

Policy Regarding Commercial Reef Wildlife Collecting (Chapter Aquarium Trade Policy Position)

Approved unanimously by Hawai'i Chapter Executive Committee on July 3, 2021

Preamble

Hawaii's coral reefs and the wildlife dependent upon them are severely threatened and being degraded by human induced global warming, increasing marine pollution, and commercial harvesting of wildlife via the "aquarium fish trade". Thus far administrative attempts to regulate, enforce, and resolve community user conflicts around this industrial style activity have failed and have not diminished the increasing societal objections to this activity. Among these objections are the inhumane treatment by which collectors regularly inflict unnecessary and unusual harm and injury to these unique and varied forms of aquatic life (including incidental damage to the living corals from which they are hunted), in the pursuit of shipping them out of state to private aquarium collectors. This trade, rather than resembling the traditional forms of recreational and subsistence fishing, is in no way compatible with the local values and lifestyles of most of Hawaii's residents and sport fishermen. And most importantly, with on-going research and appreciation of the ecological value and symbiotic relationships between all forms of life on the reef still in its infancy, the loss or degradation to any of these elements is having consequences few can anticipate, and certainly no longer be justified by their purely economic benefits for a few.

Position Statement

For these reasons, the Hawaii Chapter of the Sierra Club shall take the position of calling for a ban on all commercial reef wildlife collecting. It will also actively lobby for a ban by legislative means as well as educate the public on the negative consequences of wildlife trafficking in our nearshore environment.

Furthermore, this position acknowledges the following exceptions that are now or may become matters of law:

- Native Hawaiian traditional and customary practices as enshrined in our State Constitution, including management of native Hawaiian fishponds.

- Taking aquatic life for consumption or as bait, and in accordance with existing laws.

- Non-commercial recreational collection, pending environmental compliance resolution.

- Collection of aquatic life under a Special Activity Permit (SAP) for public aquaria, research or education, including for aquaculture purposes, to encourage captive-breeding and stop wild animal extraction. (SAP's issued by the state would further encourage employment of former collectors.)