

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

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CHAIRPERSON
BOARD OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
COMMISSION ON WATER RESOURCE
MANAGEMENT

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FIRST DEPUTY

CIARA W.K. KAHAHANE
DEPUTY DIRECTOR - WATER

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BUREAU OF CONVEYANCES
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CONSERVATION AND RESOURCES
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HISTORIC PRESERVATION
KAHOOLAWE ISLAND RESERVE COMMISSION
LAND
STATE PARKS

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

Before the Senate Committee on
WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE ARTS

Monday, February 9, 2026
1:00 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 224

In consideration of
SENATE BILL 2975
RELATING TO MARINE LIFE CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Senate Bill 2975 authorizes the Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) to close all or portions of any marine life conservation district (MLCD) for various periods of time and to adopt rules for the regulation of commercial activity within an MLCD. **The Department supports this measure.**

The Department's Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR) has designated ten MLCDs statewide and has adopted rules regulating the take of marine life in order to conserve and increase marine resources within these special areas. The number of visitors in some MLCDs has increased substantially over time, resulting in adverse impacts to the resources and habitats within these areas.

The carrying capacity study completed pursuant to Act 31, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2022, for the Pūpūkea MLCD found evidence of declining ecosystem conditions associated with high visitor use. Fish abundance, species richness, and coral health declined across the study period at heavily visited sites. At peak periods, the Kapo'o tidepools area within the MLCD experienced visitation exceeding 100 individuals in the water simultaneously.

Regarding commercial activities in MLCDs, recent reports of commercial operators potentially causing damage to MLCD resources have raised concerns within communities. Furthermore, commercial operations such as guided snorkel or SCUBA tours may result in

increased visitor traffic to MLCs. This measure would enhance the Department's ability to regulate commercial activities specifically within MLCs to protect marine resources from overuse by non-extractive commercial activities.

Mahalo for the opportunity to comment on this measure.

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 9:48:31 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Councilmember Tamara Paltin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha e Chair and members,

I am writing in strong support of SB2975. I was the President of the Save Honolua Coalition for nearly a decade. Despite Honolua having the protected status of being a marine life conservation district, no community based management nor any other kind of management was done and the coral reef cover and marine life has significantly declined over the years with no protections other than not being able to remove things from the boundaries of the marine life conservation district. Commercial and private boats have beached in or near the MLCD causing significant harm and receiving barely a slap on the wrist for the damage they caused and community stress and outrage. There needs to be authority to implement temporary, seasonal or area base closures in coordination with long term community and cultural stewards of the area. There must be some authority to respond adaptively to visitor induced ecological stress, protect fish populations and reef health, ensure sustainable public access and if this can be done in conjunction with lineal descendants who have cultural knowledge or community groups that enact makai watch then it needs to be done immediately. We have seen these areas decline in health and if they were so important to be designated a MLCD in the first place, they deserve to be cared for appropriately and immediately.

Mahalo for your service to our communities and the opportunity to provide testimony.

Tamara Paltin - Councilmember West Maui



Hui Aloha Kiholo

Our mission is to protect, perpetuate and enhance the cultural and natural landscape of the Kiholo Bay area through collaborative management and active community stewardship.

House Committees: WLA, CPN
Hawai'i State Capitol - Room 401
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

16 February 2026

Subject: Support for SB2975 from Hui Aloha Kiholo

Dear Honorable Senators:

The Native Hawaiian Organization Hui Aloha Kiholo supports SB2975 to authorize the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) to close all or portions of any Marine Life Conservation District (MLCD) for various periods of time and to adopt rules for the regulation of commercial activity within an MLCD.

Our 501(c)3 organization formed 18 years ago to re-establish respect and safety for Kiholo State Park. We are currently engaged in an active curatorship agreement with State Parks (Parks) that allows us to lead education, conservation, resource management, stewardship, and maintenance activities in close partnership with DLNR. Guided by kupa 'āina with at least 400 years of presence in the ahupua'a comprising Kiholo State Park Wilderness Reserve, within the Kona region of Kekahawai'ole, our Vision is: *A thriving cultural landscape inspiring pono connection between people and place.*

We support this measure for the following reasons, and thank you for taking the time to read this important information:

- **Places Need Rest:** For the last 18 years, we have worked side by side to co-manage Kiholo State Park. From the beginning, we have strongly advocated for managed camping at Kiholo so that the next generation can enjoy spending time outdoors, just as we were able to do. However, we have always advocated for a pause after each camping weekend to allow time for place to recover. In our experience, enabling place to rest and recover benefits people and place by providing time and space for healing.



Hui Aloha Kiholo

Our mission is to protect, perpetuate and enhance the cultural and natural landscape of the Kiholo Bay area through collaborative management and active community stewardship.

- **Places Need Help:** Co-management sometimes involves conducting activities that are dangerous and have the potential to harm the untrained and inattentive. For example, we recently completed a wildfire fuelbreak project that required closing access roads to portions of the Kiholo State Park so heavy equipment could operate. We worked closely with State Parks to coordinate area closures, so professional work crews could focus on felling and removing large fire-prone trees without impacting cultural sites in a controlled environment.
- **Places Need Healing:** We were able to participate in an invasive fish removal effort at the Kealakekua MLCD in 2025. This activity required closing the bay to commercial boats. As soon as divers entered the water, it was apparent that the invasive fish of Kealakekua had very little experience with divers, and we were able to focus on the work of invasive species removal without worrying about propellers, SCUBA divers, or rubber neckers. This level of uninterrupted focus is sometimes required to help place heal, and healing place benefits everyone.
- **We Must Give Back to Places that Feed Us:** Although MLCD's are closed to most fishing, they nourish our souls as examples of what environmental protection can do for the ocean. However, there is a great deal of science related to the damage done to coral reefs by inexperienced SCUBA divers who crush coral and stress protected species. There is also a developing concern about engine noise and exhaust pollution negatively impacting marine life. We know that fish communicate through grunts, fin clicks, trills, and visual displays, all of which are interrupted when divers and boats are nearby. We embrace a reciprocal relationship with nature where we must give back to places that give to us, including prohibiting and conservatively managing activities known to cause harm.
- **We Must Put Place First:** The economic and recreational activities demonstrably proven to negatively impact place

rely upon a healthy environment. Visiting SCUBA divers do not choose to dive in Kawaihae Harbor, although the ocean is quite calm there most days. They want to see healthy coral and colorful fish. We know that they have an impact, and that the environment must be healthy to support not only commercial activities, but Constitutionally-protected cultural practice. As former Palau President Tommy Remengesau says, "The environment is the economy, and the economy is the environment."



Hui Aloha Kiholo

Our mission is to protect, perpetuate and enhance the cultural and natural landscape of the Kiholo Bay area through collaborative management and active community stewardship.

● **The Time is Now:** Coral reef surveys in west Hawai'i documented variable recovery of reef-building corals following the extreme hot water event of 2014-15. Some heavily trafficked reefs subject to polluted run-off lost almost all of their live coral. Other remote reefs bathed in clean water recovered relatively quickly. Science shows that chemicals in sunscreen, wastewater, fertilizer nutrients, overfishing, anchor damage, and trampling by divers is lethal to live coral. Alternatively, reefs subject to clean abundant groundwater inputs can feed heterotrophically until conditions return to those conducive to coral health. The State must have the ability to close areas during large stress events such as the hot water entrainment of 2014-15 to provide the best chance for coral to survive and continue to fulfill its biocultural role as a builder of islands.

Hui Aloha Kiholo supports local livelihoods, including those associated with well-managed commercial tourism activities. However, we rely upon the people of place to chart their own course into the future because they know and understand what place can and cannot support. They must have a voice and the ability to work with DLNR to close the ocean during times of healing, rest, and cultural ceremony. The ability for a place to rest and recover from harm is vital if our precious protected areas are to benefit the community and support local livelihoods now and in the warmer oceans of the future.

Respectfully,

Chad Wiggins
Executive Director
Hui Aloha Kiholo
cwiggins@kiholo.org
808-756-2080
hualohakiholo.org



Testimony Before The
Senate Committee on Water, Land, Culture & the Arts (WLA)
IN SUPPORT OF SB2975
February 18, 2026, 1:01 p.m., Room 224 & Videoconference

We are Olan Leimomi Fisher and Kevin Chang, Kua'āina Advocate and Executive Director, respectively, testifying on behalf of [Kua'āina Ulu 'Auamo \(or KUA\)](#). "Kua'āina Ulu 'Auamo" stands for "grassroots growing through shared responsibility," and our acronym "KUA" means "backbone." **Our mission is to connect and empower communities to improve their quality of life through the collective care for their biocultural (natural and cultural) heritage, serving as a "backbone organization" that supports creative, community-driven solutions to problems stemming from environmental degradation.** Hawai'i's biocultural resources continue to be negatively impacted by political, economic, and social changes, and the increasing dangers of climate change make fostering and empowering resilient communities acutely critical.

Currently KUA supports three major networks of: (1) over 40 mālama 'āina (caring for our 'āina or "that which feeds") community groups collectively referred to as E Alu Pū (moving forward together); (2) over 60 loko i'a (fishpond aquaculture systems unique to Hawai'i) and wai 'ōpae (anchialine pool systems) sites in varying stages of restoration and development, with numerous caretakers, stakeholders, and volunteers known as the Hui Mālama Loko I'a ("caretakers of fishponds"); and (3) the Limu Hui made up of over 50 loea (traditional experts) and practitioners in all things "limu" or locally-grown "seaweed." **Our shared vision is to once again experience what our kūpuna (ancestors) referred to as 'ĀINA MOMONA – abundant and healthy ecological systems that sustain our community resilience and well-being.**

KUA strongly supports SB2975 as an incremental step towards 'āina momona.

This bill would authorize the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) to close all or portions of any of the state's eleven Marine Life Conservation District (MLCDs) for various periods of time to adopt rules for the regulation of commercial activity within those MLCDs. **Marine Protected Areas aim to conserve and replenish the i'a (marine animals), limu (various underwater plants), 'āko'ako'a (coral), and all life in specially designated places across the state, acting as safe havens and essentially nurseries for these lifeforms that may have little to no protections in surrounding areas.** Threats to MLCDs include overuse by uninformed and/or irresponsible tourists and locals, as well as increased environmental changes and disasters, pollution, and invasive species, to name a few.

We applaud the successful completion of the Act 31 (2022) Carrying Capacity Study at the Pūpūkea MLCD, and see the great value of SB2975 as an extension of Act 31's carefully collected data and recommendations. The study found significant adverse impacts to marine life in the Pūpūkea MLCD that were especially prone to overuse by tourists, and recommended seasonal, day, time, and area closures to mitigate this impact. Long-term management options to reduce the negative impacts of uninformed humans on the health and abundance in MLCDs

are essential for the health and abundance of our marine life, and especially when the surrounding communities are involved. As proven by the Hanauma Bay MLCD carrying capacity studies since 2018, the twice-weekly closures, reservation system, differential parking and entry fees, and mandatory education for tourists, among other restrictions, has resulted in notable improvement to the bay's marine ecosystem. This was due to the authority possessed by the local government to restrict access to the bay, which DLNR currently does *not* possess and is urgently necessary in Pūpūkea and likely other MLCDs under its jurisdiction.

We are proud to have Mālama Pūpūkea-Waimea as a valued member of our KUA community, and have seen the incredible work that this small organization does to steward the Pūpūkea MLCD since 2011, as well as leading the implementation of the Carrying Capacity Study created through Act 31. We recently also welcomed Ho'āla Kealakekua Nui into our KUA network 'ohana and acknowledge the hard work of them and other community groups and individuals dedicated to protecting MLCDs that may come forward.

The communities we work with are committed to ensuring the long-term health of our biocultural resources that they have cared for and depended on for generations since time immemorial. **We believe protecting our environment, the foundation of our very existence, is about sustained and long-term commitments toward achieving 'āina momona abundance once again.** To get there requires clear steps to enable more collaborative mālama 'āina efforts, including through this bill. Our decisions today will continue to shape the future that our keiki's keiki's keiki will one day inherit – we hope for a future of shared and harmonious abundance, and hope you do, too.

Mahalo nui loa for considering our testimony. Please **PASS** SB2975.

Aloha 'Āina Momona no nā kau ā kau.



THE SENATE
KA 'AHA KENEKOA
THE THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE
REGULAR SESSION OF 2026

COMMITTEE ON WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE ARTS

Senator Chris Lee, Chair
Senator Lorraine R. Inouye, Vice Chair

NOTICE OF HEARING

DATE: Monday, February 9, 2026
TIME: 1:00 PM
PLACE: Conference Room 224 & Videoconference
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street

**TESTIMONY OF THE OCEAN TOURISM COALITION IN STRONG OPPOSITION TO
SB2975**

Dear Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and Members of the Committee on Water, Land, Culture and the Arts:

The Ocean Tourism Coalition (OTC) respectfully submits this testimony in strong opposition to SB2975.

The Ocean Tourism Coalition represents hundreds of commercial ocean operators throughout the State of Hawai'i, including businesses that operate under permits issued by the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) and rely on predictable and transparent management. Our members support marine conservation and operate within an already comprehensive regulatory framework governing Marine Life Conservation Districts (MLCDs).

SB2975 would fundamentally alter that framework by authorizing the DLNR to close all or portions of any MLCD for seasonal, day-based, or time-based periods. As drafted, the bill provides no substantive standards, procedural requirements, or stakeholder consultation obligations to guide the exercise of this new closure authority.

Current law already authorizes the DLNR to manage MLCDs through the adoption of rules pursuant to chapter 91, Hawaii Revised Statutes, including rules governing permitted uses and commercial activity. SB2975 would simply allow for closures to be imposed without rulemaking, clear standards, or procedural safeguards.

While the bill cites increased visitation and localized impacts at certain MLCDs, it applies blanket authority statewide without requiring site specific findings, scientific thresholds, or consideration of existing permitted uses. The bill also does not distinguish between unmanaged recreational use and permitted commercial operations that are already regulated, monitored, and subject to enforcement.

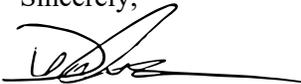
There are existing examples where collaborative management between DLNR and permitted commercial operators has successfully reduced impacts without resorting to unilateral closures. At places such as Molokini, operators have worked closely with the Division of Aquatic Resources to implement operational practices designed to minimize impacts, improve compliance, and support conservation goals. These cooperative approaches demonstrate that meaningful stakeholder engagement and adaptive management under existing authority can be effective without eliminating permitted access or bypassing established processes.

MLCDs are not incidental to many permitted commercial operations. They are central to lawful operations and the visitor experience. Allowing closures without meaningful input from affected users would create severe operational uncertainty and would effectively eliminate authorized uses without due process.

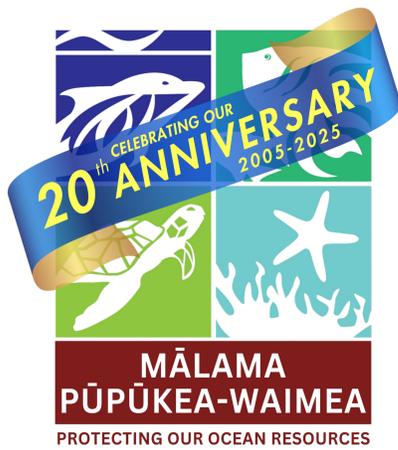
For these reasons, the Ocean Tourism Coalition respectfully urges the committee to defer SB2975 and ensure that any changes to MLCD management are developed through a transparent, collaborative, and balanced process.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Denver S. Coon', written over a horizontal line.

Denver S. Coon
President, Ocean Tourism Coalition



February 9, 2026
WLA Hearing, 1 pm
SB2975 – In Support

Aloha WLA Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and Members,

Mālama Pūpūkea-Waimea (MPW) is a Hawai'i non-profit organization founded on the North Shore of O'ahu in 2005. Our mission is "working to replenish and sustain the natural and cultural resources of the Pūpūkea and Waimea ahupua'a for present and future generations through active community stewardship, education, and partnerships."

For twenty-one years, we have focused our collaborative stewardship and education efforts on the Pūpūkea Marine Life Conservation District (MLCD), one of only three MLCDs on O'ahu.

MPW strongly supports SB2975.

In 2022, the Legislature passed Act 31 (SB3330) authorizing the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) to conduct a carrying capacity program for the sensitive areas of the Pūpūkea MLCD. MPW was honored to be awarded the contract for this program and gathered extensive data on human impacts on marine life over a three-year period. DLNR submitted the [Act 31 Final Report](#) to the Legislature on January 5, 2026.

The report found that high levels of visitors to the Kapo'o (Sharks Cove) area of the Pūpūkea MLCD are causing significant damage to marine life. Management measures including partial closures are urgently needed to prevent further damage.

This bill provides DLNR clear authority to better manage MLCDs for human use using seasonal, day, or time-based closures, and to adopt rules to limit commercial activity, in response to ecological threats to our highly valued marine reserves.

Mahalo for passing SB2975!

Denise Antolini
President, MPW

Mālama Pūpūkea-Waimea
Post Office Box 188
Hale'iwa, HI 96712

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SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 7:19:51 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
John Carty	Testifying for Save Honolua Coalition	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha Chairs and Members,

The Save Honolua Coalition strongly supports HB 2975.

Honolua Bay is a Marine Life Conservation District that was established in 1977. While it was well-intended, the number of visitors and commercial pressures on this place have increased dramatically since then. On busy days, Honolua now sees well over 1,200 users. Over this same period, the reef has declined from approximately 42% coral cover to less than 8% and is barely hanging on.

Commercial boating activity has resulted in two recent boat groundings in as many years in Honolua, causing extensive damage to the reef and culturally significant areas.

It is true that impacts come from land-based visitors as well as commercial boating. But we are successfully addressing the land-based use impacts through our cultural sanctuary plan [savehonolua.org] and forthcoming co-management with State Parks. On busy days, there is a steady stream of nine or more commercial boats occupying the three sets of moorings throughout the day. What we don't have is any effective way to manage or limit water-based commercial activity inside our bay. The result is continued and unmanaged pressure on a reef system that is already near collapse. Also, our wa'a community are being squeezed out and made to feel unwelcome.

Honolua Bay urgently needs this legislation. The reef is at a breaking point, and without action we will continue to lose one of Hawai'i's most important and culturally significant reef systems.

We strongly urge you to pass HB 2975. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

John Carty - Save Honolua Coalition

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 7:44:46 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Zachary LaPrade	Testifying for Calypso Charters	Oppose	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Testimony in Opposition to SB2975

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

This bill puts jobs, businesses, and entire industries at risk by allowing closures based solely on the discretion of an appointed administrator, with no standards, no time limits, and no due process.

I am a permitted commercial ocean operator. My company employs over 50 people who rely on predictable, transparent access to Marine Life Conservation Districts (MLCDs) to do their jobs and support their families. These areas are already heavily regulated, and operators like us operate under extensive permitting requirements and ongoing DLNR oversight.

As written, SB2975 gives the Department unchecked authority to close MLCDs indefinitely, without required stakeholder input, without defined criteria, and without any consideration of economic or operational impacts.

If there were a true emergency and DLNR needed operators to temporarily stop using an area, most of us would cooperate. We already do. The difference is that today there is at least an expectation of communication, explanation, and accountability. SB2975 removes those guardrails.

Indefinite closures without process would effectively shut down permitted operations and function as a de facto permit revocation, without due process.

Conservation works best when it is transparent, balanced, and collaborative. SB2975 moves in the opposite direction.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to defer SB2975.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Zachary LaPrade



February 16, 2026

Senate Committee on Water, Land, Culture and the Arts
Hawai'i State Legislature
Via Electronic Transmission

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB2975, Relating to Marine Life Conservation Districts
Hearing: Wednesday, February 18, 2026, 1:01 PM CR 224 & Via Videoconference

To: The Honorable Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and Members of the Committee

Surfrider Foundation Hawai'i Region strongly supports SB2975, which authorizes the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) to close all or portions of any marine life conservation district (MLCD) for various periods of time and to adopt rules for the regulation of commercial activity within a MLCD.

Surfrider Foundation is a grassroots environmental organization dedicated to protecting the ocean, waves, and beaches through grassroots activism, environmental education, and advocacy. With chapters on Maui, O'ahu, and Kaua'i, and members statewide, we work to safeguard Hawai'i's nearshore waters and ensure public trust resources are protected for future generations.

For decades, Surfrider chapters have been actively involved in long-term stewardship and advocacy efforts to protect Marine Life Conservation Districts across the state, especially at Honolua-Mokulē'ia MLCD in Maui and the Pūpūkea MLCD on O'ahu's North Shore. These districts are among the most biologically diverse and culturally significant reef systems in Hawai'i, and they are also among the most heavily visited.

Hawai'i's fragile reef ecosystems are increasingly imperiled by cumulative stressors, including land-based water pollution, sedimentation, overfishing, climate-driven coral bleaching, and over-visitation. In high-use MLCDs, unmanaged visitor pressure results in coral breakage and trampling in shallow reef flats, repeated physical contact that damages live coral tissue, wildlife disturbance that alters natural behavior, anchor and vessel damage in sensitive habitats, and chronic ecological stress that diminishes biodiversity and weakens reef resilience. Even with Hawai'i's ban on certain reef-harmful sunscreen chemicals, high concentrations of sunscreen products and other personal care contaminants continue to enter confined nearshore waters in heavily visited areas, contributing to chronic chemical loading and ecological stress. When

visitation exceeds ecological carrying capacity, these conservation districts risk functioning as recreational hotspots rather than protected areas.

SB2975 provides DLNR with clear statutory authority to proactively manage MLCD's by closing all or portions of a district on a seasonal, daily, time-of-day, or area basis to protect marine resources and address adverse human impacts.

While DLNR has authority to establish MLCDs and regulate activities within them, it lacks explicit statutory authority to implement targeted closures as a management strategy. As a result, the State has sometimes relied on adjacent county land closures to indirectly manage marine access. This patchwork approach leaves gaps in coherent marine resource management.

We have clear evidence that controlled access works. Management measures at Hanauma Bay, implemented through county authority, have resulted in measurable improvements in reef health and ecosystem recovery. Carrying capacity research conducted at Pūpūkea MLCD similarly identified tourism-related impacts and recommended periodic closures to allow marine life recovery.

Importantly, SB2975 does not mandate closures, it authorizes them. It gives DLNR the flexibility to implement adaptive, science-based management tools when necessary to protect marine ecosystems and public safety. Providing this clear authority will help ensure that MLCDs fulfill their conservation mandate and remain resilient in the face of growing environmental pressures.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of SB2975 on behalf of Surfrider Foundation's Maui, O'ahu, and Kaua'i chapters and members statewide.

Sincerely,

Hanna Lilley
Hawai'i Regional Manager
Surfrider Foundation

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/6/2026 4:24:52 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Blake Moore	Testifying for Teralani Sailing Adventures	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

I respectfully submit testimony in strong opposition to SB2975.

While the stated intent of this measure may be to improve oversight or enforcement, SB2975 grants extraordinary authority to unelected officials with insufficient guardrails, public input, or accountability. As written, this bill creates the potential for significant disruption to lawful businesses without due process, transparency, or meaningful stakeholder engagement.

Of particular concern is the impact this measure could have on employees and families in West Maui. This region is still in a fragile state of economic recovery, and many local jobs depend on consistent access to ocean, shoreline, and operational areas essential to tourism-based businesses. Allowing a single individual or department to unilaterally shut down entire areas — without public input, clear standards, or timely appeal — puts hundreds of local jobs at risk overnight.

For our employees, these are not abstract regulatory actions. A sudden closure can mean missed shifts, lost wages, canceled tours, and immediate financial hardship for families who are already navigating high costs of living and economic uncertainty. When decisions of this magnitude are made without transparency or accountability, it undermines workforce stability and erodes trust between regulators, businesses, and the communities they serve.

SB2975 allows sweeping discretionary power to be exercised administratively rather than through established rulemaking processes that include public notice, comment, and legislative oversight. This is deeply concerning for businesses that already operate under extensive federal, state, and county regulatory frameworks and maintain strong compliance records.

Hawaii’s business community depends on predictable, fair, and transparent regulation. Granting expansive unilateral authority without clear limits or public participation discourages investment, threatens local employment, and risks unintended economic harm — particularly in regions like West Maui that rely heavily on coordinated access to shared resources.

I strongly urge the Committee to **oppose SB2975**.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your consideration.

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/7/2026 7:07:41 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amanda Lloyd	Testifying for Hawaii ocean rafting	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong opposition to SB2975.

As someone who works for a permitted commercial ocean operator, the business relies on predictable, transparent management of Hawai'i's nearshore waters, including access to Marine Life Conservation Districts (MLCDs). SB2975 would give DLNR the authority to shut down MLCDs without clear standards, stakeholder input, or consideration of economic impacts.

MLCDs are not incidental to it's operation, they are central to the activity, safety, and experience we provide. Sudden or indefinite closures would effectively eliminate my ability to work if the business cannot operate in certain areas and would function as a de facto revocation of existing permits, without due process.

Commercial operators are already heavily regulated and subject to DLNR oversight. There is no justification for granting unilateral closure authority without mandatory consultation, scientific criteria, or transition planning.

Conservation works best when it is collaborative, data-driven, and balanced. SB2975 undermines that approach and creates uncertainty for local businesses, employees, and coastal communities.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to DEFER SB2975.

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/7/2026 11:08:04 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
George F. Garnes III	Testifying for Sailing Ships	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing in strong opposition to SB2975.

As a permitted commercial ocean operator, my business relies on predictable, transparent management of Hawai'i's nearshore waters, including access to Marine Life Conservation Districts (MLCDs). SB2975 would give DLNR the authority to shut down MLCDs without clear standards, stakeholder input, or consideration of economic impacts.

MLCDs are not incidental to my operation, they are central to the activity, safety, and experience we provide. Sudden or indefinite closures would effectively eliminate my ability to operate in certain areas and would function as a de facto revocation of existing permits, without due process.

Commercial operators are already heavily regulated and subject to DLNR oversight. There is no justification for granting unilateral closure authority without mandatory consultation, scientific criteria, or transition planning.

Conservation works best when it is collaborative, data-driven, and balanced. SB2975 undermines that approach and creates uncertainty for local businesses, employees, and coastal communities.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to DEFER SB2975.

Mahalo for your time.



COMMITTEE ON WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE ARTS

Senator Chris Lee, Chair

Senator Lorraine R. Inouye, Vice Chair

Testimony in Opposition for SB2975

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

My name is Mendy Dant, President of Fair Wind Cruises and Kona Sunrise Charters, a family-owned snorkel business that has operated in Kona since 1971. I write in strong opposition to SB2975.

For 55 years, our company has been a consistent steward of Kealakekua Bay, a culturally and environmentally significant wahi pana. We operate under a State Parks mooring permit issued in 1990 with substantial obligations, including annual education for 500 students, quarterly cleanups at Ka'awaloa, and a 3% contribution of our gross revenues since 2013. These are commitments we have upheld for decades.

SB2975 threatens responsible, permitted operators who have demonstrated long-term stewardship and compliance, while failing to address the real management tools already available. Our business employs approximately 50 full-time local residents and depends on the Kealakekua Bay MLCD as both a safe winter snorkel destination and a critical storm refuge. Closure of this area would have immediate and severe impacts on our employees, their families, and the broader Kona community.

DLNR already has the authority to manage capacity, limit permits, and enforce permit conditions. These existing tools should be strengthened and enforced—not replaced with sweeping closures that penalize compliant operators and destabilize local businesses that have operated responsibly for generations.

I urge the Committee to oppose SB2975 and to work instead with DLNR and long-standing permit holders to protect MLCD resources without causing unnecessary economic and community harm.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Mendy Dant
President
Fair Wind Cruises
Kona Sunrise Charters
Keauhou Bay, Kona, Hawaii



To: The Honorable Senator Chris Lee Chair, the Honorable Lorraine Inouye, Vice Chair, and Members of the Water, Land, and Cultural and the Arts Committee.

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

Re: **Hearing SB2975 RELATING TO MARINE LIFE CONSERVATION DISTRICTS**

Hearing: Monday, February 9, 2026 1:00 p.m. CR224

Aloha Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and Members of the Water, Land, and Cultural and the Arts 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 **SUPPORTS SB2975!**

Marine life conservation districts (MLCDs) are protected ocean areas designated to conserve, replenish, and restore the State's marine resources by restricting human impacts. MLCDs are established by the department of land and natural resources (DLNR), as authorized by chapter 190, Hawaii Revised Statutes. The DLNR does not currently have authority to partially or fully close MLCDs. Closure authority is urgently needed to prevent or mitigate adverse human impacts to the MLCDs, address other safety issues, like dangerous surf or hazardous areas within a MLCD, and reduce the reliance on restricted access to lands adjacent to MLCDs that may not be under state or even county jurisdiction.

This bill is needed to reduce immediate and long-term adverse impacts of increased visitation to MLCDs by authorizing the DLNR to close all or portions of MLCDs and to adopt rules for the regulation of any commercial activity conducted within an MLCD.

Please pass this bill to protect these critical ocean conservation areas!

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

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/7/2026 6:29:01 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Manu Powers	Testifying for Sea Quest Hawai'i	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha and mahalo for you time. I am writing to oppose SB2975. My family & I own and operate Sea Quest Hawai'i in Keauhou Bay on the Island of Hawai'i. Sea Quest has been in operation since 1997 and has consistently practiced self limiting and has modeled sustainable tourism. We support nearly 50 families and individuals through steady employment and a robust compensation and benefits package. We even provide housing for employees below market value. My husband & I were born and raised in Hawai'i and our business has allowed us and so many others to remain in Hawai'i when so many others have been forced to move away.

While I believe management is necessary as is balance, I would like to echo the comments of another long-standing, responsible operator who also submitted testimony:

"SB2975 threatens responsible, permitted operators who have demonstrated long-term stewardship and compliance, while failing to address the real management tools already available. Our business employs approximately 50 full-time local residents and depends on the Kealakekua Bay MLCB as both a safe winter snorkel destination and a critical storm refuge. Closure of this area would have immediate and severe impacts on our employees, their families, and the broader Kona community.

DLNR already has the authority to manage capacity, limit permits, and enforce permit conditions. These existing tools should be strengthened and enforced—not replaced with sweeping closures that penalize compliant operators and destabilize local businesses that have operated responsibly for generations.

I urge the Committee to oppose SB2975 and to work instead with DLNR and long-standing permit holders to protect MLCB resources without causing unnecessary economic and community harm."

It is my belief that solutions are readily available but the community and the stakeholders must be involved in those conversations so that harm isn't done to local families and small business in an already difficult State to do business in. We would love the opportunity to support that process.

Mahalo for your time and for the work you do on behalf of our lāhui.

HAWAI'I OCEAN LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE



February 9, 2026

Hawai'i State Legislature
Senate Committee on Water, Land, Culture & the Arts

Re: Testimony in **SUPPORT** for SB 2975, Relating to Marine Life Conservation Districts

Aloha Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and esteemed members of the committee,

The Ocean Legislative Task Force—a coalition of more than 150 individuals across over 20 organizations statewide—**supports** SB 2975, relating to marine life conservation districts. This measure authorizes the Department of Land and Natural Resources to close all or portions of any marine life conservation district for various periods of time and to adopt rules for the regulation of commercial activity within a marine life conservation district.

Protecting Hawai'i's coral reefs and coral reef fish is one of our core priorities this legislative session. These ecosystems are foundational to the health of our nearshore waters, cultural practices, and coastal protection. Yet many reef systems remain under increasing pressure from climate impacts, overuse, and localized stressors. SB 2975 provides DLNR with the adaptive management tools it needs to respond to changing conditions, prevent further degradation, and allow impacted areas the opportunity to recover.

By enabling targeted closures and thoughtful regulation of commercial activity, when necessary, this measure helps ensure that marine life conservation districts fulfill their intended purpose: conserving biodiversity, sustaining fish populations, and safeguarding Hawai'i's unique marine resources for future generations. These proactive approaches are essential to long-term reef resilience and to maintaining the balance between ocean stewardship and responsible use.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in strong support of 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-2975

Submitted on: 2/7/2026 7:58:20 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Peter Wood	Testifying for SAILING MAUI	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

February 7, 2026,

Aloha Senate Land and Water Committee,

We are writing in strong opposition to SB2975.

As a permitted commercial ocean operators who have been operating in West Maui for over three decades, our charter boaters depend on predictable, transparent management of Hawai‘i’s nearshore waters, including access to Marine Life Conservation Districts (MLCDs). SB2975 would give DLNR the authority to shut down MLCDs without clear standards, stakeholder input, or consideration of economic impacts.

MLCDs are essential to our operations, they are a huge part of our snorkel scuba charters and provide a safe location for water activities and allow both visitors and locals a chance to experience the beauty of Maui’s underwater world. It is also an opportunity for our professional charter crew to educate and enlighten the public on how important it is to protect our marine environment. In our safety briefings we clearly explain the importance of **not** standing on the coral reef, wearing reef safe sunscreen, not touching or crowding green sea turtles, providing floatation belts, in addition to having lifeguards both onboard and in the water overseeing snorkelers.

Any closures would effectively eliminate our ability to operate in certain areas and would function as a de facto revocation of existing permits, without due process. Commercial operators are already heavily regulated and subject to DLNR oversight. There is no justification for granting unilateral closure authority without mandatory consultation, scientific criteria, or transition planning.

Conservation works best when it is collaborative, data-driven, and balanced. SB2975 undermines that approach and creates uncertainty for local businesses, employees, and coastal communities.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the committee to DEFER SB2975.

Mahalo, thank you for your time, consideration, and the opportunity to testify.

Peter Wood 808-870-3672

Inca Robbin 808 870-3673

Sailing Maui Inc.



February 7, 2026,

Aloha Senate Land and Water Committee,

We are writing in strong opposition to SB2975.

As a permitted commercial ocean operators who have been operating in West Maui for over three decades, our charter boaters depend on predictable, transparent management of Hawai'i's nearshore waters, including access to Marine Life Conservation Districts (MLCDs). SB2975 would give DLNR the authority to shut down MLCDs without clear standards, stakeholder input, or consideration of economic impacts.

MLCDs are essential to our operations, they are a huge part of our snorkel scuba charters and provide a safe location for water activities and allow both visitors and locals a chance to experience the beauty of Maui's underwater world. It is also an opportunity for our professional charter crew to educate and enlighten the public on how important it is to protect our marine environment. In our safety briefings we clearly explain the importance of **not** standing on the coral reef, wearing reef safe sunscreen, not touching or crowding green sea turtles, providing floatation belts, in addition to having lifeguards both onboard and in the water overseeing snorkelers.

Sudden or indefinite closures would effectively eliminate our ability to operate in certain areas and would function as a de facto revocation of existing permits, without due process. Commercial operators are already heavily regulated and subject to DLNR oversight. There is no justification for granting unilateral closure authority without mandatory consultation, scientific criteria, or transition planning.

Conservation works best when it is collaborative, data-driven, and balanced. SB2975 undermines that approach and creates uncertainty for local businesses, employees, and coastal communities.

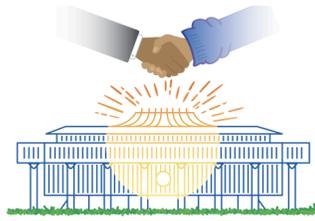
For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to DEFER SB2975.

Mahalo, thank you for your time, consideration, and the opportunity to testify.

Peter Wood 808-870-3672

Inca Robbin 808 870-3673

Sailing Maui Inc.



CLIMATE FUTURE FORUM

On behalf of the Climate Future Forum, thank you for the opportunity to testify in **support of SB2975**, which empowers the DLNR to respond quickly to protect reefs during safety risks and resource decline.

As the youngest sibling of four, and one of the youngest nieces of countless aunties and uncles, it isn't easy to unite my 'ohana together in one accessible place that satisfies us all. However, one diverse and timeless setting has never failed to enrich the laughter and excitement of each of us: Marine Life Conservation Districts. As a little keiki, countless memories were tied together by MLCDs. Whether it has been through muffled exclamations upon spotting a yellow *nunu* – trumpet fish – from across the shallow end of Honolulu Bay, or sharing binoculars with my older sister to spot Molokini Shoal on a clear day, these experiences have been sacred components of my identity and culture.

In Hawai'i, our reef biodiversity is essential to daily life and to the health of our mauka to makai systems. Overfishing, habitat loss, and food chain disruption have been harming our reefs for too long, and we are beginning to see the spillover effects of these consequences in our agriculture and healthcare. Nature is a master of protecting itself from predators; it will only scream for help when it can't fight back anymore. As humans, we are the predators, but we don't have to be. We must act now with long-term management to protect reef health for future generations.

By giving the DLNR the authority to act quickly and strategically, this policy allows Hawai'i to protect vulnerable reef areas before they reach a point of collapse. It shifts us from a reactive system to a proactive one. Hanauma Bay has already proven that a framework of strong management is successful. When visitation was reduced and rest periods were introduced, reef health improved and wildlife returned, while tourism thrived with increased accountability and reverence. Similarly, after seven years of protection at Kahekili, parrotfish biomass increased by nearly 170%, and surgeonfish biomass increased by 24%. These herbivorous fish are essential because they graze down algae that would otherwise smother coral, directly improving reef health. These two examples demonstrate that protection and access do not have to be in conflict.

This bill also recognizes that not all reef areas are the same. By allowing targeted, temporary closures, it protects the most sensitive zones such as nursery reefs, turtle resting areas, and monk seal haul-out sites, while keeping less vulnerable areas open. This balanced approach protects the ecosystem's priorities without isolating communities.

Our reefs are the foundation of life in Hawai'i. They feed our families, protect our 'ohana from storms and strengthen our economy, all while supporting the cultural identity that connects

mauka to makai. As the founder of Hawai'i's first Oceans & Biodiversity youth policy working group, I am committed to protecting our Marine Life Conservation Districts now, so we may continue partnering with them for many tomorrows to come.

The Climate Future Forum empowers youth (ages 14-26) to actively engage in shaping and advocating for climate policy and legislation. By bringing together youth, educators, policymakers, and nonprofits, the forum fosters meaningful dialogue on climate action priorities and provides actionable steps to address climate change in Hawai'i. Through discussions involving over 100 youth, the forum has identified key high-priority areas, including regenerative food systems, climate and the economy, clean energy and transportation, climate justice and equity, and sustainable infrastructure.

Thank you very much for your support of youth engagement in climate policy. We respectfully request that the WLA Committee pass **SB2975** with a favorable recommendation.

Sincerely,
Jenavive Meays

Oceans & Biodiversity Youth Leader of Hawai'i Climate Future Forum

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 7:51:28 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Christopher Kasper	Testifying for Malolo Charters	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am submitting testimony in opposition to SB2975.

I operate a permitted commercial ocean business in Hawai‘i that employs more than 10 local workers. Our ability to stay in business depends on stable rules, clear expectations, and the ability to plan operations weeks and months in advance. SB2975 undermines that stability.

As written, this bill allows MLCDs to be closed based on the unilateral decision of an appointed official, with no defined criteria, no required consultation, no time limits, and no meaningful process for affected operators. That level of discretion places lawful businesses and local jobs at constant risk.

MLCDs are already among the most regulated ocean areas in the state. Commercial operators working in these areas are permitted, monitored, and accountable. SB2975 does not add clarity or conservation value — it adds uncertainty.

If there were a legitimate emergency requiring temporary restrictions, our industry has consistently shown a willingness to cooperate when there is communication and transparency. What SB2975 proposes instead is open-ended closure authority without explanation or recourse.

That is not balanced resource management. It is destabilizing for businesses, employees, and the communities that depend on them.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask the committee to defer SB2975.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Chris Kasper

**Testimony of The Nature Conservancy
Supporting SB2975, Relating to Marine Life Conservation Districts
Committee on Water, Land, Culture and the Arts
February 9, 2026 at 1:00 pm
Conference Room 224 and via Videoconference**

Dear Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and Members of the Committee:

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify today. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Hawai'i and Palmyra supports SB2975, which authorizes the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) to close all or portions of any marine life conservation district (MLCD) for various periods of time and to adopt rules for the regulation of commercial activity within a marine life conservation district.

Hawai'i's nearshore fisheries and coral reef ecosystems are among the State's most significant natural resources, supporting food security, cultural practices, recreation, and local livelihoods. Hawai'i's growing population and increasing visitor use place significant pressure on these resources. MLCDs were created to conserve and replenish marine life by limiting or prohibiting extractive uses and providing safe areas for fish and other species to grow, reproduce, and thrive.

Over the course of the past 25 years, TNC has worked closely with the DLNR Division of Aquatic Resources, communities, and other stakeholders to facilitate the creation of Conservation Action Plans and Community Action Plans for several MLCD sites including Honolua-Mokulēi'a, Molokini Shoal, Mānele-Hulopo'e, and Kealakekua Bay. These areas are also among the most cherished and heavily visited sites for snorkeling, diving, and experiencing Hawai'i's reefs.

Carrying capacity studies show that restricting visitor use can improve marine health and support the conservation goals these districts were established to achieve. Granting DLNR clear authority to implement partial or full closures within MLCDs will ensure that the State has the tools it needs to balance public access and the long-term health of these critical marine ecosystems.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of SB2975.

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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Your Sailing and Snorkeling Adventure
Begins Here!

Aloha Chair Persons, Lee, Inouye, and all Members of the committee,

I am writing in strong opposition to SB2975.

As a permitted commercial ocean operator, my business relies on predictable, transparent management of Hawai'i's nearshore waters, including access to Marine Life Conservation Districts (MLCDs). SB2975 would give DLNR the authority to shut down MLCDs without clear standards, stakeholder input, or consideration of economic impacts. As a permit holder we have operated tours into MLCD Kealakekua Bay since 1985. Our company has acted a steward of the bay both on the water and land.

MLCDs are not incidental to my operation, they are central to the activity, safety, and experience we provide. Sudden or indefinite closures would effectively eliminate my ability to operate in certain areas and would function as a de facto revocation of existing permits, without due process.

Commercial operators are already heavily regulated and subject to DLNR oversight. There is no justification for granting unilateral closure authority without mandatory consultation, scientific criteria, or transition planning.

Conservation works best when it is collaborative, data-driven, and balanced. SB2975 undermines that approach and creates uncertainty for local businesses, employees, and coastal communities.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to DEFER SB2975.

Richard Kersten
President



808.895.0003



rich@seaparadise.com
www.seaparadise.com



PO Box 390159
Keauhou, HI 96739

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 8:23:44 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Don Prestage	Testifying for Sail Maui	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair and Members of the Committee,

Sail Maui respectfully submits strong opposition to SB2975.

As a long-standing permitted commercial ocean operator in West Maui, our business depends on clear, consistent, and transparent management of Hawai'i's nearshore waters, including responsible access to Marine Life Conservation Districts (MLCDs). These areas are central to the snorkeling and sailing experiences we provide and are fundamental to the viability of our operations.

SB2975 would grant DLNR authority to close MLCDs without defined standards, required stakeholder consultation, or consideration of economic impact. For operators like Sail Maui, sudden or indefinite closures would effectively remove access to core operating areas and function as a practical revocation of permitted use, without due process or transition planning.

Commercial ocean operators are already among the most highly regulated small businesses in the state. We operate under permits, vessel inspections, Coast Guard oversight, insurance requirements, and ongoing DLNR compliance. There is no demonstrated need to provide unilateral closure authority absent mandatory scientific criteria, community consultation, and reasonable implementation timelines.

Conservation is essential. Sail Maui supports science-based marine management and has long advocated for sustainable practices, reef education, and responsible visitor stewardship. Effective conservation policy must be data-driven, collaborative, and balanced with the livelihoods of local businesses and their employees.

In the ongoing recovery of West Maui's economy, regulatory uncertainty of this magnitude would create additional instability for businesses, crews, and families who depend on ocean recreation.

For these reasons, Sail Maui respectfully urges the Committee to DEFER SB2975.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 5:11:55 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stephen Bennett	Testifying for Trilogy Excursions	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong opposition to SB2975.

As a permitted commercial ocean operator, my business relies on predictable, transparent management of Hawai'i's nearshore waters, including access to Marine Life Conservation Districts (MLCDs). SB2975 would give DLNR the authority to shut down MLCDs without clear standards, stakeholder input, or consideration of economic impacts.

MLCDs are not incidental to my operation, they are central to the activity, safety, and experience we provide. Sudden or indefinite closures would effectively eliminate my ability to operate in certain areas and would function as a de facto revocation of existing permits, without due process.

Commercial operators are already heavily regulated and subject to DLNR oversight. There is no justification for granting unilateral closure authority without mandatory consultation, scientific criteria, or transition planning.

Conservation works best when it is collaborative, data-driven, and balanced. SB2975 undermines that approach and creates uncertainty for local businesses, employees, and coastal communities.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to **DEFER SB2975**.

LATE

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 2:05:51 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dianna Grundhauser	Testifying for Trilogy Excursions	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong opposition to SB2975.

As a permitted commercial ocean operator, our business relies on predictable, transparent management of Hawai'i's nearshore waters, including access to Marine Life Conservation Districts (MLCDs). SB2975 would give DLNR the authority to shut down MLCDs without clear standards, stakeholder input, or consideration of economic impacts.

MLCDs are not incidental to our operation, they are central to the activity, safety, and experience we provide. Sudden or indefinite closures would effectively eliminate our ability to operate in certain areas and would function as a de facto revocation of existing permits, without due process.

Commercial operators are already heavily regulated and subject to DLNR oversight. There is no justification for granting unilateral closure authority without mandatory consultation, scientific criteria, or transition planning.

Conservation works best when it is collaborative, data-driven, and balanced. SB2975 undermines that approach and creates uncertainty for local businesses, employees, and coastal communities.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to **DEFER SB2975**.

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 9:55:38 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Scott Turner	Testifying for Maui-Molokai Sea Cruises	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The problem with this broad reaching bill, is that there is little regard given to the businesses that provide jobs to our residents. Yes, protecting our natural resources is very important, and we have learned a lot over the years which has brought us here today. Commercial operators have time and time again demonstrated our commitment to protecting the environment, routinely setting examples for rules that later followed. We banned the use of sunscreens harmful to the coral and marine environment more than a decade before it became law. We put in mooring systems to end the damage caused to the coral, by dropping anchors on the reef, over 30 years ago, to protect the reef. These were decisions and actions that took place decades ago which led to forming an organization funded by commercial operators, to install moorings throughout the state, at popular snorkeling locations. There are no doubt marine conservation areas that require on-going conservation efforts, and we as the stewards of the environment are highly motivated to continue our conservation efforts, by educating our visitors whom we share them with, and not allowing activities that are detrimental to the environment, while promoting awareness with the customers we serve. Creating complex regulations, and closures further complicates management of our resources, As a diver and waterman for over 40 years in the islands, it continues to blow my mind, that our state seems blind to the proven results of establishing fish aggregates through the creation of artificial reef systems. The state of Florida has a robust and very successful artificial reef program. The collapsed pier on Maui at Mala wharf, is another perfect example of how underwater man-made structures are an exceptional fish aggregate opportunity for Hawaii. Though right off the beach, Mala offers some of the best snorkeling and diving anywhere in Hawaii.

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 10:44:41 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chandra Bertsch	Testifying for Holoholo Charters	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong opposition to SB2975.

SB2975 would authorize the Department of Land and Natural Resources to close all or portions of any Marine Life Conservation District for various periods of time and to adopt rules regulating commercial activity within those districts.

Although there are currently no MLCDs on Kaua‘i, our business, like all permitted commercial ocean operators in the State, operates in nearshore waters under the expectation of predictable and transparent management. Our routes, safety protocols, staffing, marketing, and long term vessel investments are planned under existing regulatory frameworks. Granting new discretionary closure authority introduces operational instability and regulatory uncertainty.

Closure authority without clearly defined scientific criteria, mandatory stakeholder consultation, advance notice requirements, and consideration of economic impact creates significant risk for tour operators. Sudden or indefinite closures could eliminate access to key operating areas and disrupt schedules, revenue forecasting, and customer commitments, despite full compliance with existing permits and regulations.

Commercial operators are already subject to extensive oversight and permitting requirements. Expanding unilateral closure authority without objective standards or procedural safeguards places disproportionate risk on small businesses, employees, and local communities that depend on professionally managed ocean recreation.

Effective resource management requires measurable scientific benchmarks, transparent decision making, and structured engagement with those working on the water every day. Policies should include defined triggers, publicly accessible data, and predictable implementation standards. SB2975 does not establish those protections.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to DEFER SB2975.

Mahalo,

Chandra Bertsch

Co-Owner, Holoholo Charters, Port Allen, Kauai



[COMMITTEE ON WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE ARTS](#)

Senator Chris Lee, Chair

Senator Lorraine R. Inouye, Vice Chair

February 18, 2026

Strongly Oppose SB2975

Aloha Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and Committee Members,

My name is Antoinette Davis, and I have had the honor of serving as Executive Director of the Activities and Attractions Association of Hawai'i (A3H), a 501(c)(6) not-for-profit trade organization, since 1997. A3H **strongly opposes** this measure.

While A3H strongly supports protecting Hawai'i's marine resources, this bill would grant DLNR **broad closure authority** over Marine Life Conservation Districts—allowing the department or its authorized representative to close “all or portions” of an MLCD and expand DLNR's rulemaking authority over **commercial activity** within MLCDs.

As written, SB2975 provides **too much unfettered discretion** without clear standards, transparent criteria, notice requirements beyond signage, or meaningful stakeholder input before closures and operational restrictions are imposed

For current permitted commercial operators, these waters are not an abstract policy issue—they are where local families earn a living, employ staff, and provide respectful, sustainable ocean experiences that help educate visitors and build stewardship. Sudden or recurring closures and shifting rules could disrupt payroll, bookings, and small-business viability overnight.

We urge the Legislature to reject SB2975 as drafted and instead pursue solutions that protect marine ecosystems **with clear guardrails**—including defined triggers, data-based criteria, advance notice, and a predictable process that includes impacted communities and lawful operators.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Toni

Toni Marie Davis
Executive Director
Activities & Attractions Association of Hawaii, Inc.
Statewide 501 (c) (6) not-for-profit Trade Association
PO Box 598, Makawao, Hawaii 96768
(808)871-7947

February, 2026

To: Chair Chris Lee, Vice Chair Lorraine Inouye and the Senate Committee on Water Land Culture & the Arts.

Subject: **SB2975**, Relating to Marine Life Conservation Districts

Aloha,

I am writing in support of SB2975. This bill works to authorize the Department of Land and Natural Resources to temporarily close all or portions of any marine life conservation district for various periods of time. It also requires DLNR to adopt rules for commercial activity operating within these marine life conservation districts. This bill would allow the state better tools to manage the overuse of certain areas, reduce harm to reefs and marine life, and respond when areas need time to recover.

Marine Life Conservation Districts were created to protect fragile ecosystems, but many of these areas are under increasing pressure from heavy visitation and commercial use. Giving the state more flexibility to manage and regulate activity will help them to respond to damage currently being done. Temporary closure of these areas will allow marine ecosystems to recover and simultaneously support local food systems, cultural practices, and community access for future generations by ensuring resources are available long-term.

The State has a responsibility to actively manage and protect public trust resources. Temporary closures are a sensible approach to provide care, balance, and long-term stewardship without permanent loss of access. Lastly, commercial activity should be guided by clear rules that protect resources, not overburden it. SB2975 supports responsible natural resource management, accountability, and sustainability.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to pass SB2975.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Mahalo,

Carlin McFadden & the Food+ Policy Team
#fixourfoodsystem

The Food+ Policy internship develops student advocates who learn work skills while increasing civic engagement to become emerging leaders. We focus on good food systems policy because we see the importance and potential of the food system in combating climate change and increasing the health, equity, and resiliency of Hawai'i communities.

In 2026, the cohort of interns are undergraduate and graduate students and young professionals working in the food system. They are a mix of traditional and nontraditional students, including parents and veterans, who have backgrounds in education, farming, public health, nutrition, and Hawaiian culture.

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 1:00:35 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kekoa Alip	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

I strongly support this bill.

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/7/2026 6:25:30 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kevin Ford	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in string oposition of this bill.

Commercial operators are already heavily regulated and if this bill passes it would give DLNR the ability to shut down MLCD's without any kind of regard to impacts on local small businesses. There is no justification for granting authority without mandatory consultation, scientific criteria, or transition planning.

Please defer SB 2975



FRIENDS of HANAUMA BAY

CONSERVE • PROTECT • RESTORE

*Dedicated to the conservation of coastal and marine environments,
emphasizing stewardship of the natural resources of Hanauma Bay*

Committee on Water, Land, Culture and the Arts

Senator Chris Lee, Chair

Senator Lorraine R. Inouye, Vice Chair

Hearing: Monday, February 9, 2026 at 1:00 PM

6 February 2026

Aloha Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and Committee Members,

Mahalo for hearing this important bill, and for allowing us to testify in strong support of its passage.

Providing DLNR the authority to close all or portions of marine life conservation districts (MLCDs) and to adopt rules for the regulation of any commercial activity conducted within an MLCD, is critical to reducing immediate and long-term adverse impacts of both overtourism and natural disasters on these fragile marine ecosystems.

We urge you to pass this long overdue bill!

With Aloha,

Lisa Bishop, MS

Friends of Hanauma Bay I President

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/7/2026 6:48:42 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Breona Beckler	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong opposition to SB2975.

As someone who works for a permitted commercial ocean operator, the business relies on predictable, transparent management of Hawai'i's nearshore waters, including access to Marine Life Conservation Districts (MLCDs). SB2975 would give DLNR the authority to shut down MLCDs without clear standards, stakeholder input, or consideration of economic impacts.

MLCDs are not incidental to it's operation, they are central to the activity, safety, and experience we provide. Sudden or indefinite closures would effectively eliminate my ability to work if the business cannot operate in certain areas and would function as a de facto revocation of existing permits, without due process.

Commercial operators are already heavily regulated and subject to DLNR oversight. There is no justification for granting unilateral closure authority without mandatory consultation, scientific criteria, or transition planning.

Conservation works best when it is collaborative, data-driven, and balanced. SB2975 undermines that approach and creates uncertainty for local businesses, employees, and coastal communities.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to DEFER SB2975.



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 SENATE COMMITTEE ON WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE ARTS Monday, February 9, 2026 1:00 p.m. Conference Room 224, State Capitol

DATE: February 4, 2026

TO: Senate Committee on Water, Land, Culture and the Arts, Chair, Chris Lee and Vice-Chair Lorraine Inouye and all Members.

RE: SENATE BILL 2975. RELATING TO MARINE LIFE CONSERVATION DISTRICTS.

Puakō For Reefs is a volunteer run, 501c3 non-profit organization, with a mission to save local reefs, and build a model to help save all Hawai'i coral reefs from wastewater pollution. We strongly support SB 2975 giving the State the expanded authority to control access and businesses in all MLCDs.

There is a MLCD just north of the Puakō community, at Wailea Bay, a portion of the Hapuna Beach State Park. The reefs at Wailea Bay and Puakō are absolutely connected. While there is a line marking the MLCD at Wailea, that is a man-made distinction. While Wailea Bay waters suffer from being over-looked and would definitely benefit from further management, all areas would benefit. You may not realize there is almost constant use of the bathrooms and showers at the State Park, with a septic tank disposal system. Also, the homes there are predominately using cesspools for their sewage disposal. Plus, the designation of MLCD means tourists want to see for themselves the area that is so special to receive this designation.

Puakō For Reefs is working with the Wailea Bay community providing a way for them (as well as the State Parks bathrooms and showers) to connect to the proposed sewer collection line along Puakō Beach Drive. This would benefit the MLCD by eliminating the stressors of wastewater. Being able to manage the area better, by allowing closures would also help with the volumes.

Puakō for Reefs has been working to save our local reefs from extinction for the past dozen years. The reef has lost 90% of its coral coverage, going from 70% to 7%, in a couple of decades, primarily due to wastewater. We have decades of science that prove that individual wastewater systems installed near shore properties do NOT prevent the most harmful nutrients, specifically nitrogen, from making it onto the reefs and causing irreversible damage. Currently, only a sewer can stop the damage to the reefs. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

for Puakō for Reefs Board members and its many volunteers

Karen Anderson, Board Chair, 206-724-1551 Karen.anderson@puako4reefs.org

Stephanie Erickson, Board Treasurer, 508-344-0114, Stephanie.erickson@puako4reefs.org

Barbara Bell, Board Secretary, 808-937-2573, bbellster@gmail.com

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/7/2026 12:27:11 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mike Kelley	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Thank you for the opportunity to be heard regarding my thoughts on SB2975. With only hearing about this late Friday afternoon and having to have testimony in and submitted by Sunday at 1:00 PM it's really quite quick to receive a complete input from the community. I'd really suggest / request at least a bit more lead time or not on a Friday afternoon for Monday hearing.

I fully oppose SB2975 and see it as yet another forceful and negative impact for our Maui community. Certainly these points would apply statewide however most specifically for maui this would be extremely problematic.

As a resident of West Maui for 49 years I've enjoyed ocean recreation and the benefits of having access to all of the areas on West and South Maui that this would impact. I've enjoyed these areas arriving from the land as well as via boat many, many times. To arbitrarily have a government agency turn on or off access is *"not" the way to move forward*. As a community nearly completely attached to hospitality and tourism industries our island has received one negative impact after another. Throughout social media and the mainland, which is our primary source of income and tourism, Maui has been beaten down by COVID, the tragic fire, a slow and cumbersome return or rebuild of Lahaina, negative sentiment towards visitors and one set back after another. If Maui's economic machine and the source of livelihood for many, many families and individuals is to recovery we must stop these onerous measures. I urge you for those of us that live here, those in ocean recreation or boating industries and those that may be considering whether or not to travel here to ***"NOT" support SB2975***.

Sincerely,

Michael T. Kelley

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/7/2026 6:35:52 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Toni Colombo	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong opposition to SB2975.

As someone who works for a permitted commercial ocean operator, the business relies on predictable, transparent management of Hawai‘i’s nearshore waters, including access to Marine Life Conservation Districts (MLCDs). SB2975 would give DLNR the authority to shut down MLCDs without clear standards, stakeholder input, or consideration of economic impacts.

MLCDs are not incidental to it's operation, they are central to the activity, safety, and experience we provide. Sudden or indefinite closures would effectively eliminate my ability to work if the business cannot operate in certain areas and would function as a de facto revocation of existing permits, without due process.

Commercial operators are already heavily regulated and subject to DLNR oversight. There is no justification for granting unilateral closure authority without mandatory consultation, scientific criteria, or transition planning.

Conservation works best when it is collaborative, data-driven, and balanced. SB2975 undermines that approach and creates uncertainty for local businesses, employees, and coastal communities.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to DEFER SB2975.

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/7/2026 1:07:16 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

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

Comments:

I strongly oppose SB2975. While protecting marine resources is important, granting the Department of Land and Natural Resources broad authority to close marine life conservation districts risks limiting public access, harming local families, cultural practitioners, and small businesses that rely on these areas. This bill concentrates too much unelected power without clear safeguards, transparency, or community input. Responsible stewardship should prioritize balanced, science-based management—not sweeping closures that disproportionately impact residents. Please reject SB2975 and instead pursue solutions that protect marine ecosystems while preserving reasonable public access and local livelihoods.

Mahalo,

Philip Akeo IV

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/7/2026 1:22:12 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tyler Thompson	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly oppose SB2975

The economic impacts that have devistaed an already struggling not only Maui county but the west side of Lahaina are finally coming back together. There are many many families trying to rebuild life and getting back to normal as possible. Economically and emotionally this bill would absolutely kick the ladder out from under all of the hard work and sweat and tears put into coming back as a community single handedly. The rules and regulations that are put in place are more then enough to keep all parties happy and professional as well as respecting by far all marine life and ocean health ect. I again strongly oppose this bill SB2975.

mahalos for your consideration.

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/7/2026 1:46:42 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jeffrey Melcher	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly oppose SB2975. While marine protection matters, this bill gives excessive authority to close conservation areas, risking public access and harming local families, cultural practitioners, and small businesses. Stewardship should be balanced and community-informed—not driven by broad, unchecked power. Please reject SB2975.

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/7/2026 2:46:07 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Samantha Clements	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong opposition to SB2975.

As someone who works for a permitted commercial ocean operator, the business relies on predictable, transparent management of Hawai‘i’s nearshore waters, including access to Marine Life Conservation Districts (MLCDs). SB2975 would give DLNR the authority to shut down MLCDs without clear standards, stakeholder input, or consideration of economic impacts.

MLCDs are not incidental to it's operation, they are central to the activity, safety, and experience we provide. Sudden or indefinite closures would effectively eliminate my ability to work if the business cannot operate in certain areas and would function as a de facto revocation of existing permits, without due process.

Commercial operators are already heavily regulated and subject to DLNR oversight. There is no justification for granting unilateral closure authority without mandatory consultation, scientific criteria, or transition planning.

Conservation works best when it is collaborative, data-driven, and balanced. SB2975 undermines that approach and creates uncertainty for local businesses, employees, and coastal communities.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to DEFER SB2975.

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/14/2026 7:24:28 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Emma Hanrahan	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong opposition to SB2975.

As a permitted commercial ocean operator, my business relies on predictable, transparent management of Hawai'i's nearshore waters, including access to Marine Life Conservation Districts (MLCDs). SB2975 would give DLNR the authority to shut down MLCDs without clear standards, stakeholder input, or consideration of economic impacts.

MLCDs are not incidental to my operation, they are central to the activity, safety, and experience we provide. Sudden or indefinite closures would effectively eliminate my ability to operate in certain areas and would function as a de facto revocation of existing permits, without due process.

Commercial operators are already heavily regulated and subject to DLNR oversight. There is no justification for granting unilateral closure authority without mandatory consultation, scientific criteria, or transition planning.

Conservation works best when it is collaborative, data-driven, and balanced. SB2975 undermines that approach and creates uncertainty for local businesses, employees, and coastal communities.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to **DEFER SB2975**.

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 3:00:30 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alexis Akeo	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments: Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee, I respectfully submit testimony in strong opposition to SB2975. While the stated intent of this measure may be to improve oversight or enforcement, SB2975 grants extraordinary authority to unelected officials with insufficient guardrails, public input, or accountability. As written, this bill creates the potential for significant disruption to lawful businesses without due process, transparency, or meaningful stakeholder engagement. Of particular concern is the impact this measure could have on employees and families in West Maui. This region is still in a fragile state of economic recovery, and many local jobs depend on consistent access to ocean, shoreline, and operational areas essential to tourism-based businesses. Allowing a single individual or department to unilaterally shut down entire areas — without public input, clear standards, or timely appeal — puts hundreds of local jobs at risk overnight. For our employees, these are not abstract regulatory actions. A sudden closure can mean missed shifts, lost wages, canceled tours, and immediate financial hardship for families who are already navigating high costs of living and economic uncertainty. When decisions of this magnitude are made without transparency or accountability, it undermines workforce stability and erodes trust between regulators, businesses, and the communities they serve. SB2975 allows sweeping discretionary power to be exercised administratively rather than through established rulemaking processes that include public notice, comment, and legislative oversight. This is deeply concerning for businesses that already operate under extensive federal, state, and county regulatory frameworks and maintain strong compliance records. Hawaii’s business community depends on predictable, fair, and transparent regulation. Granting expansive unilateral authority without clear limits or public participation discourages investment, threatens local employment, and risks unintended economic harm — particularly in regions like West Maui that rely heavily on coordinated access to shared resources. Any additional authority should be narrowly tailored, clearly defined, and include meaningful due process protections, public input, and legislative oversight. SB2975, as currently drafted, goes far beyond what is reasonable or appropriate. For these reasons, I strongly urge the Committee to oppose SB2975. Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your consideration.

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 10:43:58 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mark Hixon	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha. Our few and tiny Marine Life Conservation Districts are far too small to support so many people visiting them, let alone provide sufficient protection of our precious and severely depleted marine resources. This bill will help remedy this sad situation. Mahalo.

COMMITTEE ON WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE ARTS

Senator Chris Lee, Chair
Senator Lorraine R. Inouye, Vice Chair

DATE: Wednesday, February 18, 2026
TIME: 1:01 PM
PLACE: Conference Room 224 & Videoconference
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street

James E. Coon speaking in STRONG OPPOSITION to SB2975

Aloha WLA Chair Lee and Vice Chair Inouye:

My name is James Coon. I am one of the founders of Trilogy Excursions, Maui's oldest multi-generational family owned and operated charter boat company. We are in our 53rd year of business serving Maui and Lanai.

Our core business is snorkel sail excursions. We operate primarily in MLCD's in Maui and Lanai. We are a Lahaina based company and employ over 150 people in Maui and Lanai.

SB 2975 as written would give DLNR far to broad authority to shut down any MLCD without user input, stakeholder guidance or economic impact. This sets a dangerous precedent with potential unilateral closers that would decimate our business as well as those of many other commercial operators.

We depend on predictable and transparent rule making and management processes.

Please do not pass SB 2975. It circumvents the rulemaking process and has the potential to destroy our livelihoods.

Sincerely


James E. Coon

PO Box 874

Kula, HI 96790

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 9:55:04 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
peter o riordan	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong opposition to SB2975.

As a permitted commercial ocean operator, my business relies on predictable, transparent management of Hawai‘i’s nearshore waters, including access to Marine Life Conservation Districts (MLCDs). SB2975 would give DLNR the authority to shut down MLCDs without clear standards, stakeholder input, or consideration of economic impacts.

MLCDs are not incidental to my operation, they are central to the activity, safety, and experience we provide. Sudden or indefinite closures would effectively eliminate my ability to operate in certain areas and would function as a de facto revocation of existing permits, without due process.

Commercial operators are already heavily regulated and subject to DLNR oversight. There is no justification for granting unilateral closure authority without mandatory consultation, scientific criteria, or transition planning.

Conservation works best when it is collaborative, data-driven, and balanced. SB2975 undermines that approach and creates uncertainty for local businesses, employees, and coastal communities.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to DEFER SB2975.

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 9:53:50 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Peter o riordan	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong opposition to SB2975.

As a permitted commercial ocean operator, my business relies on predictable, transparent management of Hawai‘i’s nearshore waters, including access to Marine Life Conservation Districts (MLCDs). SB2975 would give DLNR the authority to shut down MLCDs without clear standards, stakeholder input, or consideration of economic impacts.

MLCDs are not incidental to my operation, they are central to the activity, safety, and experience we provide. Sudden or indefinite closures would effectively eliminate my ability to operate in certain areas and would function as a de facto revocation of existing permits, without due process.

Commercial operators are already heavily regulated and subject to DLNR oversight. There is no justification for granting unilateral closure authority without mandatory consultation, scientific criteria, or transition planning.

Conservation works best when it is collaborative, data-driven, and balanced. SB2975 undermines that approach and creates uncertainty for local businesses, employees, and coastal communities.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to DEFER SB2975.

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 9:24:03 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erik Stein	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose this bill in its overreach.

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 7:08:55 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Patrick Laughlin	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing in opposition to SB2975 as a long time resident of West Maui and a member of the Lāhainā community. This bill does not address needs of any significance and will not impact West Maui in a positive manner. Thank you for your time.

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:27:32 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sherri Hittle	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in strong opposition to SB2975. My job of 7 years relies directly around the water activities and my family would be negatively impacted.

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:02:33 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Riley E. Coon	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong opposition to SB2975.

as a 5th generation Native Hawaiian, lifelong resident of Maui, and a 3rd generation Boat Captain on these waters, I love and rely on Marine Life Conservaiton Districts for both personal enjoyment, and my livelihood. Healthy MLCD's are imperative to my livelihood and life in Hawaii. I have the honor and Kuleana of personally visiting all of the MLCD's on Maui. Sudden or indefinite closures would effectively eliminate my ability to provide for my family and cause severe financial hardship.

Conservation works best when it is collaborative, data-driven, and balanced. SB2975 undermines that approach and creates uncertainty for local businesses, employees, and coastal communities.

There are special interest groups who are calling for "temporary KAPU" of these areas. As a human, an american, and a native hawaiian I find it troubling to see this restriction of access, and with little scientific data or metrics to support this action. This is a loss of freedom and rights.

During COVID, i was not able to operate my vessels due to the island suthdown. Many people claim that the MLCD's and the ocean benefitted from this shutdown. I actually saw the opposite - I saw a tremendous increase in over-fishing and poaching, in these very same MLCD's. When boaters got into operation once again, we were the ones cleaning out hundreds of discarded fishing lines, rescuing the turtlres who had ingested fishing hooks and were strangled in fishin line.

The real threat to so many MLCD's are the mauka land use - the run off from developmment and improper land management. If the goal of bills like this is to benefit the marine resource, then target the actual causes of marine decline such as run off and overfishing.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to **DEFER SB2975**.

He Hawaii au,
Riley Coon

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 11:51:53 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Adriana McCamis	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong opposition to SB2975. SB2975 would give DLNR the authority to shut down MLCDs without clear standards, or consideration of economic impacts. Maui has had enough economic struggles lately and this would only make it worse and give too much unbalanced power to DLNR.

Mahalo

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 8:32:02 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

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

Comments:

I support this measure. Our MLCDs are among Hawai'i's most heavily visited places. Governing agencies and their co-managing community organizations need the authority to allow these areas to rest from visitors and activities so stewardship work can occur and ecosystems have time to recover.

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 9:10:32 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jessica Kai Paisley	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I strongly support this bill because Hawai‘i’s reefs are suffering, and we must take proactive and preventative measures to heal and protect them for future generations.

Mahalo nui loa,

Jessica Kai Paisley

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 9:41:41 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
jeanne schAAF	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

It is my understanding that SB2975 would protectreefs and fish populations by giving DNLR the authority to close areas within Marine Life Conservation Districts and importantly, to adopt rules for the regulation of commercial activity in these Districts. I am writing to strongly support this bill. The state must have the authority and flexibility to respond to threats to reefs and fish populations by human use.

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 9:47:01 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Patricia Gotschalk	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

In support of SB2975 I would like to submit the following article from the Summer 2024 volume of the Natural Resources Journal written by Professor Barry Solomon which outlines several solutions to the problem of overuse of natural resources due to overtourism. This article supports the policies set forth in SB2975.

<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4161&context=nrj>

Mahalo for your consideration of my testimony.

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 12:02:29 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Melissa May	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Temporary closures are a best practice for managing impacts to treasured natural areas and have been used in Hawaii at places like Hanauma Bay. This tool should likewise be available to facilitate the management of Marine Life Conservation Districts.

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 12:06:12 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
arleen velasco	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support SB2975.

As an ocean swimmer, I have personally observed the detrimental effects of over-tourism and overfishing on our coral reefs and marine life. Over the past 30 years, there has been a noticeable decline in the health of our reefs and the abundance of marine species.

SB2975 gives the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) the authority to implement temporary, seasonal, or area-based closures within Marine Life Conservation Districts (MLCDs) and to adopt rules regulating commercial activity within these districts.

We must protect our ocean. Maintaining a healthy ocean is critical to the long-term economic viability of Hawai'i. This bill gives DLNR the tools it needs to ensure that endangered species, such as monk seals, continue to thrive and inspire future generations.

Please pass SB2975.

LATE

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 1:23:24 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kaitlyn P Jacobs	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hawai‘i’s Marine Life Conservation Districts face increasing stress from overuse and over-tourism. Without flexible management tools, reefs and fish populations decline — undermining food security, cultural practices, and recreational access.

SB2975 gives DLNR authority to implement temporary, seasonal, or area-based closures within Marine Life Conservation Districts and to adopt rules for the regulation of commercial activity within a MLCD

This allows the state to:

- Respond adaptively to visitor induced ecological stress
- Protect fish populations and reef health
- Ensure sustainable public access

LATE

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 1:59:46 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dawn Lono	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support SB 2975

Mahalo, Dawn Lono

LATE

SB-2975

Submitted on: 2/18/2026 1:56:14 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ryan Dadds, PA-C	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hawai‘i’s Marine Life Conservation Districts face increasing stress from overuse and over-tourism. Without flexible management tools, reefs and fish populations decline — undermining food security, cultural practices, and recreational access.

SB2975 gives DLNR authority to implement temporary, seasonal, or area-based closures within Marine Life Conservation Districts and to adopt rules for the regulation of commercial activity within a MLCD

This allows the state to:

- Respond adaptively to visitor induced ecological stress
- Protect fish populations and reef health
- Ensure sustainable public access