala) that eat these seaweeds so corals can flourish. Unfortunately, these species are severely overfished around the island of Oahu.

This bill would begin the process of replenishing uhu and kala populations around Oahu by implementing regulations recommended by scientists and law enforcement officers. I urge you to pass this bill so our keiki can enjoy the many benefits of healthy coral reefs.

Aloha Chair Gabbard, Chair Lee, and members of AEN/WAL,

I am the Hsiao Endowed Professor of Marine Biology at UH Mānoa, testifying today as a private citizen. Because SB2972 has no introduction, 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 (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, 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, 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 effective 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 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. 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 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 and the commercial sale of speared fish is based on the experience of law enforcement officers familiar with the situation around O'ahu.

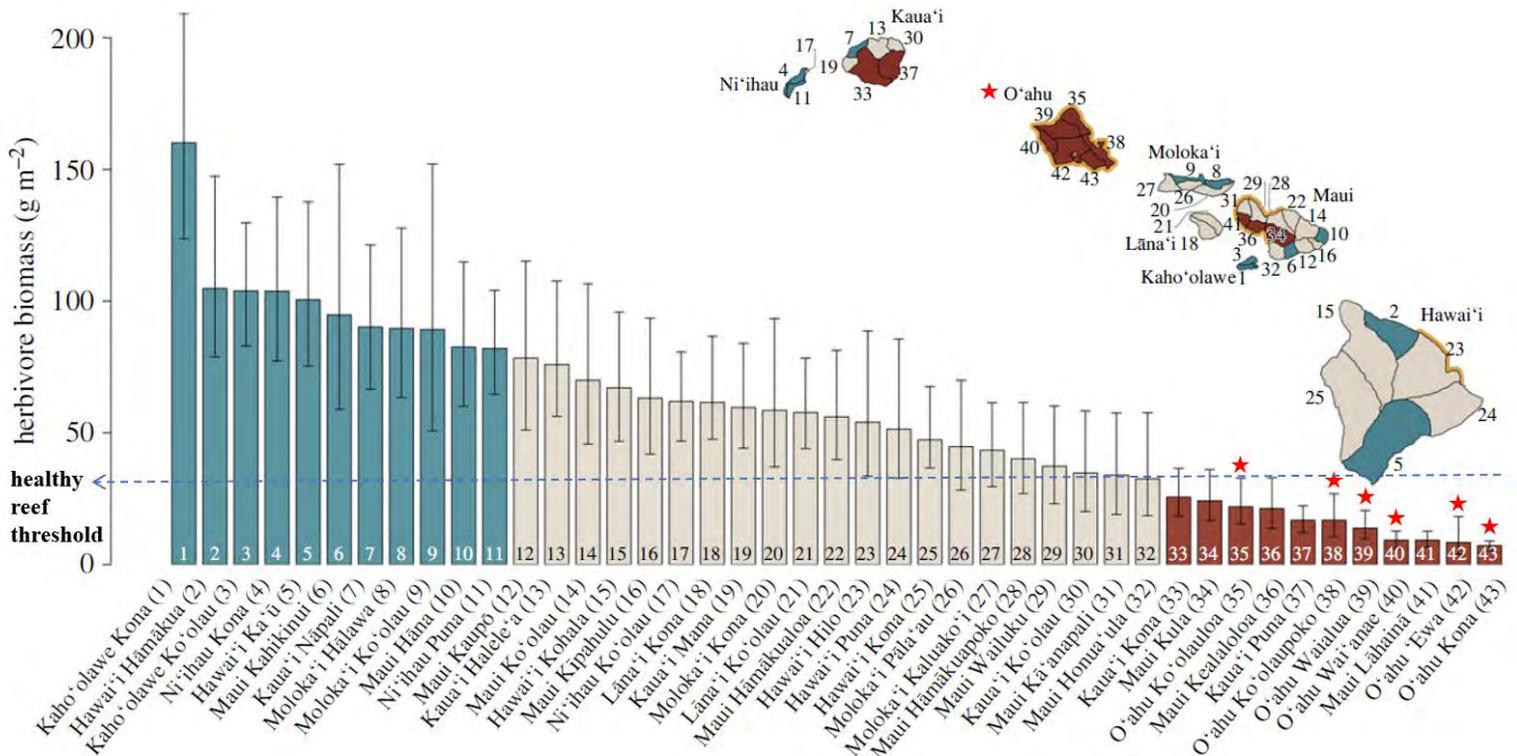
In closing, you will certainly hear the opposition berating this bill for trampling on traditional fishing rights, destroying commercial fishing, and being based on worthless data by clueless scientists and erroneous assertions by alarmist environmentalists. I have witnessed this scenario play-out elsewhere in the world multiple times. In all cases, ignoring the science resulted in collapsed fisheries and ecosystems. I urge you to pass this bill and lobby for its passage into law. (I'm sorry I could not testify in person due to teaching duties at UH.)

Mahalo,

Mark Hixon

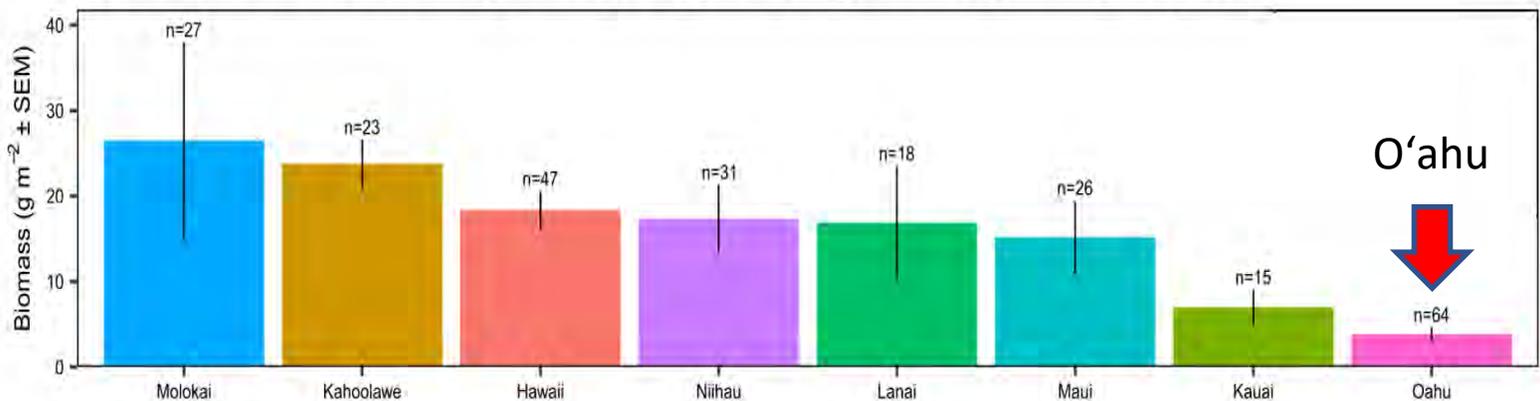
[data on next page]

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

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 6:16:13 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Hawaii’s coral reefs provide food, coastal protection, sand for our beaches, and many opportunities for recreation, tourism, and spiritual connection. Reefs around the island of Oahu are among the most degraded in the state, mostly because of leaching sewage and fertilizer run-off stimulating growth of seaweeds that smother and kill corals. The natural means of addressing these threats is to ensure that there are plenty of herbivorous fishes (especially parrotfishes or uhu, and surgeonfishes like kala) that eat these seaweeds so corals can flourish. Unfortunately, these species are severely overfished around the island of Oahu.

This bill would begin the process of replenishing uhu and kala populations around Oahu by implementing regulations recommended by scientists and law enforcement officers. I urge you to pass this bill so our keiki can enjoy the many benefits of healthy coral reefs.

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 10:22:18 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mackenzie manning	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Legislators,

Please support the passage of SB2972 to protect and replenish our herbivorous fish populations. They are essential in maintaining healthy reefs in Hawai‘i, especially O‘ahu, where reef cover is severely degraded due to local impacts and invasive organisms. Hawaii's coral reefs provide essential benefits: food security, coastal storm protection, beach sand, tourism revenue, recreation, and cultural connection. Oahu's reefs are among Hawaii's most degraded due to sewage pollution and fertilizer runoff that fuel seaweed overgrowth, smothering corals.

Herbivorous fish—especially parrotfish (uhu) and surgeonfish (kala)—naturally control seaweed by grazing, allowing corals to thrive. However, severe overfishing around Oahu has decimated these critical species.

This legislation implements expert-recommended regulations from scientists and law enforcement to restore uhu and kala populations. Passing this bill ensures future generations can enjoy healthy coral reefs and the economic, environmental, and cultural benefits they provide.

Thank you,

Mackenzie Manning

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 12:51:47 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Steve Roy Kaiser	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a fisherman I support the banning of night diving and the take of Uhu and Kala without any limits. That take by recreational or commercial can lead to excessive numbers that may not be sustainable.

I do not support the ban on the commercial sale of these species. Commercial fishers are an important source of food for our communities. They are often ignored and forgotten in our being food independent. And I'd remind all our legislators that DLNR and specifically DAR are the ones who recommend enforce and work with science backed research to protect our waters. Just 2 years ago with support for fishers the herbivore rules were put in place. And more recently the protections at Maunalua Bay which were proposed by fishers particularly commercial fisher.

So while I as fisher support the ban on night take of these species. I do not support the ban on commercial sales as we have DAR rules already in place to protect these species

February 9, 2026

Dear Senators:

I write in support of SB2972 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

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 2:32:54 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
kellycollinsjk@gmail.com	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha. I am highly in favor of approval of SB2972. Protection of all reef fish is more crucial than ever as they face blatant overharvesting from ever increasing numbers of spear fishers and stress from environmental factors such as reef siltation from flooding and coral bleaching. Prohibiting the spearing of two important reef grazers, the uhu and kala, is a great start toward helping the reefs recover, reach stability and hopefully thrive once again. Mahalo.

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 5:40:37 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Malia	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a multi-generational Hawaii resident and lover of our reefs, I have seen over my lifetime (let alone my parent's!) how Oahu's reef health has absolutely collapsed. As a child there were SO many fish. Now due to severe over fishing there are hardly any, and the vast majority of the beautiful coral towers and reefs I used to snorkel as a child are gone & covered in algae, which makes the water murkey and leaves it lifeless devoid of fish. Its heartbreaking. Pass this temporary ban so we can begin to restore reef populations. No commerical fisherfolks should be fishing KEYSTONE species, especially at night when they become paralyzed and have no chance of survival. I have friends who will regularly kill 15+ a night and have no regard for what they are doing to their children's ability to fish in the future. If even our local people refuse to learn and listen to science, its up to the law to ensure that the commons ~ our precious reefs and ocean ~ don't collapse and we still have fish, coral reefs and more for our children. Let alone for tourism. Who wants to snorkel in algae overgrowth with no living coral and no fish? Do what's right for Hawaii and our reefs by passing this bill. Mahalo.

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 5:45:13 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leo Rivera	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hawaii’s coral reefs deliver vital benefits: food security, protection from coastal storms, beach sand, tourism income, recreation, and cultural ties. Oahu’s reefs are among the state’s most damaged, harmed by sewage and fertilizer runoff that spur seaweed blooms that smother corals.

Herbivores—particularly parrotfish (uhu) and surgeonfish (kala)—keep seaweed in check by grazing, which lets corals recover. Yet heavy overfishing around Oahu has severely reduced these key fish.

This bill adopts science- and enforcement-backed measures to rebuild uhu and kala populations. Approving it will help safeguard healthy reefs and the economic, environmental, and cultural benefits they sustain for future generations.

Mahalo for protecting our reefs!

Leo

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 5:42:43 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cana L Flug	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hawaii's coral reefs provide essential benefits: food security, coastal storm protection, beach sand, tourism revenue, recreation, and cultural connection. Oahu's reefs are among Hawaii's most degraded due to sewage pollution and fertilizer runoff that fuel seaweed overgrowth, smothering corals.

Herbivorous fish—especially parrotfish (uhu) and surgeonfish (kala)—naturally control seaweed by grazing, allowing corals to thrive. However, severe overfishing around Oahu has decimated these critical species.

This legislation implements expert-recommended regulations from scientists and law enforcement to restore uhu and kala populations. Passing this bill ensures future generations can enjoy healthy coral reefs and the economic, environmental, and cultural benefits they provide.

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 5:57:12 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
kyle franks	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong support of **SB2972 and its companion HB1750**, relating to **O‘ahu coral reef restoration**. These bills temporarily prohibit the spearing of **uhu (parrotfish)** and **kala (surgeonfish)** in state marine waters around the island of **O‘ahu** and prohibit the commercial sale of uhu and kala taken by spearing until the Division of Aquatic Resources’ Holomua Marine Initiative process adopts applicable regulations.

Hawai‘i’s coral reef ecosystems provide invaluable benefits to our communities, including **coastal protection, fisheries, tourism, recreation**, and deep **cultural connections** for Native Hawaiians and all residents. Healthy reefs also support food security and biodiversity across the islands. Growing scientific evidence shows that herbivorous fishes like uhu and kala play a **critical ecological role** by grazing on seaweeds that can otherwise smother corals and inhibit reef recovery. When populations of these fish are depleted, coral resilience declines, leading to further reef degradation.

SB2972 and HB1750 act now to **pause spearfishing of these important species** around O‘ahu, safeguarding their populations while the Holomua Marine Initiative develops and implements long-term, science-based regulations. This temporary protection will give uhu and kala a chance to recover toward healthy levels, which is essential for **maintaining reef balance and enhancing coral resilience**.

Protecting herbivorous fish populations is also consistent with expert recommendations and builds on statewide efforts to improve reef health through collaborative management. Passing these bills ensures that reef ecosystems around O‘ahu have a greater chance to stabilize and recover, providing environmental, economic, and cultural benefits for current and future generations.

Thank you for your consideration and for advancing legislation that supports coral reef stewardship and sustainable marine ecosystems. I respectfully urge the committee to pass SB2972 and HB1750.

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 6:01:45 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Roland Yartzoff	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Legislators,

I support any and all protections for our reef ecosystems which have been substantially impacted by overfishing.

Mahalo, Roland Yartzoff

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 6:30:16 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Senator Chris Lee,

I am a teacher and artist living in Honolulu, and I strongly support SB2972. I've been researching Hawai'i's coral reefs for the last few years 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.

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 and fulfill our kuleana to be good stewards of our precious resources. Passing SB2972 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

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 6:50:07 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
GWEN YOUNG	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Over fishing of Uhu and Kala directly impact the health of our reefs and balance of the ecosystem. I strongly support this measure, even though I enjoy eating Uhu, I am willing to pause this for the great health of the reef and for the future keiki and generations.

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 7:52:11 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair Gabbard, Chair Lee, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jesse Rich, and I am a concerned citizen of Honolulu who strongly supports SB2972 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 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

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 9:14:31 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michele Jones	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Why this matters:

On Oahu, populations of keystone herbivorous reef fish have **collapsed to just 5% of what's needed** to maintain healthy coral reefs. This has led to widespread **algae overgrowth and coral loss**. Uhu and Kala are especially vulnerable because they become **paralyzed while sleeping at night**, making them easy targets. Irresponsible night spearfishing has devastated their populations. PLEASE, please, protect these invaluable fish.

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 1:41:08 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry Support

2972 SB RELATING TO OAHU CORAL REEF RESTORATION.

TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 2973

February 10, 2026

Aloha Chair Gabbard, Chair Lee, and members of AEN/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 Mary Donahue). 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 SB2872 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 cursive script that reads "Randall Kosaki". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and legible.

Randall Kosaki, Ph.D.

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 11:30:08 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Julia Humphrey	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Legislators,

I strongly support House resolutions HR69/HCR83 and nearly identical Senate resolutions SR104/SCR122 to help save the saviors of O‘ahu’s coral reefs: herbivorous fishes. Parrotfishes (*uhu*), surgeonfishes (*kala, kole, manini*, etc.), chubs (*nenue*) and other fishes clean reef surfaces, preventing seaweeds from smothering corals. Recent scientific research has shown that the abundance of these fishes around the island of O‘ahu is less than 5% its potential (Donovan et al. 2023 *Transactions of the Royal Society B*). Many reefs around O‘ahu are already degraded from poor land management practices, and the ever-warming ocean is predicted to cause coral bleaching and death every year by 2040 (van Hooidonk et al. 2016 *Scientific Reports*). Please pass these resolutions so that Hawai‘i can take steps to replenish our natural lawnmowers of the reef before it is too late.

Mahalo,

Julia Humphrey

Honolulu, Hawai‘i

TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 2972

February 10, 2026

Aloha Chair Gabbard, Chair Lee, and members of AEN/WAL:

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, which would temporarily prohibit the taking by 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. 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 that reads "Alan Friedlander". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored, rectangular background.

Mahalo, Alan Friedlander, Ph.D.

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 12:19:54 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Victoria Anderson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

It is the opposite of pono to kill uhu and kala while they are helpless, sleeping. Their population decline is also affecting the survival of corals. Please pass this important bill.

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 12:47:50 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bert Weeks	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support additional regulations on uhu to prevent night spearfishing. As both a marine biologist and a fisher, I believe these restrictions are reasonable and supported by evidence from other regions in the Pacific, where similar measures have significantly improved uhu populations.

I also support the Honomua initiative; however, it is realistic to assume that additional rule packages for O‘ahu will take time to develop. Passing this bill now will help support the recovery of our fish populations and coral reef ecosystems while we wait for those broader measures.

LATE

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 1:00:57 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Yanrong Chen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Yanrong (Irene) Chen and I am a rising junior of ‘Iolani School testifying in support for SB1262.

My love for the ocean came in different waves and air pockets in my life. My dad was raised near the sea and my sister and I grew up eating seafood, finding shells and learning about whales from BBC channels. In my family, it was often said that having seafood on the table meant that we were content. It has long been ingrained in my mind that nature and the ocean provides.

In recent years I have grown to become more climate conscious then ever whether that be for our mountains, our streams or our oceans. I have swimmmed in “fishless” waters, ones that once held abundant reefs but now remain as dead rocks. I have hiked the Wai’anae mountains to find not native species thriving in our forests, but others that dominate. Our ecosystems and enviroments 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. And I urge the public and our government to call for long-term change.

Over the past summer, I was an intern at a local nonprofit where I was able to learn the rich history our reefs and the different stories that stemmed from them. One story and lesson that left an everlasting impact on me was when I learned about the critical state our herbivore reef fish are in.

After conducting fisheries surveys, both visually (using scientific methods) and vocally (from interviewing fisherman) we found that out of 80% of fisherman that continues to fish in

Maunalua Bay report a noticeable decline in certain species of fish (including Uhu) and 60% urged for more regulation. With this I propose the passing of SB1262.

The bill places a ban on nighttime spearfishing specially targeting Uhu and Kala. It addresses the important roles these fish play in our ecosystem as they allow for healthy reefs to thrive without the worry of algae.

‘Oahu is currently facing the lowest population rates of these fish across Hawai‘i’s islands, and it is important that we create long-term plans for this problem. Hawai‘i must take a multi-pronged approach to fisheries management and environmental protection to ensure the viability of the land and people. This bill helps achieve those goals efficiently and equitably, and I’d love to discuss this further if there are any concerns or questions.

Mahalo!

Yanrong (Irene Chen), Kapahulu/Mo‘ili‘il

LATE

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 10:51:24 PM
Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
john Foti	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The first version of this bill prohibited night diving for Uhu and Kala, which I grew with, but it appears to have dropped the night diving language and is now a total ban on uhu and Kala spearing. This I do NOT agree with. holomua may never be instituted and then we are stuck with no spear fishing of uhu/kala forever. Night diving has no cultural basis and should be banned. Day diving, as part of the Hawaiian culture and traditional food gathering method, should be perpetuated.

LATE

SB-2972

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 8:08:48 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Klayton Kubo	Individual	Oppose	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Strongly In Opposition

Klayton Kubo

Waimea, Kaua'i