



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committees on Higher Education and
Water and Land

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And

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HB 2613 HD1 – MAKING AN APPROPRIATION FOR THE HE'EIA NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESEARCH RESERVE

Chairs Kahele and Rhoads, Vice Chairs Kim and Gabbard, and members of the committees:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2613 HD1, making an appropriation for the He'eia National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR), provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in our BOR Approved Supplemental Budget. Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology (HIMB) strongly supports this measure but would like to offer some clarifications and suggested changes to the bill as describe below.

We are highly supportive of the effort to maintain the He'eia National Estuarine Research Reserve (HeNERR) and are pleased to see continuing support of the site through HB 2613 HD1 with its inclusion of the needed personnel resources for the HeNERR. However, our understanding is that 3 of the 4 requested positions (Reserve Manager, Research Coordinator & Education Coordinator) were already permanently allocated to the university by the legislature during the 2017 session, thus they need not be included again in this current bill. These three positions are required at every designated NERR site in the nation by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, thus their permanent designation last year fulfilled the required match for the annual federal funding allocation enabling the site partners to implement the HeNERR management plan. However, a fourth position for a Cultural Resource Coordinator, while initially included in last year's bill, ultimately was not funded in 2017. Although not required for the NERRS federal funding, HIMB and the HeNERR site partners believe the Cultural Resource position is critical to the long-term success of the mission.

The establishment of He'eia as one of the 29 Research reserves across the nation has enabled the Site Partners, which includes the Ko'olaupoko Hawaiian Civic Club,

Ko'olaupoko Foundation, Paepae O He'eia, Kāko'o 'Ōiwi, and UH's Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology, to work with the State management agencies with jurisdiction for the lands (Division of Land and Natural Resources, Hawai'i Community Development Authority) to undertake a historic effort to restore He'eia to a functioning ahupua'a, and conduct research and monitoring needed to document the utility and value of this management strategy for coastal communities elsewhere. As outlined in the detailed management plan, this effort involves the removal of alien invasives and replacement with native and naturalized species throughout the area, restoration of the lo'i kalo, the loko kuapā and He'eia stream that runs through the site and links mauka to makai. Given that the ultimate goal is to restore a functioning ahupua'a, it is critical to have a cultural coordinator intimately involved in this effort.

HeNERR is unlike any other in the system - it is a coalescence of community, culture and research to combine modern science with traditional methods and cultural practices in the hope of restoring a more productive watershed and learning from the past to better inform a more bountiful and sustainable future in the face of a changing climate and increased human population. Unlike other federal NERRs, this designation effort has been community led from the beginning and was first proposed in the Kāne'ohē Bay Master plan. The designation of HeNERR is the culmination of decades of effort by the community of He'eia, and it is essential that Native Hawaiian culture and traditional practices be given equal prominence in this effort as the federally mandated science and education. Such prominence can best be realized through state investment in a position for the Cultural Resources Coordinator, and we are fully supportive of the communities' request for this position. This unique site will expose the youth of Hawai'i and those across the U.S. to a broad array of cultural and science concepts from historical and modern land use to ecological knowledge to cutting edge marine biology, and will empower the community to restore He'eia with the backing from the State of Hawai'i and the NERRS federal funding. If successful, it will serve as an example for others who seek to restore impacted watersheds and increase the productivity of nearshore fisheries throughout the Hawaiian Islands and to the broader Pacific beyond.

The Resource Manager, Research & Education Coordinators are full-time permanent positions, housed within HIMB as the lead State Partner on this effort. We would recommend that mechanisms be explored to create a fourth permanent position, similar to the 3 already allocated to HIMB as State match, to ensure culture be integrated into the restoration and management of He'eia now and in perpetuity, in accordance with the management plan. However, we also recognize that HIMB may not be the best fit for a permanent cultural resource coordinator, and we are happy to work with the committee to explore options for the creation and housing of a position in other departments with the appropriate expertise that will ensure the long-term stability of this position and success of the individual recruited in achieving the vision of restoring a functioning ahupua'a for the HeNERR.

In closing, we would like to reiterate our enthusiastic support for the intent of HB 2613 HD1 and thank your committee for the opportunity to offer this testimony.