



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Water and Land
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By

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And

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SB 69 – RELATING TO COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT

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

The University of Hawai'i Climate Resilience Collaborative (CRC) opposes Senate Bill 69 and its intent.

In short, this measure would:

1. Increase coastal development, putting homes and community assets at risk of flooding, erosion, and storm damage;
2. Increase coastal hardening, leading to further beach loss, accelerated erosion, and violation of the public trust;
3. Preempt home-rule, preventing the Counties from applying more-localized regulatory oversight;
4. Walk back progress made by the State in Act 16 (2020); and
5. Ignore guidance from the State Climate Commission regarding the trajectory of sea level rise.

These points are discussed in more detail below.

The measure's stated purpose to “balance... public and private interest in implementing sea level rise adaptation,” is code for abdicating long established protections for beaches and public access to the ocean. The proposed “balancing” would in reality lead to increased coastal development and shoreline hardening in the very locations where we need, instead, to be developing strong and innovative exit strategies. Further, we find no justification in promoting the strategy to “advance” against the rising ocean instead of retreat.

We appreciate the measure's discussion of sea level rise science, and would like to use this opportunity to provide updated information about sea level rise science and projections.

Research and modeling by a federal task force (Sweet et al., 2022) indicate the following:

1. Hawai'i will experience sea level rise that is 15% to 30% higher than the global average.
2. Sea level around Hawai'i is projected to rise about 1 foot by 2050 and about 4 feet by 2100.

In the Hawai'i State Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation's 2022 report to the Legislature as required by Act 32 (2017), the Commission recommended that:

"...the state should set a revised planning and policy benchmark of 4 ft as the minimum scenario for all planning and design based on the report's Intermediate (mid-range) scenario for Hawai'i of 3.9 feet of sea level rise by 2100, and apply a 6 ft benchmark for planning and design of public infrastructure projects and other projects with low tolerance for risk based on the report's Intermediate High scenario for Hawai'i of 5.9 feet of sea level rise by 2100. The latest science suggests that the SLR-XA for 3.2ft of sea level remains valid as a planning overlay for the mid century at this time."

SB69 would ignore this guidance from the State Climate Commission regarding the trajectory of sea level rise.

We also draw your attention to the 6th Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change which states with high confidence that:

"Sea level is committed to rise for centuries to millennia due to continuing deep-ocean warming and ice-sheet melt and will remain elevated for thousands of years."

We emphasize - There is nothing we can do to stop sea level rise. We must develop exit strategies for our coastal communities. Sea level rise is an unstoppable reality and without major adjustments to coastal laws and policies, flooding, erosion, and storm dangers will increase - slowly at first, as at present, but by the 2030's sea level rise impacts related to extreme tidal flooding will increase exponentially.

Senate Bill 69 would further complicate managed retreat, put coastal communities at increased risk of danger, and lead to beach loss by opening the door to additional private coastal hardening structures and by permitting less stringent requirements for maintenance, renovation, or reconstruction of existing coastal hardening structures.

The current framework under the Hawai'i Coastal Zone Management Act has enabled the Counties to progressively prepare for sea level rise. SB69 would prevent the individual Counties from enacting ordinances that better conform to more localized

effects of sea level rise by preventing them from utilizing peer-reviewed science, data, and modeling.

SB69 endorses historical rates of coastal erosion. We agree that these can be a useful tool for coastal land management. However, historical rates of coastal erosion underestimate the impacts of future accelerations in sea level rise. Further, the Hawai'i State Commission recommended in its recent report to the Legislature that the State should "Incorporate existing and emerging scientific data in updates to shoreline setback ordinances: The state should support the counties in updating shoreline setback and zoning ordinances to reflect the increasing threat of coastal erosion and sea level rise." SB69 would do the opposite of what the State Climate Commission recommends by preventing the Counties from utilizing peer-reviewed, localized modeling.

CRC is a multi-investigator research project at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa focused on sea level rise adaptation and climate resilience. CRC is working to update coastal models with more recent projections of sea level rise and to take account of other variables that impact Hawai'i's shorelines.

Climate Resilience Collaborative opposes Senate Bill 69 and respectfully ask that your Committee on Water and Land defer the measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.