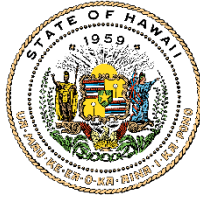


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STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII'
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KA 'OIHANA KUMUWAIWAI 'ĀINA

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Testimony of
DAWN N.S. CHANG
Chairperson

Before the House Committee on
CORRECTIONS, MILITARY, & VETERANS

Wednesday, March 20, 2024
10:00 AM

VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE, Conference Room 430, State Capitol

In consideration of
HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 121
ENCOURAGING THE UNITED STATES NAVY TO ERADICATE OCTOCORAL AND
OTHER INVASIVE SPECIES FROM PEARL HARBOR

House Concurrent Resolution 121 encourages the United States Navy to take responsibility for the eradication of octocoral and other invasive species from the waters of Pearl Harbor and to allocate resources to eradicate 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 and suggested amendment.**

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 take immediate 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 the past few years for its aggressive and damaging characteristics that have allowed it to occupy over 60 miles of

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STATE PARKS

Venezuelan coast and 1.2 million square miles of seafloor in Mochima National Park, 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 in 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, likely through aquarium dumping, to Pearl Harbor 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*.

While the invasive octocorals and other introduced species 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 Department understands that the United States Navy has recently conducted pilot eradication projects in certain areas of Pearl Harbor to test the efficacy of various eradication methods. However, the Department has not been apprised of the specifics of the outcomes of these projects, including any data collected, which would be essential to inform state response if the invasive species are found outside Pearl Harbor. The Department suggests that the resolution be amended to also encourage the United States Navy to provide the Department with regular updates on the status of eradication efforts and the extent of the spread of invasive octocoral.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of these measures.



COMMENTS ON HCR 121
ENCOURAGING THE UNITED STATES NAVY TO ERADICATE OCTOCORAL AND OTHER
INVASIVE SPECIES FROM PEARL HARBOR

House Committee on Corrections, Military, & Veterans
The Honorable Mark J. Hashem, Chair
The Honorable Cory M. Chun, Vice Chair

Wednesday, March 20, 2024 at 10:00 a.m.
Conference Room 430 & Videoconference

Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii Military Affairs Council ("MAC") **offers comments** on HCR 121.

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 committee that the U.S. Navy is executing on efforts to reduce octocoral and other invasive species in Pearl Harbor. Specifically, the U.S. Navy has been convening an interagency team of experts for this effort, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources.

U.S. Navy is working closely with agency partners to employ and continually refine our response plan and methodology, and to identify resources, capabilities, and experts that will be necessary for full-scale response and successful eradication.



To be specific, the team has successfully demonstrated that both manual removal and tarp smothering are effective in the short term. To-date, the manual removal method has removed approximately 19,956 sq ft (.45 acres) and the tarping method has eradicated approximately 13,900 sq ft (.32 acres).

Going forward, the U.S. Navy's goal is to scale up operations using funding in FY 2024 including U.S. Navy's pre-proposal for National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and Strategic Environmental Research and Development Program (SERDP) funding which has been approved to move to full proposal. Additionally, a Fish & Wildlife Coral Reef Conservation fund grant application has also been submitted.

We will be pleased to keep the Committee informed of our efforts and believe this resolution is not necessary.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments on this matter.