



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## Legislative Testimony

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Testimony Presented Before the  
House Committee on Water and Land  
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By

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### HB 414 – RELATING TO AQUATIC RESOURCES

Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Blanco, and members of the Committee:

HB 414 seeks to protect coral reefs from decline and degradation by prohibiting the import of coral products into the State and the sale of coral products in the State.

As stated in testimony submitted by the Division of Aquatic Resources, live corals are already fully protected in Hawai'i, and this bill could have the potential effect of reducing degradation of corals elsewhere, but that it would not protect Hawai'i corals. While coral protection in places outside of Hawai'i is still warranted, as written the bill will have unintended consequences for scientific coral research in Hawai'i, the primary goal of which is to help conserve coral reef ecosystems in the State. Noted also by DAR and coral scientists, the bill does not specify the definition for "coral" which could be broadly interpreted as most species within the class Anthozoa of the phylum Cnidaria (both hard and soft corals).

There is great concern among researchers at the Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology (HIMB) that this bill could shut down scientific exchange of research samples that are exchanged for study among museums and research institutions outside the State (such as the Smithsonian or Florida Museum of Natural History) and international partners (such as the Museum of Queensland or the Australian Institute of Marine Science) under our current federal CITES permitting process.

The exchange of coral samples for scientific study is necessary to directly compare skeletal and genetic similarity of coral samples for positive identification, to determine which species are Hawaiian endemics or broadly distributed species, and whether unusual corals discovered in the state are simply rare growth forms of common species, species that are newly discovered, or alien invaders that do not belong in Hawaiian waters. Without the ability to import or export scientific reference materials for study, such determinations will be impossible in the future,

which provide information that is vital to basic understanding, and therefore the conservation, of coral reef ecosystems.

HIMB suggests that language of the bill be revised to provide an exemption for scientific study or research activities performed by an accredited university or museum.