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HB 3044 HD 1 RELATING TO FISHING

Statement for House Committee on
Judiciary
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HB 3044 would lengthen the closed season for the taking of Kona crab, and spiny and slipper lobsters and would allow for the sale of these species during the closed season if the animals were caught during the open season.

HD 1 amends HB 3044 to limit the 4 month closure season to Kona crabs only. Since lobsters spawn all year long, the committee judged that closure for an extra month was not warranted and would place an unnecessary burden on lobster fisheries.

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

We appreciate the concerns expressed in the Standing Committee Report No. 167-90 regarding the apparent need for greater protection for the spawning stock of these heavily fished species but we do not concur with the position that extension of the ban, in the case of lobsters, for an additional month will "severely handicap" the lobster fishery. Continued fishing without proper attention to the reproductive cycles of the species involved can only result in the long term decline of the fisheries through continuously diminishing stocks.

In the case of lobsters, it is illegal to take lobsters with eggs. However, female lobsters may have a "coral" present, that is an immature egg mass prior to extrusion. Hence significant losses to the lobster recruitment stock can result from the taking of these females. An alternative management approach would be to ban taking of all female lobsters at any time of the year. Enforcement of such a ban on the taking of all females would be relatively easy because the additional swimmerettes are readily identified on the female.

In the case of Kona crabs, the spawning period is actually from May to September (not August). The larger females appear to ovulate two times during a season. The first period of ovulation is the most productive. Furthermore, a 25% increase in body size (carapace length) is associated with a 200% increase in the number of eggs produced. Therefore the addition of the month of May to the period when Kona Crabs can not be fished is biologically justified.

We urge that this committee consider amendment of HB 3044 HD 1 to ban the taking of all female lobsters.