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RL:0267

HB 1789
RELATING TO PRECIOUS CORAL

Statement to
House Committee on Ocean and Marine Resources
Public Hearing 17 February 1978

By
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HB 1789 would provide funds for a precious coral research and development program. This statement on the bill is approved by the Environmental Center but does not reflect an institutional position of the University.

The purpose of HB 1789 is worthy. While it is well known the precious coral industry has undergone a dramatic growth in recent years, our knowledge of the abundance, distribution and ecology of the resource is still relatively meager.

Five years of research has produced state and federal management plans for black, pink and gold coral but there is much more information needed before these plans can be refined.

For example, the State of Hawaii, Division of Fish and Game, DLNR, has promulgated Regulation 41 which places a quota of 2000 kilograms per two years on the harvest of pink coral in the Makapuu bed. Permits are required for harvesting both pink and gold coral. Unfortunately, no quota for gold coral has been set by the State. This is due to the lack of information available concerning this resource.

With regard to black corals, the state is now in the process of establishing a minimum site limit of 4 feet in height and 3/4 of an inch in stem diameter, measured 1 inch above the base of the colony. This regulation in my view is adequate to conserve the resource (all commercial species) and will eliminate the taking of undersize and immature colonies. This regulation should be promulgated in several months time.

Now, there is also a management plan currently being prepared by the Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council. Like the State regulation, this draft plan also sets a two year quota of 2000 kilograms for pink coral in the

Makapuu bed. It goes further by recommending two year quotas for gold and bamboo coral of 600 kilograms each. These estimates, however, are based on very fragmentary information.

I anticipate that both the state and federal plans will be improved, perhaps even on an annual basis as we obtain more and better information concerning the ecology of the resources.

In order to support research that is needed to improve management of the resource and to better document the magnitude and value of precious coral resources within the entire archipelago, state support is needed.

This year I have submitted to the Office of Sea Grant a proposal requesting \$29,550 for continued research on precious corals. The primary thrust of this proposal will be exploratory work in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. Approximately \$30,000 additional money is needed to support submersible dives near Midway Island. As you are well aware the Sea Grant program requires State matching for all grants equal to 50 cents on the dollar. An additional \$20,000 is needed from the State to support ecological studies of precious corals in the major high Hawaiian Islands. These funds are required to improve the management of pink and gold coral in the Makapuu, Keahole and Kaena Point beds and the black coral beds off Maui and Kauai.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before your committee.