

LINDA LINGLE  
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII



**STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

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**Testimony of  
LAURA H. THIELEN  
Chairperson**

**Before the House Committee on  
WATER, LAND, AND OCEAN RESOURCES**

**Friday, March 13, 2009  
10:00 AM  
State Capitol, Conference Room 325**

**In consideration of  
HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 104/HOUSE RESOLUTION 84,  
REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES TO  
CONDUCT A STOCK ASSESSMENT OF CERTAIN MARINE LIFE TO DETERMINE  
A BASELINE FOR FUTURE MANAGEMENT MEASURES.**

House Concurrent Resolution 104/House Resolution 84 request that the Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) conduct stock assessments of certain butterfly fish, wrasses, puffer fish, goatfish, tang and unicorn fish species to determine a baseline for future management measures. The Department opposes these resolutions for the following reasons.

The resolutions request stock assessments to be conducted for ten identified fish species. Given that stock assessments are lengthy projects, and that these species in Hawaii range across the Hawaiian Archipelago, meeting this requirement would take many years of field research and cost hundreds of thousands of dollars for each species involved. The magnitude of effort being requested would overwhelm the Department in terms of manpower and budget, divert the Department from present management initiatives, and would not provide solutions to any near-term problems.

The Department produced a five-year report on the aquarium fish industry in 2004, estimating the annual reported value of sales to be just over \$1 million dollars. The report also lists the top ten species harvested, which collectively make up almost three-quarters of the entire catch. These ten species do not include those butterfly fish, wrasse and puffer fish species indicated in the resolutions. Nor do these species comprise significant elements of more recent aquarium fishery harvests, based on commercial marine license data collected by the Department. It is therefore difficult to understand how conducting stock assessments on these minor fishery components would lead to more effective management of the aquarium fishery.

The other five species covered by this resolution, consisting of one goatfish, one surgeon fish, and three different unicorn fish species, are commonly harvested for food by subsistence,

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CONSERVATION AND COASTAL LANDS  
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recreational and commercial food fishers. As such, the take of these species by the aquarium industry is minor compared to take from other sources. Given this, it is once again difficult to understand how conducting stock assessments on these species that are targeted by multiple fisheries would provide information of unequivocal benefit to the management of the aquarium fishery.

These fishery management considerations aside, the proposed work is logistically impractical given current realities of departmental staffing and budget. Conducting a stock assessment requires approximately seven months and \$200,000 per species, based on federal fisheries management estimates. Even if the Department possessed the internal capacity for performing such stock assessments, which is not presently the case, such a requirement would significantly divert resources from other important and more clearly defined aquatic resource management programs.