SB 1195
RELATING TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMISSION

Senate Committee on Ecology and Environmental Protection

Public Hearing - February 11, 1995
10:00 A.M., Room 305 SOT

By
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SB 1195 would create a temporary strategic planning commission that would review planning efforts directed towards improved environmental management.

Our statement on this measure does not constitute an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

Over the years, various strategies have been offered to address the issue of improving environmental management, ranging from business self-regulation to highly structured governmental reorganization. This measure advocates a community-based oversight committee to review and critique existing management activities with the intent of improving prioritization and coordination.

Despite the appeal of community-based approaches, this one appears flawed, mostly due to the intrinsic unwieldiness of the proposed structure. In addition, all of the proposed activities have been attempted in one form or another in the past, and a comparable organization to the proposed commission presently exists in the form of the Environmental Council. A multitude of planning guidelines and state goals already exists, including, but not limited to the State Plan, Chapter 344, HRS, and any number of agency planning directives, not to mention provisions for environmental quality assurance in the State Constitution. Instead of articulating new plans, efforts would be more productively directed towards evaluating how well we’re meeting these existing goals. This is a function presently delegated to the Environmental Council through Section 341-6, HRS. However, the present council lacks expertise, resources, and authority to fully implement this function.
On a number of occasions, most recently in our 1991 review of the state’s EIS system, we have proposed reorganization of the Environmental Council into a Governor’s Advisory Commission, patterned after the federal Council on Environmental Quality. The main responsibility of this commission would be to evaluate government agencies through functional audits, and to make recommendations to the governor or to the county mayors concerning improvements which might be made. A similar role was intended for the Environmental Quality Commission and OEQC when they were originally created and placed in the Governor’s office in 1970. Over the intervening years, the oversight function of the state’s environmental quality agencies has been replaced by mostly ministerial functions. It would seem appropriate, given the current public and legislative concerns over the need for improved management coordination, to recreate those functions.

As an alternative to the commission proposed in the present measure, we suggest that a more effective agency would be a small, blue-ribbon panel comprised of respected individuals with strong credentials in organizational management. Four or five people, appointed by the governor in staggered terms, with appointments to be confirmed by the Senate should comprise the commission. Their main role should be to direct the efforts of a well-funded OEQC staff tasked to evaluate government environmental management programs, and to critically review the staff findings and make recommendations to the governor. They should convene public hearings to collect public testimony, and they should publish an annual report as a public record of their findings. Ideally, they also should have the power to file suit to compel government agencies to perform their prescribed functions. We feel that such an organization would more effectively achieve the intended purposes of SB 1195.