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

Before the Senate Committees on  
ENERGY AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
and  
PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

Tuesday, March 31, 2026  
3:00 PM  
State Capitol, Conference Room 224

In consideration of  
SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 79  
ENCOURAGING THE UNITED STATES NAVY TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY  
FOR THE ERADICATION OF OCTOCORAL AND OTHER INVASIVE SPECIES  
FROM THE WATERS OF PEARL HARBOR, INCLUDING WEST LOCH,  
MIDDLE LOCH, AND EAST LOCH

Senate Concurrent Resolution 79 encourages the United States Navy to take responsibility for the eradication of octocoral and other invasive species from the waters of Pearl Harbor, including West Loch, Middle Loch, and East Loch. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) supports this measure and offers the following comments.**

One of the Department's missions is to conserve the State of Hawai'i's unique aquatic ecosystems for present and future generations. A critical threat to these ecosystems lies in the introduction of invasive species, which can outcompete native species for light and space or impact their health in other ways. Hawai'i's native aquatic species are particularly susceptible to the effects of invasive species due to a high rate of endemism, which means they lack natural defenses against foreign organisms. Many aquatic invasive species especially impact native stony corals, which form the foundation of our marine ecosystems and provide natural infrastructure to our islands. Each new invasion decreases the resilience of our reefs. The State of Hawai'i is facing what may be the most catastrophic aquatic invasive species introduction it has seen, and it is critical that the United States

Navy continue to take action to prevent the spread of octocorals and other invasive species from the Pearl Harbor watershed to state waters.

The invasive octocoral *Unomia stolonifera* has made headlines in the past few years for its aggressive and damaging characteristics that have allowed it to occupy over 60 miles of Venezuelan coast, in some areas accounting for 100% cover on the reef. Left unchecked for too long, this uncontrollable spread of *U. stolonifera* in Venezuela has smothered native coral and led to a large decline in herbivorous fish reproduction. Since its introduction to Venezuela, it is now known to be invasive in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Pearl Harbor on O'ahu. The dense mats of swaying tentacles that can be seen from the shore near the mouth of Pearl Harbor have terrifying implications, as one imagines a future where 60 miles of Hawai'i's coast is covered causing unknown devastation to the marine life beneath. Perhaps equally concerning are several of the other nonnative species that have been introduced to Pearl Harbor, likely through aquarium releases, of which we have no other examples of invasions to examine to understand their impacts. This includes a second octocoral, *Capnella spicata*, which may be equally aggressive as *U. stolonifera*, and the Manjano anemone (*Anemonia manjano*).

While the invasive octocorals are only known to be contained within Pearl Harbor, it is only a matter of time until they spread or are found to have already spread to State waters. Currents and storm events could carry fragments of these species out of the watershed, potentially allowing further colonization and reproduction through fragmentation. Additionally, some of the species are fouling species, which means they have the potential to travel longer distances on vessels or marine debris to other Hawaiian Islands, to the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, or even to our neighbor Pacific jurisdictions. It is the responsibility of the United States Navy to eradicate these species as stewards of the waters of Pearl Harbor, and it is the Department's duty to support this measure as stewards of the waters of the State of Hawai'i.

The Navy is currently attempting to eradicate *Unomia stolonifera* from Pearl Harbor, with approximately 14 of 82 reported acres completed. The Navy has also given the Department's Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR) access to continue monitoring surveys in restricted waters outside the known infestation zone. Both DAR and the Navy continue to collaborate in this effort, including attending bi-weekly Hawai'i Invasive Octocoral Working Group meetings.

Mahalo for the opportunity to comment on this measure.



**TESTIMONY ON SCR 79 / SR 81  
ENCOURAGING THE UNITED STATES NAVY TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ERADICATION OF  
OCTOCORAL AND OTHER INVASIVE SPECIES FROM THE WATERS OF PEARL HARBOR, INCLUDING  
WEST LOCH, MIDDLE LOCH, AND EAST LOCH.**

Senate Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs  
Senator Carol Fukunaga, Chair  
Senator Chris Lee, Vice Chair

Senate Committee on Energy and Intergovernmental Affairs  
Senator Glenn Wakai, Chair  
Senator Stanley Chang, Vice Chair

Tuesday, March 31, 2026 at 3:00 PM  
Conference Room 224 or via Videoconference

Chairs Fukunaga and Wakai, Vice Chairs Lee and Chang, and Members of the Committees:

The Hawaii Military Affairs Council ("MAC") offers comments on SCR 79 / SR 81.

The MAC was established in 1985 when the Chamber was appointed by the State to serve as the liaison to the military. The MAC advocates on behalf of Hawaii's military, and is comprised of business leaders, academic institutions, State and County officials, members of the CODEL, community leaders, labor unions and organizations and retired U.S. flag and general officers. The MAC works to support Hawaii's location as a strategic U.S. headquarters in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region which is crucial for U.S. national and homeland security.

The MAC wishes to update the Committees that the U.S. Navy is actively implementing efforts to address the presence of octocoral and other invasive species in Pearl Harbor. These efforts involve coordination with an interagency group of subject matter experts, including federal and state partners.

The U.S. Navy continues to work closely with these partners to refine response strategies, evaluate methodologies, and identify the resources and expertise necessary to support effective, large-scale management and eradication efforts. Initial response actions have demonstrated that a combination of control methods can be effective in the short term, and these approaches are being further evaluated to inform future operations.



Looking ahead, the U.S. Navy is focused on expanding and sustaining these efforts, including pursuing additional funding opportunities and strengthening collaborative partnerships to support long-term success.

The Navy remains committed to keeping the Committees informed of its progress and, at this time, believes additional action through this resolution is not necessary.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit comments.

## Testimony in Support of SCR79

### Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs and Energy and Intergovernmental Affairs (PSM/EIG)

March 31, 2026, 3:00 PM

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs and Energy and Intergovernmental Affairs,

My name is Frederick Smith, and I live in the Kealakekua ahupua'a on Hawai'i Island. I am a graduate student at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo focused on marine policy, science, and governance. I **strongly support SCR79 and SR81**.

These measures appropriately recognize that the United States Navy is the primary steward of Pearl Harbor and should take responsibility for addressing the rapidly expanding infestation of invasive octocorals, including *Unomia stolonifera* and *Capnella spicata*.

These species represent a serious and immediate ecological threat. Unlike reef-building corals, octocorals can spread rapidly across large areas, smothering benthic habitat and reducing reef complexity. As noted in the resolution, areas dominated by octocorals show reduced fish density and diversity.

This is not a contained issue. The infestation in Kāne'ohe Bay has demonstrated how quickly these species can expand across a system, and there are now indications of a growing presence in Pu'uloa (Pearl Harbor), where significant areas of native reef habitat remain at risk. Without rapid intervention, this system could follow a similar trajectory.

Given the scale and jurisdictional realities of Pearl Harbor, the State of Hawai'i cannot effectively address this problem alone. The Navy has both the responsibility and operational capacity to lead a coordinated response. Importantly, the Navy has already begun this work, including recent efforts to remove invasive octocoral across large areas of Pearl Harbor. Expanding and accelerating these efforts is necessary given the scale and urgency of the infestation.

I respectfully encourage that implementation of this measure emphasize rapid-response containment and eradication strategies, including methods currently being deployed in Kāne'ohe Bay by the Division of Aquatic Resources and partner organizations. I further encourage coordinated interagency collaboration among the Division of Aquatic Resources, federal agencies, and academic institutions engaged in marine invasive species response in Hawai'i, as well as prioritization of early detection and intervention in areas not yet fully overrun, consistent with well-established invasive species management principles.

Time is the critical factor. Delayed action will significantly increase both ecological damage and the cost of any future response.

These resolutions are an important step toward accountability and coordinated action, and I respectfully urge their adoption.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Frederick Smith

Captain Cook, HI