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SCR 94 – ENDORSING WAIKIKI AS A WORLD SURFING RESERVE

Chair Kapela, Vice Chair Kong, and Members of the Committee:

The College of Social Sciences (CSS) and Sea Grant College Program (Hawaiʻi Sea Grant) strongly support the intent of SCR 94, which recognizes Waikīkī as a World Surfing Reserve.

Waikīkī is not only an iconic cultural and recreational landscape, but also a cornerstone of Hawaiʻi's visitor economy. Its world-renowned surf breaks, beaches and coastal ecosystems are intrinsically linked to the economic vitality of the region. The health of these natural resources directly underpins the livelihoods of local businesses, supports employment and sustains the broader economic resilience of the State. As such, there is a clear and compelling social, cultural and economic rationale for protecting and stewarding the environmental systems that make Waikīkī both unique and globally significant.

Designation as a World Surfing Reserve would formally acknowledge Waikīkī's exceptional environmental, cultural and recreational value while elevating public awareness of the growing threats facing its coastal resources. These include coastal erosion, sea level rise, increased storm impacts and ongoing pressures from urban development and heavy use. Recognizing Waikīkī through this designation provides an important platform to highlight these challenges and to promote proactive, science-informed management strategies. Our understanding is that designation as a Reserve does not necessarily trigger new environmental or commercial regulations but instead requires the formation of a stewardship committee and subsequent community-based management plan.

Equally important, this recognition would help strengthen and formalize community-based stewardship. It offers a mechanism to enhance collaboration among local stakeholders, practitioners, cultural leaders and resource managers, fostering a shared commitment to protecting Waikīkī's natural and cultural heritage. By aligning conservation efforts with community values and local knowledge, this initiative can support more effective, inclusive and adaptive management approaches.

CSS has formed a research- and advisory-based Surf Culture and Heritage Hui (Surf Hui), which supports surfing heritage initiatives in Hawai‘i. These initiatives include legislative, cultural and historical impacts, and policy work connected to surfing as a Native Hawaiian cultural practice.

This Surf Hui will give CSS a formal platform to organize research, community engagement and strategic advising around surfing as culture and heritage. As this resolution formerly endorses recognition of Waikīkī as a World Surfing Reserve, the Surf Hui could complement the effort by advancing the historical, cultural, social and policy research aspects needed to support national and international recognition of surfing in Hawai‘i.

Work has already begun on producing a small set of visible, useful products that establish credibility and support future funding or legislative collaboration. These objectives include:

Phase 1: Developing the organization and framework. To build membership, refine the scope and prepare a foundational background brief on the history and culture of surfing in Hawai‘i.

Phase 2: Researching and consultation. To convene practitioner and community conversations, review archival and scholarly sources, and identify major themes, risks and heritage documentation priorities.

Phase 3: Obtaining public products and policy support. To deliver a white paper or issue a brief, policy memo for state leadership, and roadmap for future heritage-oriented research, documentation and advisory work. Potential deliverables include a surfing heritage background report, a bibliography and archive map, one or more community-engagement roundtables, testimony or policy support materials as requested, and a strategic short memo outlining future opportunities for cultural heritage, research and public engagement.

Housing the Surf Hui in CSS would be a natural fit. The College could provide an interdisciplinary home for the historical, cultural, policy and community dimensions of surfing, while serving as a bridge to other UH units. CSS brings institutional credibility, research infrastructure and public-facing policy orientation for a group that is both scholarly and applied.

In practice, CSS would provide administrative coordination, meeting support, communications assistance and a platform for collaborative grant development. The College would help ensure that the Surfing Hui's work products are useful beyond the university to legislators, cultural organizations, schools, local communities and the broader public. By convening the proposed team and engaging additional community voices as needed, the Surfing Hui can become a credible institutional home for research and advisory work related to surfing as one of Hawai'i's most visible and culturally significant practices.

Hawai'i Sea Grant is a formidable partner in this endeavor. Its mission is to provide integrated research, extension and educational activities that increase understanding and use of ocean and coastal resources of the Hawaiian and Pacific Islands, and support the informed personal, policy and management decisions that are integral to realizing this vision. Hawai'i Sea Grant is part of a national network of 34 university-based programs associated with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration that promote better understanding, conversation and use of coastal resources.

In summary, this resolution represents a meaningful step toward safeguarding the environmental integrity, cultural significance and economic sustainability of Waikīkī for future generations. CSS and Hawai'i Sea Grant respectfully ask for your support.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.