

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR | KE KIA'ĀINA

SYLVIA LUKE  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR | KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKUAĀINA O HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
KA 'OIHANA KUMUWAIWAI 'ĀINA

P.O. BOX 621  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96809

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LAND  
STATE PARKS

Testimony of  
**DAWN N.S. CHANG**  
Chairperson

Before the Senate Committee on  
**WATER AND LAND**

March 14, 2025  
1:00 PM

Via Video Conference, State Capitol, Conference Room 229

In consideration of  
**HOUSE BILL 506, HOUSE DRAFT 1**  
**RELATING TO CONSERVATION ENFORCEMENT**

House Bill 506, House Draft 1, proposes to appropriate funds for equipment for the Oahu Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE). **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) supports this bill provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities indicated in the Executive Budget request.**

As mentioned in this measure, there has been an increase in fishing intensity around the island of Oahu, particularly at night. The proposed funding this bill provides would be used to increase DOCARE's Oahu Branch capabilities to address violations by purchasing much needed equipment including watercraft, detection equipment such as night vision goggles and unmanned aircraft systems, vehicles and communication equipment. This will provide DOCARE's Oahu Branch with resources that enhances its abilities to detect, deter and respond to violations in state waters and fisheries, and can also be used in other areas under the department's management such as State Parks, Forest and Natural Area Reserves and unencumbered state lands.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.

**Testimony of The Nature Conservancy  
Supporting HB506 HD1, Relating to Conservation Enforcement.  
Committee on Water and Land  
March 14, 2025 at 1:00 pm  
Conference Room 229 and via Videoconference**

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

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify today. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Hawai'i and Palmyra supports HB506 HD1, which appropriates funds for equipment for the O'ahu Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) of the Department of Land and Natural Resources.

Hawaii's natural environment is the engine that drives our state's economy and a natural, recreational, and cultural treasure supporting our island lifestyle and livelihoods. Careful, thoughtful, and intentional conservation, management, and restoration is critical for the environment to withstand the increasing impacts of climate change while continuing to protect our islands' economic engine. TNC is proud of our decades of working in partnership with so many local organizations, agencies, and communities to care for this vital and fragile resources.

This bill would provide funding for DOCARE to purchase equipment vital to their ability to effectively carry out its mission to uphold the laws necessary to protect, conserve, and manage Hawaii's marine resources, such as responding to violations and enforcing rules and regulations. DOCARE's operations on O'ahu are critical to the long-term management of the islands depleting marine resources which are impacted by increased, often illegal, fishing pressure. This legislation will ensure DOCARE has the equipment and resources its needs to more effectively enforce fishing regulations and provide the opportunity for herbivores and other reef fish populations to recover.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB506 HD1.

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*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 40,000 acres in 13 nature preserves 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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Testimony Before The  
Senate Committee on Water and Land (WTL)  
**IN SUPPORT OF HB506 HD1**  
March 14, 2025, 1:00 p.m., Room 229 & Via 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 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) 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 HB506 HD1 as an incremental step towards 'āina momona.**

This bill would appropriate funds to the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) of the Department of Land and Natural Resources, to supply needed equipment for the O'ahu Branch to effectively carry out its mission to uphold the laws necessary to protect, conserve, and manage our unique and limited biocultural and historic resources held in public trust for current and future generations.

**A large number of our network members partner with DOCARE officers through growing community-based co-management initiatives from mauka to makai. These DOCARE officers are often the first representation community members face from DLNR.** Some wahi pana (significant places) have become well-known for their absence of almost any DOCARE presence – largely due to inadequate training resources and capacity. A bill like this, which we urge you to support, and the growing DOCARE Academy we hope you continue to support, are beginning to fill that gap. With the recent graduating classes, so far we have heard only praise and gratitude from our community members with DOCARE's increased presence and effectiveness throughout our state. **As DOCARE's officer pool continues to grow, likewise they need more equipment to carry out their enforcement duties.**

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. Passing this bill out of your committee supports reaching our goal to once again realize the abundant and thriving ecological balance in Hawai‘i.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in strong support. Please **PASS** HB506 HD1.

**Aloha ‘Āina Momona no Nā Kau ā Kau.**



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

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**Federal Nonprofit Organization**  
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March 10, 2025

To: Chair Inouye, Vice Chair Elefante, and the Senate Committee on Water and Land

Re: **STRONG SUPPORT** of **HB506** HD1: Relating to Conservation Enforcement

Aloha Chair Inouye, Vice Chair Elefante, and the Senate Committee on Water and Land,

Mālama Pūpūkea-Waimea (MPW) is the grassroots, community non-profit that actively works to care for, educate about, and protect our fragile, near-shore marine ecosystems. 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.

We write in **STRONG SUPPORT** of **HB506 HD1** which would appropriate funds for equipment for the O'ahu Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) of the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR).

We are proud to have been the first State of Hawai'i Makai Watch program on O'ahu, a collaborative statewide program where citizens and NGOs become directly involved with DLNR in the management of marine resources through promoting compliance to rules, education, and monitoring.

We collaborate closely with DOCARE and rely on their ability to effectively respond to violations and enforce the rules and regulations protecting our marine resources. HB506 appropriates moneys to DOCARE for purchasing much needed equipment that will directly benefit the health and abundance of our nearshore marine resources.

For these reasons, we **STRONGLY SUPPORT HB506 HD1**.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony,

Jenny Yagodich

Director of Educational Programs &  
Makai Watch Coordinator

**HB-506-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/11/2025 9:28:21 AM

Testimony for WTL on 3/14/2025 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
George "Bud" Antonelis. PhD	Testifying for Na Kama Kai	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Date 3/11/2025

Aloha Legislators,

I strongly support HB506 which would appropriate funds for equipment for the O‘ahu Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) of the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR).

HB506 will fund equipment that is essential for DOCARE officers to enforce night-time fishing regulations. Without night-vision goggles, drones, and other specialized equipment, the number of apprehensions of lawbreakers is far too low to save the parrotfishes and other herbivores.

These fishes, the “lawnmowers of the reef,” are especially important for keeping dead reef surfaces clean so new corals can settle and grow. Our fishing regulations must be enforced more effectively so populations of these important reef saviors can recover.

I urge you to support HB506 and help stem the illegal take of herbivorous fishes.

Mahalo,

George "Bud" Antonelis

Na Kama Kai, Board of Directors

Kailua, Hawai‘i

# Hawai'i Ocean Legislative Task Force



March 14, 2025

Hawai'i State Legislature  
Senate Committee on Water & Land

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of HB506 HD1, Relating to Conservation Enforcement

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

We strongly support HB506 HD1, Relating to Conservation Enforcement. This bill appropriates funds for equipment for the O'ahu Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement of the Department of Land and Natural Resources.

The Ocean Legislative Task Force advocates for measures that promote funding for natural resource protection and restoration, ocean resources, our coral reefs, subsistence fishing, and coastal resilience, among other priorities.

The Ocean Legislative Task Force is a group of over 100 individuals from diverse environmental organizations, working together to safeguard marine ecosystems. Our collective expertise allows us to craft impactful strategies to protect Hawai'i's waters.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of this important measure.

*The Ocean Legislative Task Force advocates for measures that promote funding for natural resource protection and restoration, ocean resources, coral reefs, subsistence fishing, and coastal resilience, and other priorities.*

**HB-506-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/13/2025 11:17:43 AM

Testimony for WTL on 3/14/2025 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Ted Bohlen	Testifying for Hawaii Reef and Ocean Coalition	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hawaii Reef and Ocean Coalition **strongly supports** HB506! Funding is essential to protect herbivore fish that protect our precious coral reefs.

This bill would appropriate funds for needed equipment for the O‘ahu Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) of the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR).

HB506 will fund equipment that is essential for DOCARE to enforce night-time fishing regulations and help restore depleted herbivore fish stocks.

Please pass this bill to protect our reefs!  
Mahalo!

Hawaii Reef and Ocean Coalition (by Ted Bohlen)

**HB-506-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/12/2025 2:28:07 PM

Testimony for WTL on 3/14/2025 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Phil Rarick	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Honorable Chair and members of the Senate WTL, I wish to testify **in strong Support** of HB506 HD1 for DLNR DOCARE Oahu branch for much needed equipment.

I have witnessed first hand the fish population decline around the island of Oahu. The recent passed DLNR DAR Herbivoire Administrative rules are now in effect. This requires more focused DOCARE Oahu branch night patrols to help stem the night poaching of our fish both near shoreline to offshore blue waters, with operational equipment and higher technology put to use.

DOCARE Oahu branch has had a staff increase with two recruit classes. The equipment for these officers was not funded for the items articulated in this new funding bill. In addition the items for an effective Marine Enforcement unit are lacking, or existing equipment is in serious need of upgrade / repair for Officer Safety and effective patrol use. A marine SCUBA Enforcement unit for underwater use does not currently have equipment. Shoreline patrols at night are critical, thus requiring enough working patrol trucks. Law enforcement equipped patrol trucks are needed NOW.

Technology to catch violators is needed. Night vision equipment, surveillance Drones, suveillance trailers @ small boat harbors, automated license plate readers, are all tools which are in short supply or totally lacking currently. These are tools which act as a deterrent to gain compliance with existing laws, and safeguard the community as a whole.

Upgrades with communications dispatch, and two way radios are necessary for patrol officer safety.

This bill is for OAHU only. I stronly urge you to support HB506 HD1 to help equip the Oahu Branch of DOCARE, stem the poaching of our herbivore fish around Oahu.

Mahalo,

Phil Rarick - east Oahu resident

**HB-506-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/13/2025 11:56:18 AM

Testimony for WTL on 3/14/2025 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Kim	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Hello,

Protecting our parrotfishes is one of the best way to protect the reef. I support this bill as the most important fisheries bill this year.

Kim Falinski

University of Hawaii at Manoa

**HB-506-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/11/2025 7:25:23 AM

Testimony for WTL on 3/14/2025 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Daniela Escontrela	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support HB506 which would appropriate funds for equipment for the O‘ahu Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) of the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR).

HB506 will fund equipment that is essential for DOCARE officers to enforce night-time fishing regulations. Without night-vision goggles, drones, and other specialized equipment, the number of apprehensions of lawbreakers is far too low to save the parrotfishes and other herbivores.

These fishes, the “lawnmowers of the reef,” are especially important for keeping dead reef surfaces clean so new corals can settle and grow. Our fishing regulations must be enforced more effectively so populations of these important reef saviors can recover.

I urge you to support HB506 and help stem the illegal take of herbivorous fishes.

**HB-506-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/11/2025 7:31:40 AM

Testimony for WTL on 3/14/2025 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Uilani Naipo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure that will fund DOCARE for night patrol.

**HB-506-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/11/2025 8:00:07 AM

Testimony for WTL on 3/14/2025 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Dennis Mahaffay	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

March 11, 2025

Aloha Legislators,

I strongly support HB506 which would appropriate funds for equipment for the O‘ahu Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) of the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR).

HB506 will fund equipment that is essential for DOCARE officers to enforce night-time fishing regulations. Without night-vision goggles, drones, and other specialized equipment, the number of apprehensions of lawbreakers is far too low to save the parrotfishes and other herbivores.

These fishes, the “lawnmowers of the reef,” are especially important for keeping dead reef surfaces clean so new corals can settle and grow. Our fishing regulations must be enforced more effectively so populations of these important reef saviors can recover.

I urge you to support HB506 and help stem the illegal take of herbivorous fishes.

Mahalo,

Dennis Mahaffay

Honolulu, Hawai‘i

**HB-506-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/11/2025 9:42:01 AM

Testimony for WTL on 3/14/2025 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Bert Weeks	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Bert Weeks, and I am submitting testimony as both a marine scientist and a lifelong fisher born and raised on Oahu. I am writing in support of HB506, which I believe is critical to protecting Hawaii's marine natural resources and ensuring the sustainability of our fisheries.

Hawaii's unique marine ecosystems are central to our cultural heritage, food security, and economy. For generations, our communities have depended on the ocean not just for sustenance, but as a cornerstone of our way of life. However, overfishing, habitat degradation, and climate stressors have placed increasing pressure on these resources. The Department of Aquatic Resources (DAR) has implemented improved fishing regulations, such as new herbivore rules and MMA designations. While these measures are crucial, they cannot be effective without proper enforcement.

As someone who spends significant time both onshore and in the water, I have personally witnessed individuals violating fishing regulations. This includes activities such as catching undersized fish, using banned fishing gear, or fishing in protected areas. Unfortunately, I seldom see conservation officers present to address these infractions. Without consistent enforcement, these illegal activities will continue to undermine the state's efforts to protect marine resources, damaging the delicate balance of our ocean ecosystems and jeopardizing the future of sustainable fishing in Hawaii.

Strengthening enforcement will not only protect Hawaii's marine environment but also benefit law-abiding fishers who adhere to regulations. Fair and consistent enforcement ensures that all users have equitable access to healthy fisheries, reducing resentment caused by unchecked violations.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this important issue. I urge you to pass this bill.

## **Testimony in Support of HB506**

March 12, 2025

Aloha Legislators,

I strongly support HB506 which would appropriate funds for equipment for the O'ahu Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) of the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR).

HB506 will fund equipment that is essential for DOCARE officers to enforce night-time fishing regulations. Without night-vision goggles, drones, and other specialized equipment, the number of apprehensions of lawbreakers is far too low to save the parrotfishes and other herbivores.

These fishes, the "lawnmowers of the reef," are especially important for keeping dead reef surfaces clean so new corals can settle and grow. Our fishing regulations must be enforced more effectively so populations of these important reef saviors can recover.

I urge you to support HB506 and help stem the illegal take of herbivorous fishes.

Mahalo,

Sherri Rigg  
Honolulu, Hawai'i

**HB-506-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/12/2025 9:40:19 AM

Testimony for WTL on 3/14/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sarita Rich	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

March 12, 2025

Aloha Legislators,

I strongly support HB506 which would appropriate funds for equipment for the O‘ahu Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) of the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR).

HB506 will fund equipment that is essential for DOCARE officers to enforce night-time fishing regulations. Without night-vision goggles, drones, and other specialized equipment, the number of apprehensions of lawbreakers is far too low to save the parrotfishes and other herbivores.

These fishes, the “lawnmowers of the reef,” are especially important because they help restore reefs from coral bleaching; they eat seaweed that grow on the corals; the reef surfaces stay clean; new corals can grow; and the reefs and all the species that depend on them for food and shelter flourish too. Uhu use their hard beaks and teeth to crunch dead corals, which are then ground up and excreted as sand to create our iconic beaches.

We believe in fishing. We fish to be connected physically, emotionally, and spiritually to the aina. But if we want to keep fishing and maintain these connections to our land and sea, we must be responsible stewards of the rich resources Mother Ocean gives freely—especially the herbivore populations that manage the health of our reefs. The choice to ignore what science says about the decline of herbivore populations due to overfishing is a choice that will deprive Hawai‘i of a future of biodiversity and economic growth. Kill the herbivores, and you kill the coral reefs and beaches. Without reefs and beaches, our coastlines are threatened by erosion, and tourism and recreation industries will decline. Let’s give our reefs, and our people, the gift of life by saving the uhu.

I urge you to support reef health by passing HB506. I strongly support more funding to fully enforce our fishing regulations to replenish populations of reef-saving fishes so that people may continue to enjoy the benefits of a thriving ocean for future generations.

Mahalo,

Sarita Rich

Honolulu, Hawai'i

**HB-506-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/12/2025 9:49:08 AM

Testimony for WTL on 3/14/2025 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Christina Comfort	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill to help marine resource enforcement get the needed equipment to function appropriately. With a multitude of threats to our coastal marine resources such as climate change, overfishing, land-based pollution, and invasive species, we need to do everything we can locally to help our marine resources to be sustained and managed appropriately for future generations and for ecosystem health. To give the best chance for the survival and success of our coral reefs and nearshore fisheries in the face of global stressors of climate change and ocean acidification, it requires each local stressor to be addressed to give ecosystems the best resilience to climate threats. Recent research (Gove et al. 2023, published in Nature) has shown that the most resilient coral reefs have high fish herbivory and low land-based pollution, so enforcing fishery regulations is critical.

Christina Comfort, Coastal Oceanographer, Pupukeya

**HB-506-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/12/2025 4:17:17 PM

Testimony for WTL on 3/14/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jacqueline Leinau	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**Testimony in Support of House Bill 506  
Appropriating Funds for Equipment for the Oahu Branch of DOCARE**

I strongly support House Bill 506, which would appropriate funds to provide essential equipment for the Oahu Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) of the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR). This funding is critical to enhancing DOCARE’s ability to monitor and enforce laws against illegal fishing, especially during nighttime when violations are most common.

Illegal fishing threatens the health of our marine ecosystems and the livelihoods of local communities. With improved equipment such as surveillance tools and night-vision technology, DOCARE can more effectively combat these illegal activities. This bill will help strengthen the division’s efficiency, manpower, and safety, ensuring a sustainable future for Hawai‘i’s marine resources.

I urge you to pass House Bill 506 to ensure that DOCARE has the necessary resources to protect our environment and community.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Jacqueline Leinau

**HB-506-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/12/2025 4:23:24 PM

Testimony for WTL on 3/14/2025 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha e Legislators,

I am writing in support of HB506. The official passing of this bill will ensure that the herbivorous species around O’ahu are protected from overfishing. Coral reefs are important to all marine ecosystems in many ways. They provide sheltering and protection for fishes from predators, as well as a food source. Corals benefit not only their habitats but also our Earth as a whole.

The reefs are responsible for lessening the impact of storms in coastal areas. Another major contribution of coral reefs is the absorption of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. The ocean itself is a major carbon sink for the planet. Herbivorous fish keep the reefs clean and thriving. This ensures that algae is not outcompeting coral for space and sunlight. To ensure that our planet can recover from such threats as climate change, there must be a balance between the interacting organisms in the ocean.

There should be appropriated funds towards the conservation of herbivorous fish to ensure further conservation of coral reefs. Mahalo!

Kindly,

Ziomara Ramos

Aloha Chair Inouye, Vice Chair Elefante, and members of the Senate Committee on Water and Land,

In strongly supporting HB506, I wish to briefly review the origin of this bill, which is not well documented. HB506 resulted from 2024 House Resolution 69 and Senate Resolution 104, which instructed the Division of Aquatic Resources to convene a working group of relevant experts from state and federal agencies, universities, and other organizations to document the state of coral-reef herbivorous fish populations around the island of O‘ahu and recommend corrective action. As the Hsiao Endowed Professor of Marine Biology at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, I was a member of that working group, which was convened in the State Capitol last December.

Why the focus on herbivorous fishes? These living lawnmowers of the sea, including parrotfishes (uhu), surgeonfishes (kala, kole, and others), and chubs (nenu), eat various kinds of seaweeds, preventing them from overgrowing and smothering corals. Living corals are the “trees” of the reef, providing habitat for all coastal sea life. And living coral reefs in Hawai‘i are worth \$100s millions, being extremely valuable as natural breakwaters protecting our shores from sea level rise, and as sources of the sand that replenishes our beaches, fisheries that feed us, and new medicines, among other ecosystem goods and services. And the cultural and spiritual value of coral reefs is incalculable.

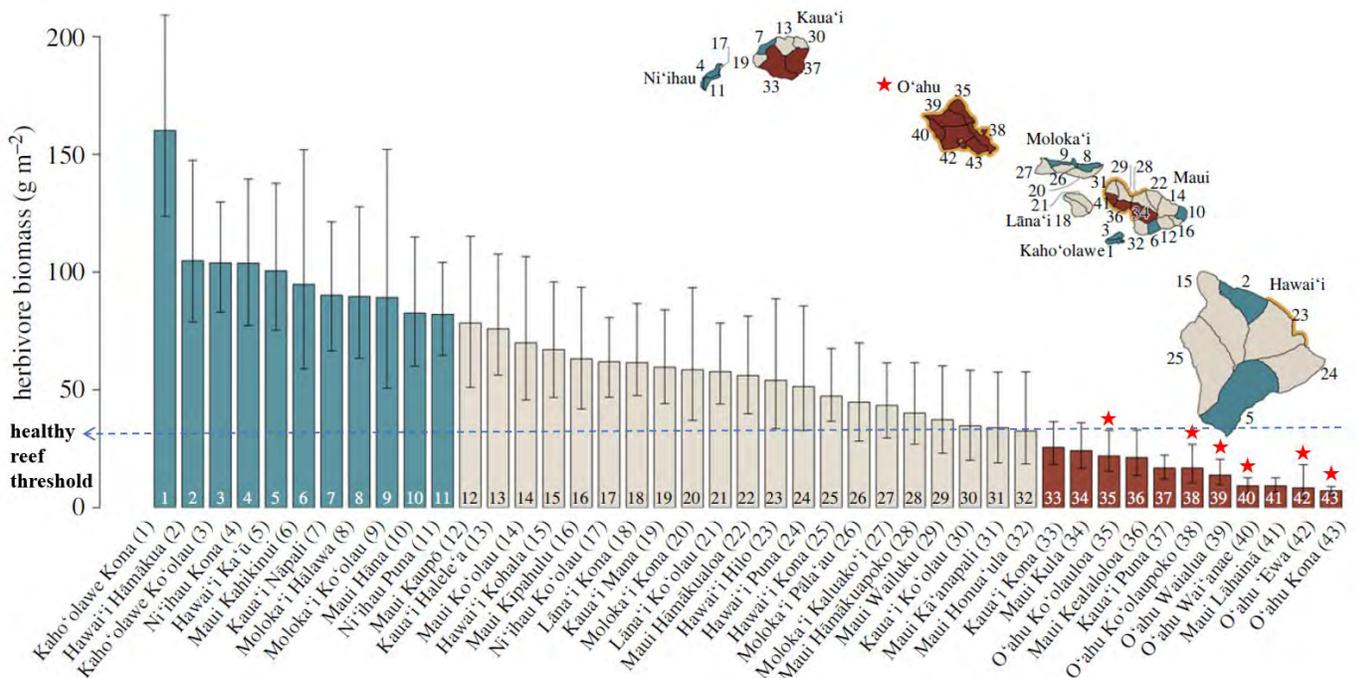
Unfortunately for Hawai‘i, many of our coral reefs are degraded and covered with seaweeds, *and* herbivorous fish populations are severely depleted, especially around O‘ahu. Working group members reviewed previously published information and new data from NOAA showing that O‘ahu is by far in the worst shape of all Hawaiian Islands in terms of herbivore depletion (see graphs below).

The working group’s primary consensus was that DOCARE requires much needed equipment to help their woefully understaffed marine patrol stop the rampant overfishing of herbivores that occurs at night on O‘ahu reefs. HB506 will provide this equipment. It is common knowledge that groups of spearfishers pillage entire reefs as herbivores like uhu sleep helplessly under ledges at night. My neighbor witnessed a dozen trucks unload about 30 divers for night diving on our local reef. They cleaned-out our reef. Such accounts are common around our island. These lawbreakers are not only depleting our fisheries, they are also greatly endangering the very survival of our coral reefs.

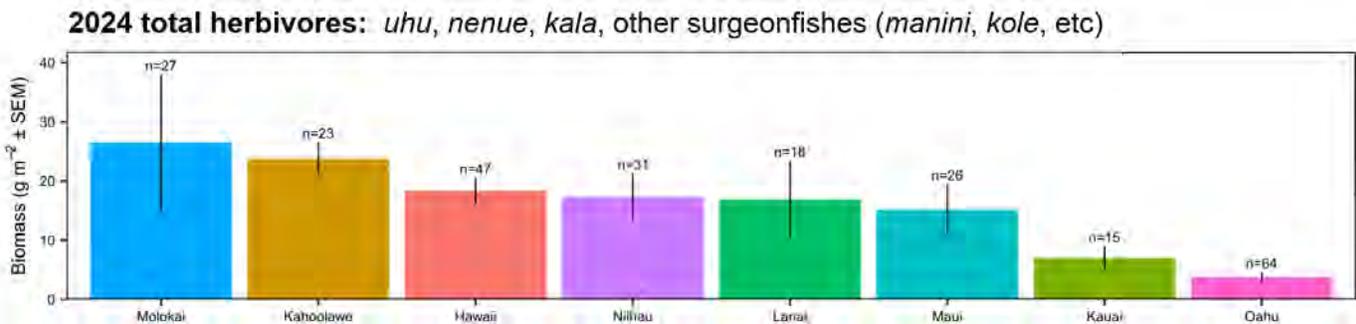
I understand that only a few DOCARE officers are dedicated to night marine patrols around O‘ahu, an island of 1 million people. Without night-vision goggles, drones, and other specialized equipment, the number of apprehensions of lawbreakers is far too low to save the herbivores that are critical for the survival of our reefs. As a professional marine biologist who has studied these fishes on O‘ahu since the 1970s, I have personally witnessed their extreme decline over the decades. Those who argue that there are plenty of uhu around O‘ahu are simply wrong.

Our existing fishing regulations – from the new herbivore fishing rules enacted last year to the new night spearfishing ban in Maunaloa Bay – must be enforced effectively so populations of our herbivorous reef savors can recover. Otherwise, those who plunder our reefs with zero regard for the law will continue their nighttime pillaging. I urge you – no, I beg you – to support HB506. If we continue to kick the can of coral reef conservation down the road, I guarantee that we will lose our reefs.

Mahalo,  
Mark Hixon



Abundance of herbivorous fishes (grams of fish per square meter of reef) in each moku of the main Hawaiian Islands. Red stars indicate the extreme depletion of herbivores around O’ahu (Donovan et al. 2023 *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*). The “healthy reef threshold” is the abundance of herbivores necessary for reefs to remain healthy (Brock 1979 UH PhD thesis).



Abundance of herbivorous fishes (grams of fish per square meter of reef) around each of the main Hawaiian Islands from NOAA’s 2024 diver surveys (n is the number of survey sites per island). Note the extremely low abundance of herbivores around O’ahu (far right).

**HB-506-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/12/2025 6:46:58 PM

Testimony for WTL on 3/14/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kosaki, Randall	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Committee Members,

**I am writing to ask for your support of HB506**, which will equip DLNR DOCARE enforcement officers with equipment that is essential for night-time enforcement of fishing regulations. Illegal night spearfishing and gill-netting of reef fishes, especially in marine protected areas and in the newly created Maunalua Bay Fisheries Management Area, will exacerbate depletion of populations of herbivorous fishes (especially uhu or parrotfish, family Scaridae). **These herbivores, the “lawnmowers of the reef”, are essential to keeping algal growth from smothering our corals**, especially in the wake of coral mortality driven by climate change driven events such as coral bleaching (and subsequent death), and damage from major storms and hurricanes.

I have worked as a professional marine biologist here in Hawaii for nearly 40 years. I am also an avid recreational spearfisher. Whether on the job as a biologist, or in the water as a fisher, I have witnessed a serious decline in the abundance of these ecologically important fishes during my lifetime. O’ahu’s abundance of herbivores has been reduced through human activities to less than 5% of their abundance on the pristine reefs of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands where I work. These observations come from peer-reviewed scientific studies of the highest caliber.

Thank you for your support of HB506, and for helping to stem the illegal take of herbivorous fishes. **The continued existence of coral reefs as we know them is at stake.**

Sincerely yours,

Randall Kosaki, Ph.D.

**HB-506-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/12/2025 10:55:08 PM

Testimony for WTL on 3/14/2025 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Mackenzie manning	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Legislators,

I strongly support HB506 which would appropriate funds for equipment for the O‘ahu Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) of the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR).

HB506 will fund equipment that is essential for DOCARE officers to enforce night-time fishing regulations. Without night-vision goggles, drones, and other specialized equipment, the number of apprehensions of lawbreakers is far too low to save the parrotfishes and other herbivores.

These fishes, the “lawnmowers of the reef,” are especially important for keeping dead reef surfaces clean so new corals can settle and grow. Our fishing regulations must be enforced more effectively so populations of these important reef saviors can recover.

I urge you to support HB506 and help stem the illegal take of herbivorous fishes.

Thank you,

Mackenzie Manning

**HB-506-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/13/2025 11:46:01 AM

Testimony for WTL on 3/14/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
James Beets	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**We urge strong support HB506!**

My wife and I are residents of Hawai'i Island (Pepeekeo), but we strongly support the Bill HB506 for more support for enforcement actions of fishes on O'ahu. If we do not support these actions, our resources on Hawai'i Island will be next to fail in adequate protection. Obviously, I support all action for Hawai'i Island on marine issues, but I believe that this action is very important for all residents of Hawai'i.

**Why the focus on herbivorous fishes?** These living lawnmowers of the sea, including parrotfishes (uhu), surgeonfishes (kala, kole, and others), and chubs (nenu), eat various kinds of limu, preventing them from overgrowing and smothering corals. Living corals are the "trees" of the reef, providing habitat for all coastal sea life. And living coral reefs in Hawai'i are worth \$100s millions, being extremely valuable as natural breakwaters protecting our shores from sea level rise, and as sources of the sand that replenishes our beaches, fisheries that feed us, and new medicines, among other ecosystem goods and services. And the cultural and spiritual value of coral reefs is incalculable.

Unfortunately for Hawai'i, many of our coral reefs are degraded and covered with seaweeds, and herbivorous fish populations are severely depleted, especially around O'ahu. Scientists and activists have reviewed previously published information and new data from NOAA showing that O'ahu is by far in the worst shape of all Hawaiian Islands in terms of herbivore depletion.

**WE DO NOT WANT HAWAI'I ISLAND TO BE NEXT!**

DLNR/Division of Aquatic Resources was asked by the legislature to convene a working group of relevant experts from state and federal agencies, universities, and other organizations to document the state of coral-reef herbivorous fish populations around the island of O'ahu and recommend corrective action.

**HB506 is the first important recommendation from the working group!**

**We respectfully urge you to support HB506!**

James Beets and Lisa Muehlstein

28-608 Opuia Road, Pepeekeo

**HB-506-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/13/2025 11:46:06 AM

Testimony for WTL on 3/14/2025 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Brian Kitaoka	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a voting person, I fully support this bill and the mission of the DNLR. Aloha!

**HB-506-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/13/2025 12:54:56 PM

Testimony for WTL on 3/14/2025 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Alan Friedlander	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Legislators,

I am writing in strong support of HB506, which would improve DOCARE's ability to enforce existing fishing regulations and improve the health of fish populations around O'ahu's. Studies authored by myself and others have shown a severe decline in herbivorous fish populations across Hawai'i, some dangerously low, imperiling our coral reefs statewide. Maintenance and recovery of coral reefs require herbivores, which graze on limu and help reefs recover from climate-driven bleaching, as well as local threats from poor water quality, overfishing, and habitat loss. O'ahu's herbivore populations are in crisis with populations at less than 5% of their potential capacity. A major contributor to herbivore depletion is illegal spearing and lay gillnetting, especially at night and in marine protected areas. This bill would help to address this issue and aid in the recovery of these keystone species. I have worked on nearshore fisheries and coral reefs in Hawai'i and across the global for over 4 decades and have documented significant declines in fish stocks, particularly in populated islands such as O'ahu. Many locations have passed the tipping point but there is still hope for Hawai'i. One of the main complaints from fishers is the lack of enforcement of existing regulations. This legislation is a critical step in helping to ensure we can restore severely depleted herbivore populations and build coral reef resilience in the face of climate impacts. Restoring herbivore populations is essential for reef recovery and for the people of Hawai'i.

Mahalo, Alan Friedlander, Ph.D

**HB-506-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/13/2025 3:29:55 PM

Testimony for WTL on 3/14/2025 1:00:00 PM



Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
joseph simpliciano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As someone who works closely with DOCARE almost everyday they need all the funding they can get! They currently have old vehicles with no sirens, their trucks unable to arrest or transport criminals and they don't even have enough safety equipment to operate utvs, boats,etc. As seen in other states conservation officers are always at the tip of the spear wether they are in the mountains or on the ocean they need the proper equipment to do a tough job that is required of them. People always grumble about DOCARE, by saying DONTCARE and that's because these men and women are not being set up for success.