SR 148 SCR 169
URGING THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
TO DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

Statement for
Senate Committee on
Education
Public Hearing - April 8, 1991

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SR 148 and SCR 169 call attention to the valuable environmental resources enjoyed by the people of Hawaii and its visitors; the potential threats to these resources from over population, groundwater contamination, sewage discharges and land fills; and, the need to better educate the public of the need for greater environmental awareness.

Our statement on these resolutions does not represent an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

As coordinator of the Environmental Studies Major and Certificate programs under the Liberal Studies program at the Manoa campus, I have had the opportunity to become acutely aware of the needs and interests of the students and public in environmental education. Each year bills or resolutions recognizing the need for education programs focused on the environment are introduced, yet each year only minimal results seem to occur. We generally concur with the intent of these resolutions but we do have some suggestions for modifications of the specific resolves of SR 148, SCR 169.

First, and perhaps most importantly, the resolution should recognize the many excellent ongoing programs in the area of environmental education. The OHTA project being carried out jointly between the Bishop Museum and the Moanalua Gardens Foundation and with guidance from members of the University, is developing teaching and resource materials for environmental education from elementary through high school. The Hawaii Nature Center has an excellent program and involves many thousands of young people each year.
The Sierra Club has an ongoing program geared toward the older students and includes training in trail management, botany, endangered species and forestry. These resolutions call for the Department of Education to develop an environmental education program. We strongly urge that this resolve be amended to reflect the excellent work already being accomplished by the other organizations and to encourage the DOE to implement the programs being developed by the OHIA project and the Hawaii Nature Center. It would certainly not be in the best interests of the environment (or the State) to duplicate or worse yet conflict, with existing, ongoing programs of such high caliber.

Secondly, the resolutions call for the Department of Health to provide coordination with other State agencies and environmental organizations in developing a comprehensive plan for environmental education. We suggest that the Office of Environmental Quality Control would be a more appropriate coordinator. In accordance with HRS 341-4, OEQC has a direct responsibility in the area of environmental education. Unfortunately, they are short staffed at present, so compliance with this resolution would require sufficient funds to fill their vacant positions.

As in so many other areas of management, prevention of the problem is so much better (and more cost effective) than having to repair after-the-fact damage. Environmental education is certainly a prime example of that principle. Monies spent in educating the school children and public, as well as the tourists, can well reduce pollution costs such as litter control, drinking water contamination, non-point source pollutants, or sediment runoff. Protection of native forests, endangered species, and scenic views may be less tangible benefits, but no less important to the overall quality of life, (not to mention the tourist industry). Greater attention to both tangible as well as the intrinsic environmental issues is a win win situation for the State and will be significantly enhanced by a comprehensive environmental education program.