HB 3651
RELATING TO WATER POLLUTION

House Committees on
Tourism
Energy and Environmental Planning
Finance

Public Hearing - February 3, 1992
8:30 AM, Rm 1206

By
John T. Harrison, Environmental Center
Jaquelin Miller, Environmental Center

HB 3651 would direct the Department of Health to utilize federal funds from US EPA grants to perform investigations into the causes and extent of coastal water pollution along the coast of Waikiki.

Our statement on this bill does not reflect an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

We share the concerns voiced over perceived hazards to human health, aesthetics, and tourism engendered by alleged contamination of coastal waters off Waikiki. However, it is our understanding that pollution of these waters, as measured by elevated coliform bacterial counts detected in periodic analyses, appears to be directly correlated with periods of significant rainfall. In this regard, Waikiki doesn't differ substantively from other areas of the state, and both federal and state regulatory programs are being implemented to address these nonpoint source pollution concerns. While we would welcome a direct, effective remedy to these problems, it is clear that such straightforward solutions will not be forthcoming, due to the complexity and site-specific individuality of the pollution characteristics. However, research has been under way for some time, and will continue. With regard to the Ruhio Beach situation, it appears from State and County studies that that the source of the elevated coliform counts in runoff from the Kapahulu storm drain is the 25 thousand or so pigeons inhabiting the watershed of Waikiki. We are not aware of data showing prevalent and persistent elevated human enterococci in these waters. We certainly take issue with the characterization of these waters as "heavily polluted", and should ongoing and consistent monitoring of water quality reveal an emergent enterococcus signal, the Department of Health is
mandated to take whatever action is required to protect human health.

Since the mid 1970's, we have participated directly in numerous studies of the effect of wastewater discharge into Hawaiian waters. While we are aware that the City and County of Honolulu recently settled out of court with the Sierra Club to provide for millions of dollars worth of additional studies on our deep ocean outfalls, we reiterate that no additional studies of these systems are likely to elucidate new information or to implement research methodologies more sophisticated than those we have already undertaken. Serious problems exist in the infrastructure of our wastewater systems, and hundreds of millions of dollars will be required to solve these problems. However, no additional studies of sewage related ecosystem dynamics in the vicinity of the deep ocean outfalls will address these immediate needs. Furthermore, the public perception of contamination off Waikiki from sewage discharged at the Sand Island outfall has failed to withstand critical examination. Both existing information on tidal and oceanic current patterns in the region and the extensive survey and monitoring data on water quality off of Honolulu indicate a vanishingly small frequency of water mass transport from the vicinity of the outfall to Waikiki Beach.

Addressing pollution of coastal waters resulting from urban runoff will require the combined strategies of source reduction, criminal prosecution of deliberate acts of pollution, and upgrades of drainage infrastructure. It also will demand a rational appreciation of the distinction between human impacts which are amenable to remediation and natural processes which are beyond the scope of reasonable mitigation. We applaud the intent of this bill, but we respectfully suggest that the requested funding be contributed to a war chest to replace the antiquated and inadequate sewage collector system, extend collection networks into presently unsewered areas, devise management mechanisms for urban storm drains to comply with provisions of the federal Clean Water Act, and vigorously prosecute those who indiscriminately dispose of waste on our streets and in our storm drains.