# HONOLULU CITY COUNCIL

***KE KANIHELA O KE KALANA O HONOLULU***

CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU

No. 26-159

## RESOLUTION

URGING THE STATE BOARD OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES TO DIRECT THE DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES, DIVISION OF AQUATIC RESOURCES, TO ADOPT RULES PROHIBITING THE HARVEST OF AQUATIC LIFE FROM STATE OF HAWAI'I MARINE WATERS FOR COMMERCIAL AQUARIUM PURPOSES.

WHEREAS, the coral reef ecosystems of the State of Hawai'i ("State") are of immeasurable importance to the people, culture, and economy of the islands, supporting biodiversity, subsistence, and traditional Native Hawaiian practices tied to the principle of aloha 'āina (caring for the land and sea); reducing the impact of extreme weather events and high surf by moderating onshore erosion, protecting human infrastructure, and mitigating harm to flora and fauna; and contributing to the State's economic growth through nature-based tourism and educational opportunities; and

WHEREAS, the State's coral reefs are being pushed to their limits due to rising ocean temperatures, repeated bleaching events, and human pressures; and

WHEREAS, herbivorous reef fish such as but not limited to yellow tang (*Zebrasoma flavescens*) and orangespine unicornfish (*Naso lituratus*) play critical ecological roles in controlling algal growth, maintaining coral resilience, and sustaining subsistence fisheries; and

WHEREAS, the capture and sale of the State's native reef wildlife for ornamental display and commercial profit is unsustainable and contrary to Hawaiian values, including mālama 'āina, aloha 'āina, kuleana for the surrounding environment, and pono fishing practices, such as taking only what is needed for family or community subsistence; and

WHEREAS, fish collected for the aquarium trade are frequently subjected to severe stress and internal injuries, especially when brought to the surface rapidly, which can lead to immediate or delayed death as recovery often requires extended, low-stress conditions that are rarely provided in commercial handling; and

WHEREAS, rapid surfacing of fish followed by venting (puncturing the overexpanded swim bladder of fish) is inhumane, unnecessary, and inconsistent with best practices of the global aquarium trade, and knowingly causing such injuries is considered cruelty to animals, a criminal offense pursuant to Section 711-1109, Hawaii Revised Statutes; and

# HONOLULU CITY COUNCIL

*KE KANIHELA O KE KALANA O HONOLULU*

CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU

No. 26-159

## RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, since 2021, the commercial harvest of aquatic life for aquariums has been prohibited throughout the State; and

WHEREAS, based on various court proceedings, the State Board of Land and Natural Resources ("BLNR") is planning to resume issuing permits to commercially harvest aquatic life for aquariums for the first time since 2021; and

WHEREAS, the State Department of Land and Natural Resources ("DLNR"), Division of Aquatic Resources ("DAR"), has proposed new administrative rules to reopen commercial harvesting of aquatic life in West Hawai'i, allowing harvesters to remove various native species from the region with an annual permit; and

WHEREAS, despite past efforts to address concerns about reef protection, the current proposal from DAR has moved forward without the depth of community dialogue, cultural consideration, or independent scientific evaluation that many believe is necessary, raising questions about whether the process aligns with the State's responsibilities to safeguard natural resources, uphold the right to a healthy environment, and protect traditional and customary Native Hawaiian practices as provided in Article XI, Sections 1 and 9, and Article XII, Section 7 of the State Constitution; and

WHEREAS, the Association of Hawaiian Civic Clubs, which has nearly 4,000 members, approved a resolution at its 66th annual convention to include as part of its 2026 State Legislative Package a proposed bill to enact a permanent statewide ban on the commercial harvesting of aquarium fish, affirming that the State's reef ecosystems must be managed under the public trust doctrine for the benefit of future generations rather than private profit; and

WHEREAS, multiple organizations supported various bills during the 2026 legislative session that sought to curtail or ban the commercial harvesting of aquarium fish, including the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Earthjustice, the Nature Conservancy, Sierra Club of Hawai'i, the Hawai'i Reef and Ocean Coalition, and For the Fishes; and

WHEREAS, in April 2026, the Hawai'i First Circuit Environmental Court ruled that the BLNR and the DLNR have the legal authority to enact a complete, statewide ban on commercial aquarium collection; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the City and County of Honolulu that the Board of Land and Natural Resources is urged to direct the Department of Land and Natural Resources, Division of Aquatic Resources, to adopt rules prohibiting the harvest

# RESOLUTION

of aquatic life from State of Hawai'i marine waters for commercial aquarium purposes; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that copies of this resolution be transmitted to the Mayor, the Managing Director Designate, the Governor of the State of Hawai'i, the President of the Hawai'i State Senate, the Speaker of the Hawai'i State House of Representatives, the Mayor of the County of Hawai'i, the Mayor of the County of Kaua'i, the Mayor of the County of Maui, and the Chairperson of the Board of Land and Natural Resources.

INTRODUCED BY:

Cynthia Thielen

Tommy Waters

DATE OF INTRODUCTION:

JUL 8 2026
Honolulu, Hawai'i

Councilmembers

CITY COUNCIL
CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU
HONOLULU, HAWAII

# CERTIFICATE

**RESOLUTION 26-159**

Introduced: 07/08/26 By: ESTHER KIA'ĀINA
TOMMY WATERS
Committee: ZONING & PLANNING (ZON)

Title: URGING THE STATE BOARD OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES TO DIRECT THE DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES, DIVISION OF AQUATIC RESOURCES, TO ADOPT RULES PROHIBITING THE HARVEST OF AQUATIC LIFE FROM STATE OF HAWAI'I MARINE WATERS FOR COMMERCIAL AQUARIUM PURPOSES.

Voting Legend: * = Aye w/Reservations

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 07/08/26 | INTRO | Introduced. |
| 07/16/26 | ZON | Reported out for adoption.<br><br>CR-210(26)<br><br>4 AYES: CORDERO, KIA'ĀINA, OKIMOTO, WATERS<br><br>1 ABSENT: TUPOLA |
| 08/12/26 | CCL | Committee report and Resolution were adopted.<br><br>7 AYES: CORDERO, KIA'ĀINA, NISHIMOTO, OKIMOTO*, TULBA*, WATERS, WEYER<br><br>1 NO: TUPOLA<br><br>1 ABSENT: DOS SANTOS-TAM |

I hereby certify that the above is a true record of action by the Council of the City and County of Honolulu on this RESOLUTION.

CHADD KADOTA, ACTING CITY CLERK

TOMMY WATERS, CHAIR AND PRESIDING OFFICER