

Informational Briefing on State Water Quality Standards
Senate Committee on Health and House Committee on Energy and Environmental
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My name is Roger Fujioka, I am a researcher at Water Resources Research Center, University of Hawaii. My expertise is in water quality and public health microbiology. I was asked to attend this briefing to provide my professional assessment related to whether Hawaii State Department of Health (DOH) should change its current recreational water quality standard set at 7 enterococci/100 ml to adopting the national EPA standard of 35 enterococci/100 ml.

In 1986 EPA directed all states to adopt their new marine recreational water quality standard set at 35 enterococci/100 ml (geometric mean). At that time DOH formed a Water Quality Standards Advisory Committee to provide recommendations to DOH. I served on that committee and recommended that DOH accept the EPA standard of 35 enterococci/100 ml because we had monitoring data to show that most beaches in Hawaii could meet this new EPA standard. However, DOH chose to adopt a more restrictive standard of 7/enterococci/100 ml based on EPA table of predictable disease rate, which showed that 7/enterococci/100 ml would lead to an expected low disease rate of 10/1000 swimmers. However, EPA has not been able to verify their predicted disease rate associated with 7 enterococci/100 ml and no longer uses this data. As a result, the scientific basis for setting the Hawaii standard at the restrictive 7/enterococci/100 ml standard is not valid. In summary, DOH used faulty EPA data to set a state water quality standard, which is much more restrictive than the federal standard. There are serious consequences when state set unrealistic water quality standards. First, failing to meet state water quality standards is considered a water quality violation by EPA. Second, State and County Agencies of Hawaii can be fined for not meeting Hawaii's restrictive standard, even if that water meets federal water quality standards. Third, when water quality violations are compared annually for each state, the state of Hawaii's rate of water quality violation is based on not meeting the restrictive state standard of 7 enterococci/100 ml whereas for other states, the rate of water quality violation is based on not meeting the federal standard of 35 enterococci/100 ml. Thus, in some reports, Hawaii's water quality may appear to be poorer than other states because Hawaii's water quality must meet more restrictive standard. These are the main reasons why I have testified on many occasions from 1986 to the present that DOH should change its marine water quality standard from 7 enterococci/100 ml to adopting the federal standard of 35 enterococci/100 ml.