

Populations of Hawaii's yellow tang are actually on the rise, indicating that the species is being sustainably managed.
PHOTO: JOHN DAWES

HAWAII: GOVERNOR VETOES ANTI- AQUARIUM INDUSTRY BILL

Bill SB1240: "Requires DLNR (Department of Land and Natural Resources of Hawaii) to submit proposed legislation...by the 2019 session, including a definition of 'sustainable', a policy of sustainable collection practices of near shore aquatic life, a process for determining limits on collection practices... Prohibits issuance of new aquarium permits. Prohibits transfer of current permits subject to certain provisions. Prohibits renewal of permits that have not been renewed for five or more years."

This, in summary, is what the latest Bill presented to the Hawaii legislature by anti-trade campaigners demanded... none of it backed by any solid scientific data. Not surprisingly, there was an immediate and widespread reaction from individuals and sectors of the international ornamental aquatic industry community when the news broke, with everyone urging the Governor of Hawaii, David Ige, to veto the Bill. There were online petitions, individual letters by leading reef specialists like Richard Pyle, John Randall, Bruch Carlson, Randall Kozaki and Leighton Taylor, several call outs to members from top trade associations like the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC) and Ornamental Fish International (OFI), and even an editorial in Hawaii's own popular and influential newspaper, the *Honolulu Star Advertiser*.

In sharp contrast to the proposal, the DLNR has conducted approximately 7,000 surveys over the past 17 years, amassing data which show that numbers of the most sought after species in the marine hobby and Hawaii trade are actually rising, thus demonstrating that the current levels of harvesting are sustainable.

The majority of these studies have been carried out off the coast of West Hawaii where most of the State's 'aquarium' collecting takes place. Further, DLNR Division of Aquatic Resources Administrator, Dr. Bruce Anderson, believes that these results could be replicated in Oahu waters where the majority of the remaining fish bound for home aquaria are collected.

He refers to the claims and statements made by the proposers of SB1240 as showing "a lack of understanding or an unwillingness to accept what has been done." This does not, however, mean that the DLNR is complacent about the current state of the sector. Indeed, it is keen to improve matters further, for example, by considering a limited-entry programme for the industry, raising the cost of permits to dissuade casual collectors, limiting the number of permits issued annually and/or limiting