



# Hawai'i Natural Energy Institute Research Highlights

## Energy Policy & Analysis Hawai'i Energy Policy Forum

**OBJECTIVE AND SIGNIFICANCE:** Through this project, HNEI supports and manages the Hawai'i Energy Policy Forum (HEPF) in its mission to advance Hawai'i's energy transition by engaging energy stakeholders in fact-finding, analysis, information sharing, and advocacy, thereby enabling informed decisions.

**BACKGROUND:** HEPF was established in 2002 by the University of Hawai'i's College of Social Sciences (CSS) Public Policies Center (PPC) as a collaborative energy planning and policy group consisting of Hawai'i's electric utilities, oil and synthetic natural gas suppliers, environmental and community groups, renewable energy industry, academia, and federal, state, and local government.

In its first five years, the Forum was instrumental in promoting reform for the State's utility regulatory agencies (i.e., the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) and the Division of Consumer Advocacy). It also commissioned studies, reports, and briefings to raise the level of dialogue around energy issues for legislators and the general public.

The Forum's mission is to share ideas and information, recommend and advocate policies and initiatives, and promote civic action to achieve a clean, sustainable, and secure energy future for Hawai'i. To this end, it conducts research, briefings, forums for informative and deliberative dialogue and policy development, annual legislative briefings, outreach, and public education.

In past years, the Forum regularly sponsored and organized legislative briefings at the Capitol prior to the opening of each legislative session, an annual Hawai'i Clean Energy Day event, and sponsors programs to develop reliable information and educate and raise awareness in the community.

**PROJECT STATUS/RESULTS:** Originally managed by the CSS PPC, the HEPF program was assumed by HNEI. During the initial years of HNEI management, HEPF focused on the development of online informational resources for members and the public focusing on compilation of the significant new federal policies related to energy which includes a description of the policy, policy type, relevant sector, funding opportunities, and managing agency. The

legislative briefing in January 2024 focused on gaps in Hawai'i's energy infrastructure and how the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act could be used to address the most vulnerable aspects of that infrastructure.

Beginning in 2024, but more substantially over 2025, HEPF reconstituted its Steering Committee to identify and prioritize the most pressing energy policy issues facing the state. Through a structured process engaging a broad range of stakeholders, the committee identified a broad list of topics and ultimately selected eight areas that warranted focused analysis and policy development: affordability, reliability, resilience, battery recycling, public education, building performance standards, biofuels, and electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure.

To advance this work, the Forum created eight topic-specific subcommittees and expanded participation to include technical experts, utility and industry representatives, and other stakeholders. Each subcommittee met multiple times throughout the year to develop a scope of work outlining the research needs, objectives, and policy questions for their assigned topic. These scopes now serve as the foundation for a multi-year research plan intended to provide legislators and decision-makers with actionable insights.

Throughout the year, the Steering Committee has remained highly engaged in shaping the research agenda and ensuring that the outcomes directly support policymaking and Hawai'i's energy transition.

Three priority topics—*reliability*, *affordability*, and *building performance standards*—were selected for immediate analysis.

- *Reliability* analysis continued efforts previously initiated by HNEI and has already generated significant findings, including the conclusion that 500 MW, or more, of firm capacity will be needed to maintain grid reliability on O'ahu, even at high levels of intermittent renewables. Complementary to this work, the study initiated efforts to explore firm power fueling options and their impact on costs and emissions.
- On *affordability*, the first phase of work—an analysis of rooftop solar hosting capacity—has

been initiated. Additional evaluation of impacts to affordability is currently out for competitive bid, with project work expected to begin in early 2026.

- For *building performance standards*, an RFP has been issued, and the assessment is also expected to begin in 2026.

The battery recycling subcommittee has also been particularly active and has produced a policy brief detailing both short- and long-term strategies for addressing end-of-life lithium-ion batteries in Hawai‘i.

In January 2026, HEFP will host a legislative briefing where the eight subcommittees will provide status updates, share the research findings of the Forum’s 2025 efforts, and outline the research planned for the coming year. Updates to these efforts will be posted to the HEFP and HNEI websites.



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