

SB26 Testimony January 28, 2013

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of Pacific Whale Foundation's staff, members and our commitment to protecting the world's oceans, I am writing in support of SB26, as well as asking committee members to adopt an amendment that specifically defines "sustainable" as it relates to reef fish populations.

The Hawaiian Islands are a lesson in paradox. On the one hand, we represent a community ground in the knowledge and understanding of ideals such as conservation and sustainability. Yet at the state level, we lack the rules and regulations necessary to maintain the long-term viability of our marine resources.

The purchase of a \$50 commercial license, for example, provides an aquarium collector with almost completely uninhibited access to the collection of reef fish. The collection of many species, such as yellow tangs, is furthermore not limited by either bag limits nor catch size, creating a perverse system that rewards those collectors who can harvest the most fish in the shortest amount of time.

But the removal of individual fishes is only half of the problem. To understand the full ecological ramifications of unregulated harvest, consider the fact that the majority of species targeted by aquarium collectors are herbivores – fish that eat plants such as algae. As herbivores, groups such as parrotfish, surgeonfish and damselfish are responsible for regulating algal growth on the reef. The overexploitation of these fishes thus results in an unbalanced ecosystem, one that becomes dominated by algae rather than live coral. The shift from coral to algal dominance represents a complete restructuring of the reef system, and

results in both a loss of biodiversity, as well as an ecosystem breakdown.

While top-down approaches alone will not ensure healthy reef fish populations, state regulations nevertheless represent an integral part of the movement towards a more comprehensive and sustainable coral reef management strategy.

With these thoughts in mind, **I urge you adopt SB26 as it relates to the aquarium collection trade here in Hawai'i, and specifically ask you to adopt an amendment that strongly defines "sustainable"**.

Please do your part to help maintain healthy and sustainable reef ecosystems - adopt SB26 and protect our reefs.

Sincerely,

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