



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Ocean, Marine Resources, & Hawaiian Affairs
Wednesday, February 3, 2016 at 10:15am

By

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And

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HB 1765 – RELATING TO CORAL

Aloha Chair Ing, Vice Chair Lowen and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in enthusiastic support of HB 1765, provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in our BOR Approved Budget.

This measure relates to the allocation of resources for the University of Hawai'i to examine the impacts of sunscreen products on corals. Speaking for myself, I am a marine scientist who has studied the health of coral reefs for the past 25 years and Hawaiian reefs for the past 13 years, and I am the current President of the International Society for Reef Studies. My team of graduate students and post-doctoral fellows, have conducted numerous studies on the way in which the environments in which corals grow influence their overall health. There is no doubt that coral communities in Hawai'i have been and continue to be exposed to increasing impacts from human use and that in some places they are in decline. Work from other parts of the world has highlighted the detrimental impact of chemicals in sunscreen products on coral health and reproduction. No studies to date have explored their impact on Hawaiian corals however some Hawaiian reefs see heavy tourist traffic (e.g. Haunama Bay and Waikiki), and measurable concentrations of sunscreen chemical, a scenario that creates context for a detailed examination of the impact of sunscreen chemicals on the health of Hawai'i corals.

This measure will allocate resources to the University of Hawai'i to conduct and report on a study examining the effects of sunscreen used by ocean users on the coral reefs located in Hawai'i waters and if any are found, make recommendations for mitigating these impacts. The University of Hawai'i has experts who are appropriately trained in coral reef biology and analytical chemistry to conduct such a study. The compartmentalization of tourist traffic on O'ahu makes the comparison of concentrations of sunscreen chemicals like oxybenzones in heavily trafficked versus rarely visited coral reef areas tractable and measurable. Facilities in the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's School of Earth, Ocean and Earth Science (SOEST), possess world class capacity to

expose corals to these measured concentrations of sunscreen chemicals in the laboratory and the experts to assess their impact on coral health, growth, reproductive output and on their offspring. The results from such studies will create information that can guide management actions to mitigate or minimize impacts of sunscreen products on corals and develop best practices for products and ocean use in Hawai'i waters.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this measure.