

SB 145

NEIL ABERCROMBIE
Governor



RUSSELL S. KOKUBUN
Chairperson, Board of Agriculture

JAMES J. NAKATANI
Deputy to the Chairperson

State of Hawaii
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
1428 South King Street
Honolulu, Hawaii 96814-2512

**TESTIMONY OF RUSSELL S. KOKUBUN
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE**

**BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE
ON
WAYS AND MEANS**

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2011
9:00 A.M.
CONFERENCE ROOM 211**

**SENATE BILL NO. 145, S.D. 1
RELATING TO IRRIGATION**

Chairperson Ige and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill No. 145, S.D. 1. The purpose of this bill is to appropriate funds for State irrigation systems. The Department supports the intent of this bill.

The State's irrigation systems provide one of the essential resources to farm. The systems listed in this bill provide reliable irrigation water to over 22,000 acres of farm land. Most of these systems are approaching or are over 100 years old and are in need of significant improvements to reduce water losses and maintenance costs. These funds are necessary to help extend the life of these systems for many decades to come and to continue to move Hawaii toward a more sustainable future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.





Hawaii Agriculture Research Center

Administration: P.O. Box 100, Kunia, HI 96759

Ph: 808-621-1350/Fax: 808-621-1359

a member of the
Kunia Water Cooperative

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

SENATE BILL 145, SD1

RELATING TO IRRIGATION

February 24, 2011

Chairman Ige and Members of your Committee:

My name is Stephanie Whalen. I am Executive Director of the Hawaii Agriculture Research Center (HARC). I am testifying today on behalf of the center and our research and support staff. I also am the President of the Kunia Water Cooperative and I am testifying on its behalf

HARC strongly supports Senate Bill 145, SD1 as proposed which includes supporting the improvement of the irrigation infrastructure for the Waiahole water system

HARC is a non-profit organization whose mission is to support agriculture in Hawaii through research and infrastructure preservation. Its experiment station is located at the urban/agricultural boundary in the Kunia agricultural area, essentially the gateway to this agricultural district. It has been stated in the past as being located among some of the best agricultural lands in the state. In the sugar era it produced some of the highest yields on record. It continues to show that with other crops.

HARC recently agreed to an agricultural easement on the property to protect this land for agricultural production in perpetuity. This prevents the encroachment of urbanization in the future as desired by the surrounding communities and expressed in the Central Oahu and Ewa Development plans.

The only source of agricultural water for HARC is the Waiahole Irrigation System. The Board of Water Supply limited the use of potable water to domestic use on this parcel and where available to other agricultural operations in the area. Without water there can be no viable agriculture on this land as it receives very little rainfall.

The federal government and the state hold this agricultural easement requiring that the land remain in agriculture. Consequently, there is a public interest in ensuring that water is available to this property.

An additional state interest in the Waiahole Irrigation System is a 150-acre parcel owned by the state, located in Kunia, and destined to be one of its agricultural parks. The Department of Agriculture recently requested an allocation of water from the Water Commission from this system to service the tenants of this agricultural park.

The Kunia Water Cooperative was established to represent the producers using the Waiahole Irrigation System. It has 9 members and over 50 farms are serviced. For the majority of farms this is the sole source of water for their crops. For much of the acreage in the Kunia area developing a well is not an option. Under most of these lands, the aquifer allocation has already been meted out.

The system is made up of a series of natural dikes and tunnels, 7 siphons, and open ditches. The system remarkably uses gravity to transport water for 25.3 miles through the central plain. Cooperative members along the ditch help in maintaining the integrity of the ditch as the Waiahole Irrigation System maintenance crew is too small to deal with all the maintenance issues for this system.

Three of the 7 siphons have been repaired but the other four remain perilously deteriorated. If one or more of these siphons collapse it would take several months to get the system back in service. It took over 18 months for one of the siphons in the Wahiawa Irrigation System to be replaced after a major storm took it out a few years back. Considering the number of farms, the diversity of crops, the economic contribution of this area and the 1,000s of acres of this prime agricultural area, support for irrigation infrastructure needs to be a high priority.

It is the desire of the Kunia Water Cooperative and HARC that this system be made less risky over the next several years by approving this proposed measure and advancing it to the next committee.

HARC and the KWC strongly support efforts to maintain and improve the irrigation systems in Hawaii and for that reason respectfully request funding for the Waiahole Irrigation System be included in this measure. The sum of \$2M would cover the planning, design and construction of 1 of the 4 siphons in need of repair.

HARC is supportive of the requests for all the agricultural water systems listed in this proposed bill over the biennium. HARC is appreciative of the legislature's past support and continuing recognition of repair needs for agricultural water systems in the state. These are valuable investments in the food, feed and fuel needs for the current and future generations.

We strongly urge you to approve Senate Bill 145, SD1 and thank you for the opportunity to testify.



Hawaii Farm Bureau

F E D E R A T I O N

2343 Rose Street, Honolulu, HI 96819
PH: (808)848-2074; Fax: (808) 848-1921

February 24, 2011

TESTIMONY

RE: SB145 SD1 RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

Chair Ige and Members of the Committee:

Hawaii Farm Bureau Federation on behalf of commercial farm and ranch families and organizations in the State **strongly supports with amendments**, SB145 SD1 authorizing the issuance of general obligation bonds for repair and maintenance of the Irrigation Systems across the State.

Hawaii's increased level of self sufficiency is totally dependent upon the health of its' agricultural industry. Without water, there can be no agriculture. This measure seeks to provide funding to address needed improvements to the system to provide reliable deliveries.

Building water storage and delivery infrastructure is critical but so is our ability to access the water needed to put into these systems. To accomplish this, the **completion of the Agricultural Water Use and Development Plan is critical. The information is needed to assist the Water Commission in making critical water decisions for agriculture.**

To this end, we request the addition of the following line in section 2:

(9) <u>Ag Water Use and Development Plan (Important Sources of Agricultural Water</u> <u>Section)</u> <u>\$400,000</u>

We respectfully request your support in passing this measure with the suggested amendments. If there are any questions, please contact Warren Watanabe at 2819718. Thank you.