Testimony before UH Board of Regents, 21 May 2015, by Dr. Mark Hixon, UH Mānoa:

Good morning Chairman Moore, President Lassner, and Regents:

My name is Mark Hixon. I am a Professor and Sidney & Erica Hsiao Endowed Chair in Marine Biology at UH Mānoa. I’d like to open by sharing an image that I have experienced personally: Imagine the most beautiful of tropical forests—a rainbow garden of so many colors and shapes and sheer variety that it boggles the mind. People living nearby thrived on the foods and other services provided by this amazing ecosystem. Pharmaceutical corporations discovered dozens of natural chemicals in this Eden, including anti-cancer agents.

But this amazing assemblage of species proved no match for the accelerating rate at which humans have been warming the Earth. So suddenly, all the trees of this grand garden turned as white as snow. But it had not snowed. Instead, record warm temperatures had caused the trees to expel the colorful organisms living within their tissues, rendering all surfaces colorless. All of the ashen trees soon died and eventually collapsed, along with their associated riches.

This was not a forest as we know them on land. This cemetery had been my favorite coral reef, killed by the great coral bleaching of 1998, then the warmest year ever experienced by modern humans. Nearly 10 percent of all the coral reefs in the world died that single terrible year. It was heartbreaking to witness this loss firsthand.

2014 is presently the warmest year on record, also a year of record coral bleaching here in Hawai‘i.

The remaining reefs face both increased bleaching and ocean acidification. The rainbow gardens beneath the tropical seas are dying, along with their uncountable goods and services for humans: unparalleled destruction, unseen and unheard, with no end in sight.

But the good news is that we CAN stop this collapse. Research shows that, while the effects of climate disruption are accelerating, we can still reverse them. YOU can help reverse them.

We at Divest UH believe that, by divesting from fossil fuels, the Regents and the University of Hawai‘i Foundation will be meeting both its fiduciary duty and its stated moral obligation. The University’s strategic plan expresses a public commitment to “acquire, allocate, and manage public and private revenue streams and exercise exemplary stewardship over all of the University’s resources for a sustainable future.”

Our students and our faculty, as well as our business leaders, understand that our biggest industry—tourism—depends on our ability to stop the shifting of our trade winds, the altering of our rainfall patterns, the erosion of our beaches, and the loss of our ocean life.

News of your willingness to divest from fossil fuels is high in symbolic value. We have no doubt that by divesting its endowment from fossil fuels, the University of Hawai‘i will set a leading example for the rest of the State, and begin the cascade of policy and legislative changes we need to help reduce the effects of global warming.

On behalf of Divest UH, I’d like to show you the level of support that this campaign represents. I ask that all those who are in attendance today who agree with this testimony, please indicate so by raising your hand. Thank you.