

STATE ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, STATE OF HAWAII
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David Y. Ige
Governor

February 8, 2021

Chairperson
Puananionaona Thoene

Aloha nui,

Vice Chair
Mary Begier

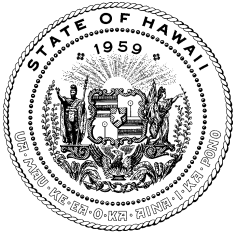
We are pleased to share the Environmental Council's 2020 Annual Report (attached). This year's Annual Report focuses on the key issue of our time - COVID -19, and how the pandemic has impacted Hawai'i's environment.

Members
Roy Abe

Mahalo,

Stephanie Dunbar-Co
Dawn Heger-Nordblom
Makaala Kaaumoana
Keith Kawaoka (OEQC, *ex officio*)
Ian Robin Kaye
Theresita Kinnaman
Robert Parsons
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Michael Tulang
N. Mahina Tuteur

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Aloha, and welcome to the Environmental Council's 2020 Annual Report.

As stated in HRS §341-6, the Council is statutorily required to produce this report:

The council shall monitor the progress of state, county, and federal agencies in achieving the State's environmental goals and policies and with the assistance of the director [of Office of Environmental Quality Control (OEQC)] shall make an annual report with recommendations for improvement to the governor, the legislature, and the public no later than January 31 of each year. All state and county agencies shall cooperate with the council and assist in the preparation of such a report by responding to requests for information made by the council.

The pandemic impacted the Council's ability to meet in person, particularly given that more than half of its members are from the neighbor islands. Thankfully, the Council continued to meet in 2020 on a regular basis via Zoom. Although it was an initially challenging change in operations, the Council was able to continue to successfully hold regular meetings, review agency exemption lists, prepare the annual report, and for the first time for this Council, hear an appeal of a decision to reject an environmental impact statement. Because of the Council's own experiences with having to adjust our operations to be flexible due to the pandemic, and faced with unprecedented budgetary and staffing limitations, the Council decided to focus its Annual Report on the key issue of 2020: COVID-19.

Working with a local, professional survey consultant (Grove Insight of Lāna'i City), a survey was developed to gather information highlighting how the pandemic has impacted Hawai'i's environment, positively and negatively. The survey was shared with key individuals in County, State and Federal offices whose work is impacted by the Council and the applicable statutes and administrative rules related to environmental review. Forty-nine surveys were distributed with 46 responses received, totaling a 93.8% participation rate.

The Council is greatly appreciative of those who participated in the survey. The results and analysis of the survey are in the attached report and are being shared with survey participants as well as with government leaders and environmental organizations. The

report will also be made available on the Office of Environmental Quality Control (OEQC) website: <https://health.hawaii.gov/oegc/>

Moving forward, the results of the survey will be incorporated into the Council's recently-commenced strategic planning process and future Strategic Plan. Recognizing that the limitations the Council, and the state as a whole, are currently facing will likely continue, strategic direction is required now more than ever for the Council to meet its statutory obligations as well as meaningfully contribute to the long-term care and protection of Hawai'i's unparalleled natural environment.

Mahalo,



Puananionaona Thoene
Chair, Environmental Council



2020 Environmental Council of the State of Hawai'i Survey Findings

Analysis of findings from a survey of 46 Council respondents
January 2021

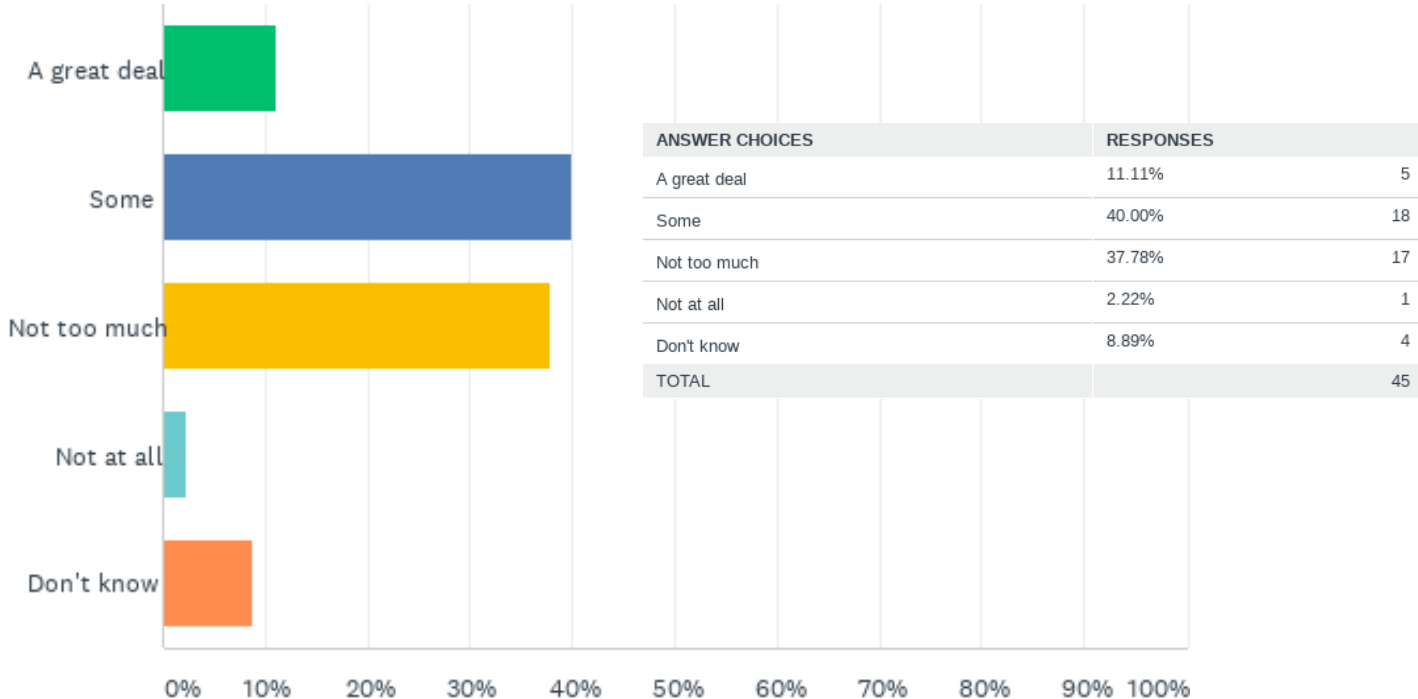
Methodology



- This analysis is based on a short, online survey of a variety of County, State and Federal agencies (e.g. County Planning Agencies, Departments of Public Works, etc.). A total of 46 of the 49 agencies participated in the survey.
- The survey was in the field from December 21, 2020 to January 5, 2021.
- The questions focused on perceived COVID-19 impacts on their ability to carry out their environmental priorities.
- The margin of error is +/- 4 percentage points at the 95% level of confidence.
- Verbatim responses to the open-ended questions are used to highlight the findings. They appear in *italics*.
- Grove Insight Ltd. conducted the pro bono survey. Lead analysts were Lisa Grove and Max Becker.

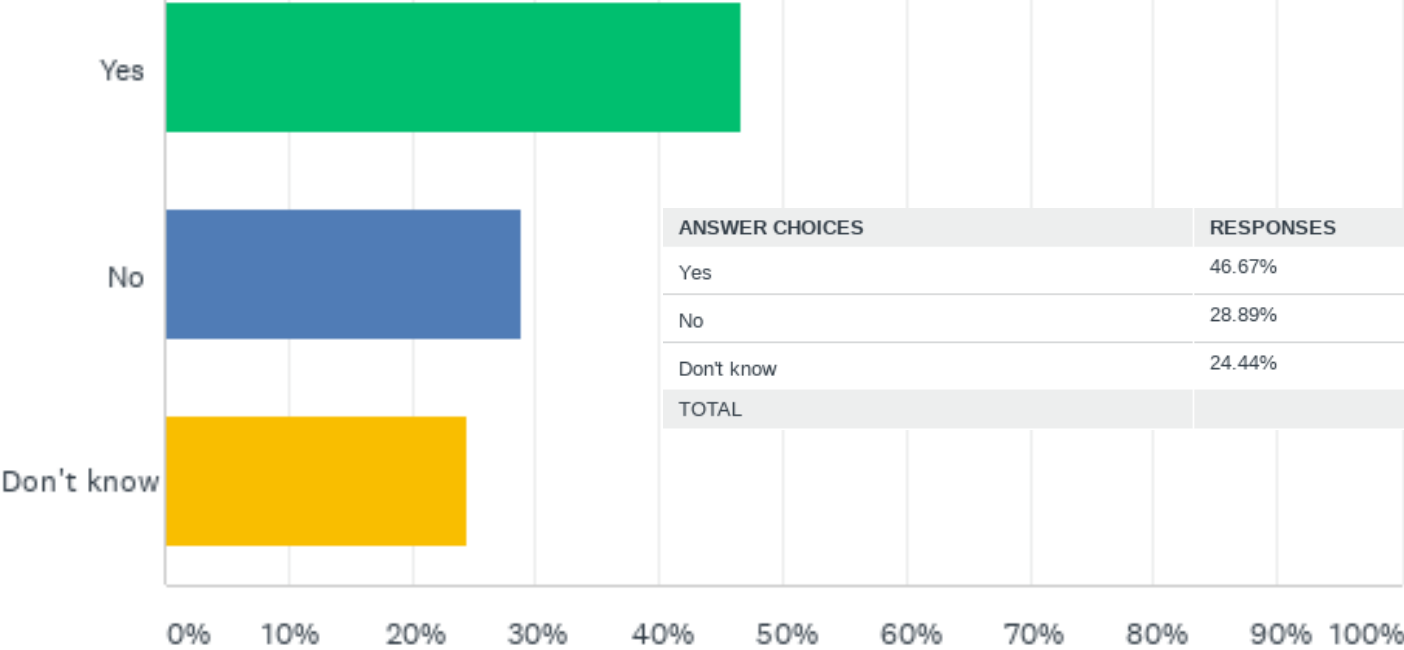
COVID-19 hasn't had a profound impact on their agency's or department's ability to carry out its environmental goals. The vast majority of respondents answered 'not too much' or 'some' impact.

To what extent has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your agency or department's ability to carry out its environmental goals?



Nearly half report positive impacts from the pandemic related to carrying out its environmental goals; one-quarter don't venture a guess.

Have there been any positive impacts from the pandemic and your organization's ability to carry out its environmental goals?



Agencies identify a number of positive COVID-19 impacts related to their environmental mission.

- Less driving leading to GHG reduction.
- Ability to do more mitigation work.
- More focused, quality work time with better organized zoom meetings.
- Virtual meetings have led to increased public participation.
- Fewer tourists which allow for more projects and fewer impacts.
- Utilize CARES Act money for sustainable projects.

-The ease of meetings with zoom makes getting questions answered actually easier than in-person meetings. Time is better spent now.

-With our planning commissions and other groups meeting via videoconference, we have had greater public participation and availability of resource personnel in the entitlement process, which is when environmental reviews typically occur.

-It allowed us to do some projects, like parakeet culling which is difficult with visitors here. It allowed us to slow down the train of tourism so that we can try to implement more destination management thought work and hopefully actions to protect our resources.

-The reduction in traffic due to the pandemic has made it easier to construct our roadway projects that improve transportation alternatives by providing places for people to walk and bike, and maintain roadside swales, ditches, and detention areas so they properly filter and convey stormwater. We have also seen an increase in walking and bicycling activity during the pandemic, which helps us meet our transportation mode shift goals.

-Increase in use of technical resources in support of work, such as digital filing and distribution of large documents, remote participation in public meetings. Opportunity to reevaluate processes.

-The pandemic has highlighted the need for planning for hazards and future crises, and it has leveraged our ability to further plans as well as permit review to include additional mitigative or adaptive measures for impacts on and from the natural environment.

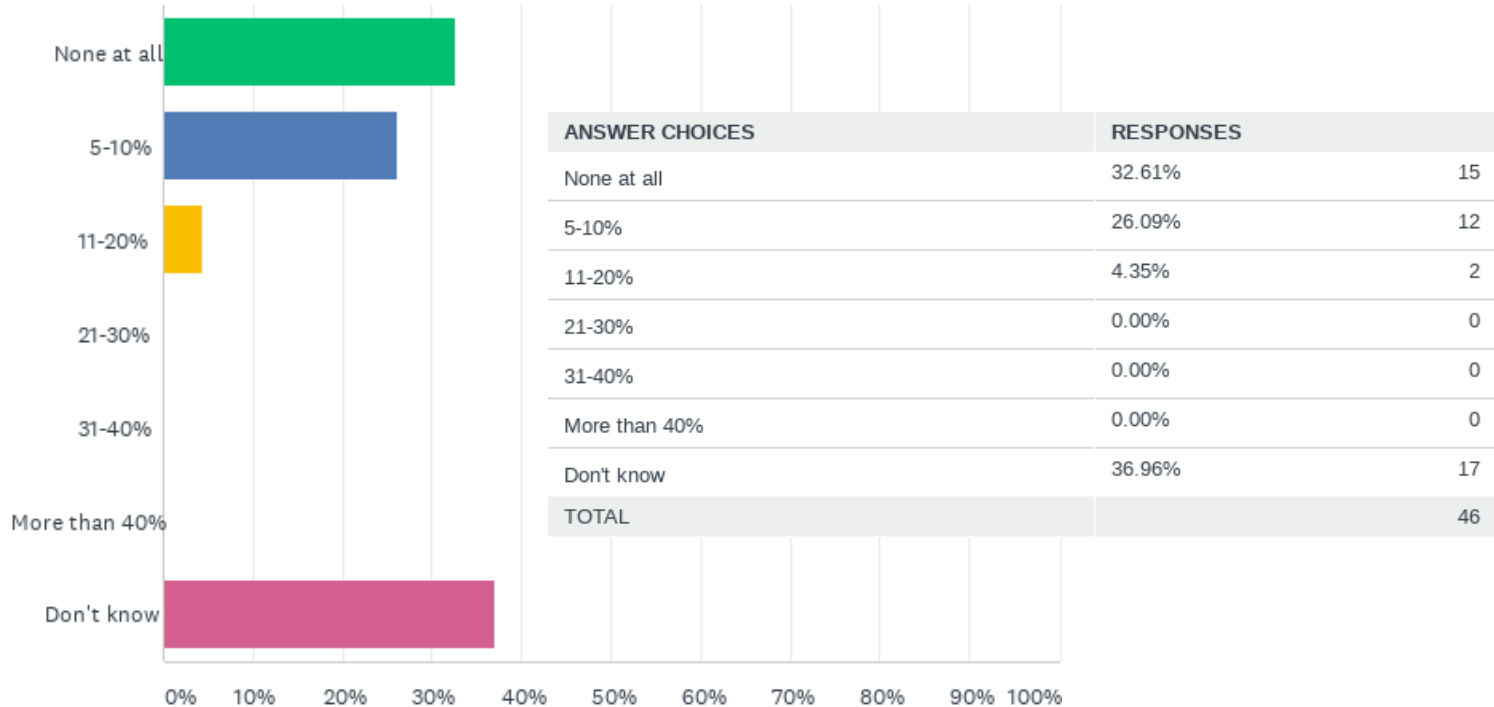
-While we have known in theory that teleworking could work, we were motivated to implement swiftly and broadly as a result of the pandemic.

-Ability to potentially use COVID recovery funding to help diversify the economy and support sustainable agriculture, new jobs in renewable energy and infrastructure.

Most report little-to-no negative COVID-19-related budget impact.

Though more than 35% of respondents did not know how COVID impacted their environmental budget

What portion of your environmental-focused budget has been cut due to COVID-19?



On the negative side, COVID-19 has also brought delays, distractions and delinquents

The building industry is working on overdrive. Not enough people to control the environmental impacts of the construction workers. Many developers are risking building without approved permits.... "build now, ask for forgiveness later"... some actions are unforgivable!! As for our office, it is running at 1/3 staff, yet the A/C, office equipment etc. is running as if a full staff worked. Working from home I need to log on to my office computer, therefore paying for my own electricity (my bill has doubled), equipment, computer, furniture, etc.

Major shift to focus on health and safety.

The Pandemic is causing and has caused many of my delays in my project.

I'm in Enforcement so the impact is mostly about multi-families / multi-dwellings because the pandemic doesn't allow people to evict. There is a clause about illegal dwellings, but still.

Our Division was unable to collect certain items (large appliances, greenwaste and scrap metal) at some of our refuse transfer stations.

Dune restoration projects with volunteers have had to limit the number of people who can participate. Consultants working on environmental projects have had to limit site visits.

Slowed down environmental review as staff rotates in the office and works from home.

The pandemic has put a strain on Administrative resources that normally support our division. Additionally, we have lost revenues for commercial hauling and landfill tip fees. These revenue losses will result in larger problems in the future.

The Covid-19 pandemic has stalled environmental goals for the County of Maui. Most affected are creating effective community engagement in plan development such as the All-Hazards Mitigation Plan update, CoM Resilience Strategy, and South Maui Community Plan update.

Access between islands has been difficult during the response to COVID-19. Public engagement has been affected by the inability to hold meetings in person. Social distancing requirements and staffing has been affected. Inability to fill vacancies.

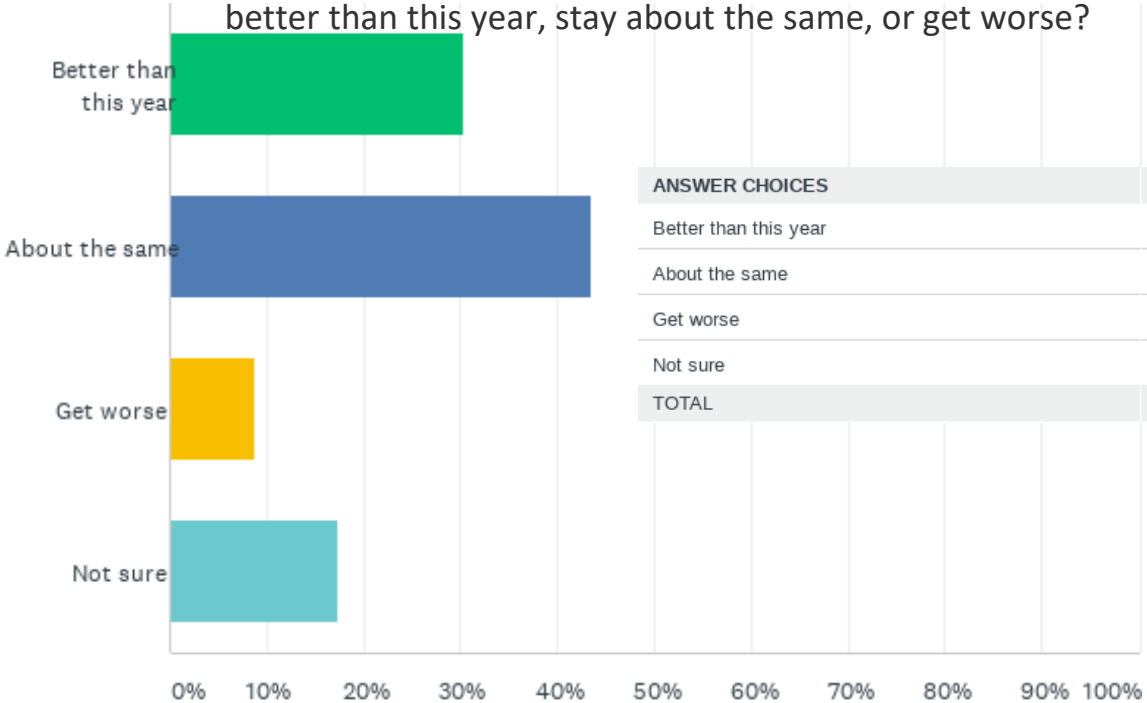
Our Department's responsibilities during this COVID-19 response has been very wide-ranging and crisis oriented. Environmental factors surrounding housing development are important and have been considered, but other more emergent issues have taken priority.

Complete focus on CARES funding processing ground all other important contracts and agreements to a halt. Inability to engage with public to roll out new initiatives in a pono way with communities.

Staffing within our Department as well as our consultants. We have also been informed that review time by agencies and other groups in preparing the documents is also taking longer.

Looking to the future, respondents believe the COVID-19 impact on their budgets will either stay the same or improve; few believe it will worsen.

Looking to next year, do you expect the effects of the pandemic that have negatively impacted your ability to carry out environmental goals to be better than this year, stay about the same, or get worse?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Better than this year	30.43%	14
About the same	43.48%	20
Get worse	8.70%	4
Not sure	17.39%	8
TOTAL		46

Top environmental priorities identified for 2021: “Build a better future”

What is your agency's or department's top environmental priority for 2021?

Big picture

- Climate mitigation
- Sea level rise
- Shoreline protection and erosion prevention
- Watershed protection
- Better stormwater management
- Improved transportation modes
- Growth management
- Waste reduction and improved waste disposal options
- Reduce water and energy use
- Destination and growth management

Administrative

- Regulatory compliance
 - Better long term planning
 - Increase the speed of reviews
-

Agencies identify several roadblocks to carrying out their environmental mission.

What roadblocks or obstacles, if any, stand in the way of your agency or department's ability to focus and address your top environmental priority?

- Regulatory timelines
- Availability of staff
- Heavy workloads
- Limited activity due to pandemic
- Politics
- Potential budget cuts
- Possible furloughs

Strong enforcement against violators - strong messages to the public. I still see (for instance) people smoking on the beaches, drinking alcohol on the beaches... we don't enforce these things the way we need to. More parks enforcement people would help - more coastal enforcement too.

There's been much discussion about streamlining processes to allow for revenue generating projects to move forward, but what applicants are looking for are ways to bypass certain requirements. In addition, responses to the pandemic and lack of funding affect our ability to address environmental issues.

Availability of sufficient funds is a key factor to maintain services, supplies and maintaining adequate County staffing due to an increase in retirements in key positions of related programs.

Solutions to complex environmental problems take a collective effort from the State, County, private sector, and the community. These efforts are hindered when State resources are diverted or impacted which puts additional burdens on the Counties to provide supplemental services. It has yet to been seen what impacts will come from furloughs and disruptions in our educational system.

Balancing needs with funding.

When provided a list, overcoming permitting hurdles and delays is considered the biggest roadblock by many.

Lack of goal-setting and focus are also considered to be at least “very important” obstacles to environmental progress by at least half of respondents.

How important are each of the following challenges when thinking about your agency’s or department’s ability to meet its environmental goals?

	One of the Most Important	Very/Most important	Somewhat Important	Not Too Important	Not Important at all	Don’t Know
Overcoming permitting hurdles and facing delays created by public opposition and/or legal challenges	25%	66%	23%	7%	0%	5%
COVID-19 short and long-term impacts creating widespread uncertainty in setting priorities	14%	48%	25%	20%	2%	5%
Insufficient clear goals in addressing and future impacts of climate change	12%	53%	33%	7%	0%	7%
Inadequate focus on carrying capacity issues, leading to inequities in funding priorities	9%	50%	14%	16%	2%	18%
Absence of a comprehensive statewide environmental master plan, and thus agencies working in their own silos	7%	45%	30%	14%	5%	7%