



Testimony Before The  
House Committee on Finance (FIN)  
**IN SUPPORT OF HB2626 HD1**  
February 26, 2024, 3:30 PM, Room 308 & Zoom

We are Olan Leimomi Fisher and Brenda Asuncion Lima, Kua'āina Advocate and Hui Mālama Loko I'a Coordinator, 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 and 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) almost 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 HB2626 HD1 as an incremental step toward 'āina momona.**

Prior to 1900, **Hawai'i had close to 500 flourishing loko i'a, sustaining communities in numerous ways including through sustainable local seafood, limu, shellfish, and fertilizer – at one time producing an average of 400-600 pounds of fish per acre per year, yielding over 2 million pounds of fish annually throughout Hawai'i.** (See Generally, [Loko I'a Needs Assessment, 2021](#)). The U.S. Organic Act of 1900 (the Act) abandoned the support of most semblances of Native Hawaiian governance, especially in regard to biocultural resource management. The Act then transferred the aegis of governance – or lack thereof – to a U.S. laissez faire market system, ended Konohiki Fishery Management, and condemned loko i'a – extinguishing most of the existing ownership and operations of these systems. For context, in 1901 the catch and sale data for commercial 'ama'ama (mullet) – believed to be mostly fishpond-raised – decreased from close to 800,000 pounds of fish to less than 3,000 pounds today, with an estimated 88% of all food consumed in Hawai'i now imported, and reports showing that about 60% of our seafood alone is imported. **Rebuilding our robust and sustainable local food systems is critical to community resilience in the face of more frequent natural disasters** such as the recent devastating Lahaina fires and 2018 floods, climate change, and long lasting pandemics.

Up until about nine years ago, all loko i'a were once stymied by an overly burdensome permitting process that would often take decades to secure all the required state and federal permits to restore the ponds. A partnership of regulatory agencies, funders, and nonprofits formed in 2012 to design a better process, including input from members of KUA's Hui Mālama Loko I'a – and the Hō'ala Loko I'a Program was born after extensive consultations with loko i'a practitioners, scientists, resource agencies, and government officials. **Since the [Hō'ala Loko I'a Program](#) was implemented in 2015, 23 fishpond permits have been approved on six of the main Hawaiian Islands, with an average processing time reduced from many years to under one month.** The success of permit streamlining for fishponds serves as a resounding example of the power of our collective sharing of responsibility to care for our island home and resources.

Looking at the lessons learned from the successful permit streamlining process, we hope to one day also implement streamlining for fishpond leases as well. However, **we find it equally important to ensure that any applicants using the current leasing process understand and utilize the time-tested techniques and practices through native Hawaiian scientific knowledge best-adapted to our unique Hawai'i environment.** HB2626 HD1 would most-likely attract and secure more Native Hawaiian and local community individuals and organizations to fishpond management, further increasing the likelihood of more successful multi-sector partnerships where our "shared responsibility" to care for our island resources would benefit all that love Hawai'i. As we build a better future for our keiki, **we appreciate creative and collaborative approaches that build the capacity and skills of the next generation with intention, and in a way that benefits ongoing community efforts at loko i'a as a catalyst for ecosystem regeneration.**

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 our environment, the foundation of our very existence, is about long-term investment and a vision of 'āina momona.** To get there it requires taking the steps necessary for greater self-sufficiency, development of a pipeline of new and more innovative career pathways, mindsets, relationships, and resources for mālama 'āina efforts that encourage and build upon the time-tested . Passing this bill out of your committee is a start on a pathway toward reaching this vision.

Mahalo for this opportunity to submit supportive testimony. Please **PASS** HB2626 HD1.

**Aloha 'Āina Momona no nā kau ā kau.**

**Testimony of The Nature Conservancy  
Supports HB 2626 HD1, Relating to Fishponds  
Committee on Finance  
February 26, 2024, 3:30 p.m.  
Conference Room 308 & Videoconference**

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and Members of the Committee:

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) **supports** HB 2626 HD1, relating to fishponds, which specifies certain findings the Board of Land and Natural Resources must make for a lease of a government-owned Hawaiian fishpond.

Today, Hawaii's marine environment faces threats from anthropogenic sources of pollution, sedimentation, overharvesting, lack of community ownership, and an overall decrease in the competitive advantage of native species over non-natives. Scientists believe that present day reef fish stocks in Hawai'i have decreased by 75% in the past century. We believe fishponds may be able to assist in increasing fish stocks by providing additional juvenile recruitment and relieving fishing pressure on wild stocks of some reef fish species. In addition, fishponds can reduce sediment reaching the reefs, and may help to increase water recharge. Their rock walls may also mitigate some of the effects of sea level rise on coastal areas.

We strongly support the development and implementation of the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) master permit process for traditional Hawaiian fishponds which helps streamline the process for the repair, restoration, maintenance, and operation of traditional Hawaiian fishponds, or loko i'a. Hawaiian fishponds are culturally important and can be a potential solution to enhance the food security of communities in Hawai'i. A more streamlined process will ensure greater care for, restoration, productivity and cultural connectivity for traditional fishponds. TNC commends and supports the current version which acknowledges and prioritizes the ancestral wisdom and time-tested management of Hawai'i by requiring traditional Native Hawaiian knowledge, practice and protocols in the lease and management plans.

Thank you for the opportunity to **support** HB 2626 HD1.

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February 25th, 2024

Subject: Support HB2626 HD1 Relating to Fishponds

Dear Chair Kyle T. Yamashita, Vice Chair Lisa Kitagawa, and all other members of the House Finance Committee.

Aloha mai kākou!

I strongly support HB2626 HD1 Relating to Fishponds as it would allow for more people to utilize fishponds and produce for the community. Restoration and cultivation would be made much easier.

O'ahu alone used to have an estimated 97 fishponds along its coast; currently only six remain intact or operational (according to the National Park Service). These fishponds were once capable of producing hundreds to thousands of pounds of fish and were a shining example of non-exploitative resource management. Now however, many of them are filled in, destroyed entirely, or covered in Mangrove and Hau bushes.

Making it easier for people to gain access to these otherwise untapped and unmanaged resources while ensuring that the people to be reasonably verified is crucial to improving food access in Hawai'i. We cannot let these vital pieces of cultural and agricultural importance go to waste for no reason other than neglect.

All in all, I reiterate my strong support for HB2626 HD1 and urge the committee to support HB2626 HD1 as well. Restoring our 'āina and traditional systems is key to food independence!

**HB-2626-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 9:22:46 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2024 3:30:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Natalie Parra	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure.