

State of Hawai'i  
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
Division of Aquatic Resources  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

February 27, 2026

Board of Land and Natural Resources  
State of Hawai'i  
Honolulu, Hawai'i

**Request Approval for a FY26 State-Funded Project Agreement Between the Department of Land and Natural Resources and the University of Hawai'i for Statewide Coral Nursery and Restoration Support in Support of the Division of Aquatic Resources' Management Goals**

Submitted for your consideration and approval is a request to enter into a Project Agreement (PA or Agreement) between the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR or Department) and the University of Hawai'i (UH). The PA is entitled "Statewide Coral Nursery and Restoration Support" and is scheduled to run from March 15, 2026 through March 15, 2031. The PA provides \$376,000.00 in State funds and allows the Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR), through DLNR, to secure assistance from UH on the four (4) project objectives listed below to facilitate timely completion of DAR's marine resources management projects over the next five (5) years.

**PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

1. **Conduct coral nursery grow-out and outplant coral modules at identified artificial reef site(s)** through:
  - Identifying suitable artificial reef outplant sites and appropriate coral species to outplant;
  - Collecting and processing source coral, conducting coral grow-out, acclimation, outplanting, and monitoring at identified sites; and
  - Coordinating with partners and sharing work with DAR and partners.
  
2. **Increase DAR's coral nursery capacity and facility efficiency** through:
  - Planning, designing, and building/repairing coral holding tanks, ex-situ and other coral nursery systems; and
  - Supporting coral grow-out, holding, outplanting, and monitoring activities, including testing new techniques to improve coral restoration efforts.
  
3. **Support response to emergency coral damage events and restoration** through:

- Supporting in-situ rapid response activities (e.g., assessments, righting and reattaching corals, monitoring, etc) and ex-situ coral rescue (e.g., collection, grow-out, outplanting, monitoring); and
  - Coordinating with agencies and partners to conduct activities and share work with DAR and partners.
4. **Support coral restoration after aquatic invasive species removal** including:
- Identifying outplant sites and appropriate coral species at reef areas after removal of invasive species (e.g., Majano anemones);
  - Collecting and processing source coral, conducting coral grow-out, acclimation, outplanting, and monitoring at identified sites. Conducting coral translocation or reattachment if needed; and
  - Coordinating with partners and sharing work with DAR and partners.

#### DURATION

This PA, entitled “Statewide Coral Nursery and Restoration Support,” is scheduled to run from March 15, 2026 through March 15, 2031.

#### FUNDING SOURCE

State funds in the total amount of \$376,000.00 (\$276,000 from the Ocean Stewardship Special Fund and \$100,000 from the State’s General Fund).

#### EXEMPTION FROM ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

This PA involves the use of state lands (submerged lands zoned in the Conservation District, Resource subzone) and the use of state funds. The Department has determined that the actions undertaken by this project will have little or no significant effect on the environment and are exempt from the preparation of an environmental assessment. See Agency’s Determination of Exemption (attached) from preparation of an environmental assessment.

#### REMARKS

There is a need for DAR to fill capacity gaps for coral nursery support services focused on coral restoration and monitoring. This project will provide coral nursery support staff to DAR, including trained aquatic biologists, technicians, specialists and other specialized staff who have the expertise to conduct the objectives outlined above.

The Project Agreement is being prepared for submission to the Attorney General's Office for approval as to form. DAR is aware implementation of this Project Agreement is dependent upon receipt of all required approvals as well as the availability of funds and that funding restrictions may occur at any time.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above discussion, the Division of Aquatic Resources requests that the Board:

1. Find that the actions of the Project Agreement will have little or no significant effect on the environment and is therefore exempt from the preparation of an environmental assessment;
2. Upon making the requested findings in recommendation one above, delegate to the Chairperson the authority to sign the attached Declaration of Exemption from the environmental review requirements of Chapter 343, HRS, and Chapter 11-200, HAR; and
3. Delegate to the Chairperson the authority to negotiate and approve the Division of Aquatic Resources' and the University of Hawai'i's Project Agreement entitled "Statewide Coral Nursery and Restoration Support" and to amend the aforesaid Agreement, including any extensions, as necessary.

Respectfully submitted,



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BRIAN J. NEILSON  
Administrator

APPROVED FOR SUBMITTAL:



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RYAN K.P. KANAKA'OLE  
Acting Chairperson

### Attachment(s)

- Declaration of Exemption

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR | KE KIA'ĀINA

SYLVIA LUKE  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR | KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



**STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII'  
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
KA 'OIHANA KUMUWAIWAI 'ĀINA**

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**DAWN N.S. CHANG**  
CHAIRPERSON  
BOARD OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
COMMISSION ON WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

**RYAN K.P. KANAKA'OLE**  
FIRST DEPUTY

**CIARA W.K. KAHAHANE**  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR - WATER

AQUATIC RESOURCES  
BOATING AND OCEAN RECREATION  
BUREAU OF CONVEYANCES  
COMMISSION ON WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT  
CONSERVATION AND COASTAL LANDS  
CONSERVATION AND RESOURCES ENFORCEMENT  
ENGINEERING  
FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
KAHOOLAWE ISLAND RESERVE COMMISSION  
LAND  
STATE PARKS

February 27, 2026

TO: Division of Aquatic Resources File

THROUGH: Ryan K.P. Kanaka'ole, Acting Chairperson *R.K. Kanaka'ole*

FROM: Brian J. Neilson, Administrator *B. Neilson*  
Division of Aquatic Resources

SUBJECT: Declaration of Exemption from the Preparation of an Environmental Assessment under the Authority of Chapter 343, Hawaii Revised Statutes, and Chapter 11-200.1, Hawaii Administrative Rules, for a FY26 State-Funded Project Agreement, Entitled "Statewide Coral Nursery and Restoration Support," Between the Department of Land and Natural Resources and the University of Hawai'i

Anticipated activities relating to the Project Agreement (Agreement) entitled "Statewide Coral Nursery and Restoration Support" and its subsequent project objectives are found to be exempted from preparation of an environmental assessment under the authority of Chapter 343, Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS) and Chapter 11-200.1, Hawaii Administrative Rules (HAR).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Agreement will provide the Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR) with support in coral restoration efforts. Support staff that will be covered under the Agreement include trained coral nursery technicians and specialists who have the expertise to conduct the objectives outlined below.

The Agreement's project objectives are to:

1. Conduct coral nursery grow-out and outplant coral modules at identified artificial reef site(s);
2. Increase DAR coral nursery capacity and facility efficiency;
3. Support response to emergency coral damage events and restoration; and
4. Support coral restoration after aquatic invasive species removal.

CONSULTED PARTIES

- Department of Land and Natural Resources - Division of Aquatic Resources' Staff

## EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

After reviewing §11-200.1-15, HAR, and DLNR's departmental exemption list approved on November 10, 2020,<sup>1</sup> including the criteria used to determine significance under §11-200.1-13, HAR, DLNR has concluded that the activities under the Agreement would have minimal or no significant effect on the environment and that approval of the Project Agreement is categorically exempt from the requirement to prepare an environmental assessment based on the following analysis:

**1. All Activities Associated With the Agreement and its Subsequent Project Objectives Have Been Evaluated as a Single Action**

Since the Agreement involves activities that are precedent to a later planned activity, i.e., coral outplanting, translocation, and monitoring, the categorical exemption determination here will treat all planned activities as a single action under §11-200.1-10, HAR.

**2. The General Exemption Type 4 (Minor Alterations in the Conditions of Land, Water, or Vegetation), Type 5 (Basic Data Collection and Scientific Research with no Serious or Major Environmental Disturbance) and Type 8 (Continuing Administrative Activities) Apply**

Subsection 11-200.1-15(c), HAR, exempts classes of actions that involve "minor alterations in the conditions of land, water, or vegetation" (HAR 11-200.1-15(c)(4) or "General Exemption Type 4"), "basic data collection, research, experimental management, and resource and infrastructure testing and evaluation activities that do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource" (HAR 11-200.1-15(c)(5) or "General Exemption Type 5"), and "continuing administrative activities" (HAR 11-200.1-15(c)(8) or "General Exemption Type 8"). These exemption classes have been interpreted to include the project objectives listed above, such as data collection, research related to coral husbandry and coral restoration, the propagation of aquatic organisms (invertebrates/corals), experimental studies of native species, and the outplanting of native coral species. The proposed activities fall squarely under the exemption classes identified above, and as described in the most recent DLNR exemption list.<sup>2</sup>

*A. General Exemption Type 4 (Minor Alterations in the Conditions of Land, Water, or Vegetation), Part 1*

Applicable exemptions under Part 1 of General Exemption Type 4 include:

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<sup>1</sup> Exemption list for DLNR, approved on November 10, 2020. See Environmental Review Program website: [https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/erp/Agency\\_Exemption\\_Lists/State-Department-of-Land-and-Natural-Resources-Exemption-List-2020-11-10.pdf](https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/erp/Agency_Exemption_Lists/State-Department-of-Land-and-Natural-Resources-Exemption-List-2020-11-10.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

- (15) The “captive propagation of birds, mammals, *invertebrates*, or *aquatic organisms*,”<sup>3</sup> and
- (16) “[T]he reintroduction or supplementation (e.g., stocking) of native, formerly native, or established species into suitable habitat within their historic or established range, where no or negligible environmental disturbances are anticipated.”<sup>4</sup>

Husbandry support for the nursery-grown corals<sup>5</sup> and support for coral restoration techniques and technologies<sup>6</sup> include the captive propagation of coral which would fall directly within the parameters of General Exemption Type 4, Part 1, #15. Once the corals are grown, restoration includes acclimation, reintroduction and outplanting, and monitoring of these coral species into their native environment, which falls under General Exemption Type 4, Part 1, #16.

*B. General Exemption Type 5 (Basic Data Collection, Research, Experimental Management, and Resource and Infrastructure Testing and Evaluation Activities that do not Result in a Serious or Major Disturbance to an Environmental Resource), Part 1*

Applicable exemptions under Part 1 of General Exemption Type 5 include:

- (1) “[C]onduct[ing] surveys or collect[ing] data on existing environmental conditions...”<sup>7</sup>
- (2) “[N]on-destructive data collection and inventory, including field, aerial and satellite surveying and mapping;”<sup>8</sup>
- (15) “[R]esearch that the Department declares is designed specifically to monitor, conserve, or enhance native species or native species habitat;”<sup>9</sup> and
- (16) “...[A]quatic life surveys...and captive propagation.”<sup>10</sup>

Support response to emergency coral damage events and restoration,<sup>11</sup> could include assessments, righting and reattaching corals, monitoring, and ex-situ coral rescue to collect, grow, and outplant at-risk corals. These assessments would fall under General Exemption Type 5, Part 1, #2. Supporting coral restoration after aquatic invasive species removal,<sup>12</sup> could necessitate the conducting of surveys to identify outplant sites and appropriate species at reef sites after removal of invasive species (e.g., Majano anemone) and the

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<sup>3</sup> See General Exemption Type 4, Part 1, #15 (emphasis added).

<sup>4</sup> See General Exemption Type 4, Part 1, #16.

<sup>5</sup> See Project Objective #1. “Conduct coral nursery grow-out and outplant coral modules at identified artificial reef site(s).”

<sup>6</sup> See Project Objective #2. “Increase DAR coral nursery capacity and facility efficiency.”

<sup>7</sup> See General Exemption Type 5, Part 1, #1.

<sup>8</sup> See General Exemption Type 5, Part 1, #2.

<sup>9</sup> See General Exemption Type 5, Part 1, #13.

<sup>10</sup> See General Exemption Type 5, Part 1, #15.

<sup>11</sup> See Project Objective #3. “Support response to emergency coral damage events and restoration.”

<sup>12</sup> See Project Objective #4. “Support coral restoration after aquatic invasive species removal.”

collection of data on existing environmental conditions which would fall under General Exemption Type 5, Part 1, #1.

As discussed below, no significant disturbance to any environmental resource is anticipated. Thus, as long as the below considerations are met, the general exemption types discussed above should cover the project objectives within the Agreement.

### **3. Cumulative Impacts of Actions in the Same Place and Impacts with Respect to the Potentially Particularly Sensitive Environment Will Not Be Significant**

Even where a categorical exemption appears to include a proposed action, the action cannot be declared exempt if “the cumulative impact of planned successive actions in the same place, over time, is significant, or when an action that is normally insignificant in its impact on the environment may be significant in a particularly sensitive environment.”<sup>13</sup> To gauge whether a significant impact or effect is probable, an exempting agency must consider every phase of a proposed action, any expected primary and secondary consequences, the long-term and short-term effects of the action, the overall and cumulative effect of the action, and the sum effects of an action on the quality of the environment.<sup>14</sup>

Significant cumulative impacts are not anticipated as a result of the objectives of this activity, and numerous safeguards further ensure that the potentially sensitive environment of the project area(s) will not be significantly affected. All assessment and data integrative activities will be conducted in a manner that does not diminish marine resources, qualities, and ecological integrity, or have any indirect, secondary, cultural, or cumulative effects.

Since no significant cumulative impacts or significant impacts with respect to any particularly sensitive aspect of the project area are anticipated, the categorical exemptions identified above should remain applicable.

### **4. Overall Impacts will Probably have No Significant Effect on the Environment**

Any foreseeable impacts from the proposed activity will be further mitigated by general and specific conditions attached to the Project Agreement. Specifically, all research activities covered by this Project Agreement will be carried out with strict safeguards for natural, historic, and cultural resources, other applicable law, and agency policies and standard operating procedures.

## **CONCLUSION**

Upon consideration of the Agreement before the Board of Land and Natural Resources, the potential effects of the above listed project as provided by Chapter 343, HRS, and Chapter

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<sup>13</sup> See §11-200.1-15(d), HAR.

<sup>14</sup> See §11-200.1-13, HAR.

11-200.1, HAR, have been determined to be of probable minimal or no significant negative effect on the environment and exempt from the preparation of an environmental assessment.