1	Recent declines in invasive macroalgae on coral reefs in Kāne'ohe Bay, Hawai'i: evidence
2	for phase shift reversals.
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11	Keywords: Phase shift, resilience, coral reef, macroalgae, herbivory
12	
13	Abstract
14	The non-native red algae Eucheuma denticulatum (Burman) Collins and Hervey and
15	Gracilaria salicornia C. Ag. were spatially dominant components of the reef flat communities
16	of Kāne'ohe Bay, O'ahu, Hawai'i for approximately 20 years. In 2014 and 2015, E.
17	denticulatum and G. salicornia abundance declined abruptly on Kāne'ohe Bay reefs,
18	independent of efforts to control E. denticulatum through manual removal and stocking
19	reefs with hatchery-raised herbivorous sea urchins. The proximate cause of these declines
20	appears to be grazing by herbivorous fishes, but the declines also coincided with two
21	successive summers of high water temperatures. Field experiments with E. denticulatum in
22	the fall of 2014 showed that rates of tissue removal by herbivorous fishes exceeded growth
23	rates on the reef flats and reef slopes of 13 patch reefs.
24	One of two long-term time-series of the abundance of herbivorous fishes at Kāne'ohe Bay
25	patch and fringing reefs sites shows an increase in the numbers of herbivorous fishes from
26	2007 through 2013 on reefs where <i>E. denticulatum</i> and <i>G. salicornia</i> declined in cover. The

second record from a different site in Kāne'ohe Bay does not show a significant increase in
herbivorous fish biomass over the same time period.

High water temperatures may have acted synergistically with grazing to bring about the
decline of *E. denticulatum*. During the summers of 2014 and 2015, surface water
temperatures in Kāne'ohe Bay exceeded 30°C; sufficiently high to cause coral bleaching.
Laboratory studies of *E. denticulatum* thalli held at a range of water temperatures showed
that growth rates decreased at temperatures above 28-29 °C. This decrease may have
increased the apparent loss of tissue due to herbivory. Comparable responses to variation in
water temperature were not observed in *G. salicornia*.

The recent decline in *E. denticulatum* and *G. salicornia* abundance occurred approximately 40 years after their introduction to Kāne'ohe Bay and 20 years after they became widespread and competitive with corals. The declines of these spatially dominant algae constitute a phase reversal, and the first reversal that has been attributed in large part to naturally occurring grazing by herbivorous fish.

41

42 **1** Introduction

On most coral reefs, macroalgal cover is minimal in zones of active coral growth; when 43 44 macroalgae are abundant in these zones, it is generally because a phase shift has occurred. The term phase shift refers to a large-scale, abrupt and persistent transition in ecological 45 46 structure, dynamics and/or function (Hughes 1994, de Young et al. 2008, Möllmann et al. 47 2015). Shifts from coral to macroalgal dominance are among the most frequently reported phase shifts in marine ecosystems (e.g., Smith et al. 1981, Done 1992, Hughes 1994, Connell 48 1997, McClanahan et al. 2001, Ledlie et al. 2007, Maliao et al. 2008, Cheal 2010). A wide 49 50 range of natural and anthropogenic drivers of coral-macroalgal phase shifts have been identified or proposed, including disease outbreaks in coral and herbivore populations, 51 52 hurricanes, tsunamis, coral bleaching, depletion of herbivores through overfishing, eutrophication and human-mediated biological invasions. These drivers often act 53 54 simultaneously or sequentially, which can increase susceptibility to or persistence of phase shifts (de Young et al. 2008). 55

56 Some researchers have speculated that phase shifts from coral to -macroalgae are irreversible (Scheffer et al. 2001, Rogers and Miller 2006, Ledlie et al. 2007, Hughes et al. 57 2011, Mumby et al. 2013), due to low resilience and strong hysteresis (i.e., resistance to 58 59 ecological recovery after environmental conditions have returned to a pre-degradation 60 state). However, data from long-term monitoring at sites of historical phase shifts may alter 61 the irreversibility view. Several cases of reversals in coral-macroalgal phase shifts have been reported. Most of these reversals occurred on Caribbean reefs, where recovery of grazing 62 urchin populations to pre-phase-shift levels coincided with large-scale reductions in 63 64 macroalgal cover and a return to coral dominance (e.g., Edmunds and Carpenter 2001, 65 Miller et al. 2003, Idjadi et al. 2006). An additional phase-shift reversal has been reported 66 from Hawai'i (Stimson and Conklin 2008).

67 An early example of a coral-macroalgal phase shift was the proliferation of the green 68 macroalga Dictyosphaeria cavernosa (Forsskål) Bøorgesen in Kāne'ohe Bay, O'ahu, Hawai'i. D. cavernosa began replacing reef building corals on the patch and fringing reefs of 69 70 Kāne'ohe Bay in the late 1960s, presumably in response to nutrient enrichment from 71 sewage discharges and direct coral mortality caused by freshwater inflows (Banner 1968, Banner and Bailey 1970, Smith et al. 1981). Despite the diversion of sewage discharges from 72 Kāne'ohe Bay in 1977-1978, D. cavernosa persisted as a spatially dominant component of 73 74 reef slopes throughout the bay for the next 30 years (Stimson & Conklin 2008). In 2006, D. 75 cavernosa in Kāne'ohe Bay underwent a rapid decline in abundance; maximum D. cavernosa 76 cover on previously infested reefs decreased to < 1% over a 5-mo period. The decline in D. 77 cavernosa appeared to be triggered by light limitation during an extended period of high 78 turbidity and high cloud cover, which coincided with the season of slowest growth in the 79 annual D. cavernosa growth cycle (Stimson & Conklin 2008). The lack of regrowth of D. 80 cavernosa following the rapid decline may have been prevented because nutrient concentrations in the bay were lower than when the alga became abundant in the 1960s; D. 81 82 cavernosa growth in Kane'ohe Bay is strongly nitrogen-limited and dissolved nitrogen concentrations in the bay water column have decreased substantially in the last 40 years 83 (Larned and Stimson 1996, Stimson 2015). The decline in D. cavernosa was followed by a 84 85 rapid increase in live coral cover on reef slopes (Stimson 2017); these two events comprised 86 a major phase-shift reversal.

87 In the early 1970's, several species of economically important red macroalgae were intentionally introduced to southern Kane'ohe Bay for aquaculture trials. By the early 2000's 88 established populations of some of these species were present in all sectors of the bay, 89 90 where they overgrew and killed reef-flat corals (Rodgers and Cox 1999, Smith et al. 2004, 91 Conklin and Smith 2005), causing a second coral-macroalgal phase shift that persisted until 92 the initiation of the present study in 2014. The red macroalgae that contributed to that 93 phase shift were dominated by two species, Eucheuma denticulatum and Gracilaria salicornia. 94

95 In this paper, we have assembled records of the extent and abundance of *E. denticulatum* and G. salicornia from multiple unpublished sources. Collectively, these records provide 96 97 evidence of a second phase shift reversal in Kane'ohe Bay, approximately 10 years after the reversal associated with the decline of *D. cavernosa*. Detection of such phase-shift reversals 98 99 requires long term monitoring of coral reef communities that have long-term resilience to the effects of macroalgal proliferations (Hughes et al. 2010, Graham et al. 2013). Here, long-100 101 term resilience refers to the potential for recovery from a prolonged degraded state, as 102 distinct from initial resistance to degradation (Nyström et al. 2008). If long-term resilience applies to many coral reefs, then the emerging view that coral-macroalgal phase shifts are 103 irreversible should be reevaluated. In addition to documenting the second phase-shift 104 105 reversal in Kane'ohe Bay, we present the results of experiments designed to test the effect 106 of grazing and high sea-water temperatures as potential drivers of the second phase-shift 107 reversal.

108

109 1.1 Introduction, expansion and ecology of *Eucheuma denticulatum* and *Gracilaria*

110 salicornia in Kāne'ohe Bay

Macroalgae in the genera *Eucheuma* and *Kappaphycus* are the principal sources of the food additive kappa-carrageenan, and are raised in marine aquaculture systems in tropical and subtropical regions within and outside of their native ranges (Pickering et al. 2007, Bindu and Levine 2011). Established populations of non-native *Eucheuma* and *Kappaphycus* have been observed on coral reefs adjacent to aquaculture facilities in India and South and Central America; the presumed sources of these populations are spores or thallus fragments

that drift out of the facilities (Barrios 2005, Chandrasekaran et al. 2008, Sellers et al. 2015). 117 The same process of intentional introduction, propagule dispersal and establishment on 118 adjacent reefs may apply to the establishment of Eucheuma and Kappaphycus species in 119 120 Kāne'ohe Bay. From 1970 to 1976, thalli from the putative species Eucheuma denticulatum, 121 Kappaphycus striatum (formerly Eucheuma striatum) and Kappaphycus alvarezii were 122 introduced from the Philippines and Pohnpei to southern Kane'ohe Bay for aquaculture trials (Russell 1983, Russell and Balazs 2009). The main site of the trials was on the fringing 123 reef flat of Moku o Loe in the southern bay (Fig. 1), where unattached thalli of both species 124 125 were grown in mesh pens. Visual surveys carried out between 1976 and 2002 documented 126 the subsequent expansions of the *Eucheuma* and *Kappaphycus* ranges in Kāne'ohe Bay. 127 Results of the first survey in 1976 indicated that *Kappaphycus striatum* (as 'Eucheuma striatum') thalli had drifted down the Moku o Loe reef slope to the bay bottom, but not to 128 129 shallow habitats on other patch and fringing reefs (Russell 1983). In the early 1980s, thalli 130 identified as *Eucheuma spinosum* (possibly equivalent to *E. denticulatum*) were observed on a reef flat adjacent to Moku o Loe (Morrissey 1985). In 1996, taxa identified as Kappaphycus 131 striatum and Kappaphycus alvarezii were observed on most patch and fringing reef flats in 132 the south and central portions of Kane'ohe Bay, up to 6 km from Moku o Loe (Rodgers and 133 134 Cox 1999). In repeated surveys in 1999 and 2002, Eucheuma and Kappaphycus (as "Kappaphycus spp.") were observed on reef flats throughout Kāne'ohe Bay, including the 135 northern-most fringing reef that extends out of the bay to the outer coast (Conklin and 136 Smith 2005). 137

138 As indicated by the shifting terminology used in the surveys cited above, the taxonomic 139 identities of Eucheuma and Kappaphycus species in Hawai'i have changed several times in the last 40 years. Field identifications have varied between studies due to the taxonomic 140 changes and to the morphological plasticity of these taxa. Genetic analyses have since 141 confirmed the presence of two taxa in Kāne'ohe Bay, Eucheuma clade E (i.e., E. 142 denticulatum) and Kappaphycus clade B (Conklin et al. 2009). The Eucheuma taxon used for 143 experiments in the current study corresponds to E. denticulatum. The current study also 144 includes assessments of survey data collected by multiple researchers prior to and after 145 146 publication of the genetic analyses (Conklin et al. 2009). For consistency, we refer to the

taxa in all pre-2014 studies as *Eucheuma/Kappaphycus*. The taxon in post-2014 surveys and
field and laboratory experiments is referred to as *E. denticulatum*.

Fertile E. denticulatum thalli have been reported from Kane'ohe Bay (Conklin et al. 2009), 149 but propagation and dispersal appear to be dominated by vegetative fragments. These 150 151 fragments settle and grow to form interwoven mats of branched thalli. Until the current study, E. denticulatum occurred on reef flats over a wide exposure range in Kane'ohe Bay, 152 from the high-energy barrier reef and northern fringing reef to low-energy reefs in the lee of 153 154 the barrier reef. Persistence on high-energy reef flats was facilitated by branch growth into 155 reef interstices and attachment to coral and limestone substrata (Conklin and Smith 2005). On low-energy reefs, detached thalli also accumulated in gaps between coral heads, in sand 156 pockets between corals and on reef slopes (Conklin and Smith 2005, Stimson 2013). The 157 propensity of *E. denticulatum* to overgrow and kill live corals on Kāne'ohe Bay reef flats led 158 159 to the initiation of a control program in 2005. The control program initially focused on 160 manual removal of E. denticulatum from selected reefs; manual removal was combined with biological control based on hatchery-raised sea urchins in 2010 (Pala 2008, Westbrook et al. 161 162 2015).

Gracilaria salicornia was first introduced to Kāne'ohe Bay for aquaculture trials in 1978; the 163 point of introduction was a fringing reef of Moku o Loe (Rodgers and Cox 1999). In contrast 164 to E. denticulatum, field identifications of G. salicornia are reliable and the taxonomy has 165 been stable throughout its history in Kāne'ohe Bay (Abbott 1985, Sherwood et al. 2010). 166 167 Visual surveys of G. salicornia on Kane'ohe Bay reefs did not commence until 1996. At that 168 time, G. salicornia was present on most of the fringing and patch reef flats in the southern 169 bay, and on several reef flats in the central bay (Rodgers and Cox 1999). By 1999, the G. salicornia range had expanded in the central bay and in 2002, G. salicornia was observed on 170 the northern fringing reef (Conklin and Smith 2005). By 2009, the G. salicornia range 171 extended across Kane'ohe Bay (Hawai'i State Division of Aquatic Resources (HDAR), 172 173 unpublished survey data).

G. salicornia is restricted to moderate to low energy environments in Kāne'ohe Bay,
including intertidal zones. Reproduction of the species in Hawai'i appears to be limited to
vegetative fragmentation (Nishimoto 2000, Smith et al. 2002). Fragments settle and attach

to limestone substrates with small holdfasts, then grow to form mats of densely interwoven
thalli; mats can exceed 1 m diameter and can overgrow and kill corals (Martinez et al. 2012,
Stimson 2013). Large thalli are often detached from anchoring substrate, transported across
reef flats by wind-driven currents, and deposited on leeward reefs slopes (Stimson 2013).

181 Grazing preference experiments with common herbivorous fish and urchins from Kane'ohe 182 Bay indicate that dietary preferences for both *Eucheuma/Kappaphycus* and *G. salicornia* are moderate to low (Stimson et al. 2001, Smith et al. 2004, Stimson et al. 2007, Westbrook et 183 184 al. 2015). Field bioassays and surveys of herbivorous fish in Kāne'ohe Bay indicate that 185 herbivore abundance (Stamoulis et al. 2017) and grazing pressure (Stimson et al. 2001) both decline with distance across reef flats from crests. The relatively low grazing pressure, 186 perennial habit, moderate to low dietary preference and limited herbivore abundance may 187 partially explain the high standing crops and persistence of Eucheuma/Kappaphycus and G. 188 189 *salicornia* on reef flats prior to the current study.

190

191 2 Methods

192 2.1 Study site

The field studies reported here were conducted on multiple reefs in Kane'ohe Bay, a 193 partially enclosed, 46 km² embayment on the northeast coast of the Island of O'ahu (Fig. 1). 194 The bay is subdivided into northern, central and southern sectors based on circulation 195 196 patterns (Smith et al. 1981). A peninsula and a 5-km-long barrier reef protect the south and 197 central sectors from oceanic swells driven by the prevailing NE trade winds. Within the bay, there are approximately 60 individual patch reefs (30 to > 200 m diameter), and a fringing 198 reef borders the landward shore. The identification numbers for patch reefs used here 199 200 follow Roy (1970). Patch reefs in the southern and central sectors generally have shallow sand-dominated inner reef flats and shallow coral- and limestone-dominated outer reef 201 202 flats. Reef flats in the northern bay have lower sand cover and higher coral and limestone cover. Reef slope substrates are a mixture of live coral, collapsed coral heads, fine sediment, 203 204 and rubble. Live coral cover decreases with depth to the bay bottom at \sim 15 m depth

(Hunter and Evans 1995). Most of the bay bottom consists of fine carbonate and terrestrial
 sediments. Tidal amplitude in Kāne'ohe Bay is approximately 1 m.

207

208 2.2 Surveys of algal cover

Unpublished data from four multi-year surveys with different starting dates (designated
Surveys A, B, C and D) were used to assess changes in *Kappaphycus/Eucheuma and*, *G*. *salicornia* cover in Kāne'ohe Bay. All four surveys were initially designed to investigate the
distribution and cover of corals and the invasive green alga, *Dictyosphaeria cavernosa*. Each
survey included observations on the cover of *Kappaphycus/Eucheuma* and *G. salicornia*, but
those data have not previously been assembled and analyzed.

215 Survey A was initiated in 1970 (Maragos 1972) (prior to the introductions of Kappaphycus/Eucheuma and G. salicornia) and was repeated in 1983, 1990 and 1999 216 (Hunter and Evans 1995, S. K. Rodgers unpublished data). This survey consisted of paired 25-217 m transects running from the reef crest downslope; macroalgal cover estimates from the 218 219 upper 5 m of each transect were used here. The surveys were conducted at 14 sites in 220 southern, central and northern Kane'ohe Bay. Detailed methods for Survey A are in Maragos (1972) and Hunter and Evans (1995). Survey B commenced in 1992 and was repeated in 221 2014. This survey consisted of cover estimates in large quadrats (4 m wide and extending 3 222 223 m down the reef slope from the crest) distributed at 10-20 m intervals along the perimeter of the reef slope on 34 patch reefs in southern, central and northern Kane'ohe Bay. 224 225 Estimates of cover of coral and macroalgal species were made visually by a snorkeler 226 floating above the reef slope looking perpendicular to the slope. Detailed methods for 227 Survey B are in Stimson et al. (2001). Survey C commenced in 1996 and was repeated in 228 1997, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2013, 2014, and 2016. This survey consisted of triplicate transects spaced 5-m apart, at two sites on each of five patch reefs (Patch reefs 4, 8, 29, 30 and 44) 229 and the fringing reef of Moku o Loe. The transects extended 40 m onto the reef flat from 230 the crest, and 5 m down the reef slope. Detailed methods for Survey C are in Stimson et al. 231 (2001). Survey D commenced in 2006 on three patch reefs in central Kāne'ohe Bay (Reefs 232 233 19, 20 and 21) and was repeated approximately 3 times per year until 2017. This survey 234 consisted of 1 or 2 transects per reef; each transect extended approximately 30 m across

the center of the reef flat and 5 m down slope at each end of the 30-m section. Detailed
methods for Survey D are in Stimson and Conklin (2008).

A fifth survey of macroalgal cover (Survey E) on Kane'ohe Bay reefs was carried out in 2014 237 in conjunction with the field study of E. denticulatum growth and grazing intensity reported 238 239 below. In Survey E, 25-m transects were used to estimate the cover of macroalgae, coral and other substrata on the reef flats and upper 3 m of the reef slopes at 12 reefs (Reefs 6, 9, 240 241 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, 22, 23, 28, 33, 40). As these reefs were selected to represent a range of E. denticulatum cover, they were not a randomly selected subset of the reefs in Kāne'ohe Bay. 242 243 At each of the Survey E reefs, 3-9 transects were surveyed on the reef flat and 3-6 transects were surveyed on the reef slope approximately 2 m below the crest; the number of 244 245 transects varied with reef area. The occurrence of corals and macroalgae were scored at 20 cm intervals along each line to obtain a % cover value. 246

247 No surveys of macroalge and corals on Kane'ohe Bay reefs were carried out in 2015, but by 248 January 2016, it was apparent that the cover of *E. denticulatum* had declined markedly. In order to quickly assess the extent and magnitude of this decline, Survey F was carried out. E. 249 250 denticulatum cover was visually estimated on 11 reefs in January 2016 (Reefs 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 22, 23, 24, 28, 38). A single straight transect was swum across each reef flat in a NE 251 to SW direction and passing through the approximate center of the reef (30-180-m long 252 transects, width 1 to 2 m depending on water depth). The number and approximate 253 diameter of E. denticulatum thalli were recorded within these transects. Thallus counts and 254 255 sizes in combination with the transect dimensions were converted to percent cover 256 estimates.

Some of the reefs used in Surveys C, D, and E were also used in invasive algae control
programs by HDAR and The Nature Conservancy. These programs were intended to prevent
further range expansion of non-native macroalgae by manual removal and by stocking reef
flats with the herbivorous sea urchin *Tripneustes gratilla*. The control programs began in
2010. The year that macroalgal removal commenced on each reef (hereafter 'manipulated
reef') and the potential effects on algal coverage are presented in the Results section.

264 **2.3** Eucheuma denticulatum growth and grazing intensity on reef flats and slopes

265 E. denticulatum thallus growth rates and grazing intensity were measured in a field experiment conducted on 13 reefs on 13 dates in the summer, autumn and winter of 2014. 266 Twelve runs of the experiment were carried out on 12 patch reefs from August to October 267 268 of 2014, and 7 additional runs were carried out on the NE fringing reef of Moku o Loe from 269 June to December of 2014. E. denticulatum thalli for the experiment were collected from 270 reef flats and held overnight in outdoor tanks with flowing, unfiltered seawater. Thalli were 271 then divided into experimental units (approximately 30 g wet weight), shaken to remove 272 excess water, and weighed on an analytical balance to 0.1 g. Two thalli were attached to vinyl-coated wire mesh platforms (15 x 30 cm) using fine plastic-coated wire, and one of the 273 274 thalli was enclosed in a plastic-mesh cage (12 x 12 x 12 cm, 6-mm mesh, mesh diameter ~0.5 mm) to exclude herbivorous fishes. The platforms with paired caged and uncaged E. 275 276 denticulatum thalli were transported by boat to the reef where they were to be used; thalli 277 were shaded and sprayed with seawater during transport. At each reef, approximately 20 platforms were positioned on the reef slope and 30 platforms were positioned on the reef 278 279 flat in predetermined configurations. The reef slope platforms were evenly spaced around 280 the reef perimeter at 2-m depth, and the reef flat platforms were arranged in a regular grid 281 across the entire flat. Platforms were retrieved after two days and the thalli were 282 reweighed. Specific growth or loss was calculated as weight change per initial weight per day (g g⁻¹ d⁻¹). Grazing intensity was calculated as the difference between specific growth or 283 284 loss rates of the caged and uncaged thalli on each platform.

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286 2.4 Effects of water temperature on *Eucheuma denticulatum and Gracilari salicornia* 287 growth

Water temperatures of ~30°C were measured in shallow waters in Kāne'ohe Bay in the late
summers of 2014 and 2015 (www.pacioos.hawaii.edu) in association with coral bleaching
events both years (Bahr et al. 2015a, 2017). Outdoor laboratory experiments were
conducted in October and November 2016 to examine the effect of such high temperatures
on the growth of *E. denticulatum* and *G. salicornia*. Small *E. denticulatum* thalli (2-4 gm wet
weight) were held in six 6.4 l glass tanks supplied with unfiltered seawater at a rate of 300

294 ml per min⁻¹. Aeration was used to increase water motion in the tanks. The water in two tanks was heated with aquarium heaters, the water in one tank was cooled with an 295 aquarium chiller and the water in the remaining three tanks was maintained at the 296 297 temperature of the laboratory seawater system. Temperatures were recorded in the tanks 298 using Hobo temperature loggers; the treatments produced a range of mean temperatures from 24 to 31° C. The tanks were covered with one layer of window screen to reduce 299 300 irradiance by ~ 40% (measured with a Biospherical Instruments QSI-140 meter and 4- π 301 sensor). Three E. denticulatum thalli were placed in each tank at a depth of 7 cm. The thalli 302 were reweighed after 48 hr and specific growth rates of the three thalli in each tank were averaged for subsequent analysis. Eight experimental runs were carried out in October 303 304 2016; all six treatments were included in each run but results from six of the 48 replicates 305 were excluded from analysis because of aeration or water supply problems. The mean temperature in each tank over the 48 hour growth period was used in a regression analysis 306 to quantify the relationship between *E. denticulatum* growth rate and water temperature. 307

Effects of water temperature on *Gracilaria salicornia* growth were measured using the same
methods used for *E. denticulatum*, with the following modifications. Starting weights of *G. salicornia* thalli were 2 to 3 g. Three 2-day experimental runs were carried out from
November 1, 2016 to November 7, 2016. Six tanks were used, two heated, one cooled and
three with ambient water temperature, treatment temperatures ranged from 24.5 to 30°C.

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314 **2.5 Herbivorous fish abundance and biomass**

The abundance of herbivorous fishes has been visually estimated at Kane'ohe Bay reefs in 315 two multi-year surveys that were extended for the current study. The first survey consisted 316 317 of counts of herbivorous surgeonfishes (Acanthuridae) around the perimeters of four small 318 patch reefs (~30 m in diameter) in the central bay (Reefs 19, 20, 21, 23). Repeat surveys were carried out 106 times from early 2007 to late 2013. Each fish was assigned to one of 319 three size classes, and no attempt has been made to convert these counts to biomass. Total 320 length of acanthurid individuals on these reefs is generally less than 14 cm. Detailed 321 methods for the first fish survey are in Stimson et al. (2005). The second survey consisted of 322 323 counts and estimated lengths of herbivorous surgeonfishes and parrotfishes along 50 m

324 long belt transects located on a 750-m long section of the windward reef of Moku o Loe (Fig. 1). The transect belt extended from the crest 3 m onto the reef flat and 5 m down the reef 325 slope. The total length of the individual fish was estimated to the nearest cm. Length 326 327 estimates were converted to biomass estimates using the conversion factors in Stimson et 328 al. (2001). The individual biomass values were multiplied by the number of individuals in a 329 size class in a species, then these products were summed across the size classes and species 330 in a survey. The analysis presented here used the natural log of the biomass value of each survey. Detailed methods for the second fish survey are in Stimson et al. (2001). A total of 331 332 41 Moku o Loe surveys were carried out from early 2007 to late 2013.

333 **3 Results**

334 3.1 Multi-year surveys of algal cover

In survey A (commencing in 1970) Kappaphycus/Eucheuma occurred on the reef slopes of 335 only one of the 14 reefs and only in the 1983 and 1990 surveys. G. salicornia occurred on a 336 different reef and only in 1999. In survey B (commencing in 1992), Kappaphycus/Eucheuma 337 occurred on 19 of 34 reef slopes in the 1992 survey, with a mean cover of 0.5%, and on 12 338 of 30 reefs in 2014, with a mean cover of 1.46%. G. salicornia occurred on 6 of 34 reefs in 339 340 Survey B in 1992, with a mean cover of 0.2%, and was absent from all 30 reefs in 2014. 341 Kappaphycus/Eucheuma and G. salicornia are generally most abundant on reef flats in 342 Kāne'ohe Bay, therefore, Surveys A and B were less sensitive to the presence of both taxa than Surveys C and D, which included reef flats. 343

344 In Survey C (commencing in 1996), mean Kappaphycus/Eucheuma cover increased from 1996 to 2008-2009 on reef flats, then declined by 2013 (Fig. 2A, un-manipulated reefs). In 345 346 2012, manual removal of Kappaphycus/Eucheuma commenced on Reef 29; the cover of Kappaphycus/Eucheuma on this reef has been plotted separately in Fig. 2A. By 2014, no 347 Kappaphycus/Eucheuma cover was observed on the un-manipulated reefs and very little 348 was detected on Reef 29. The pattern of temporal variation in G. salicornia cover on the six 349 reefs used for Survey C was similar to that of Kappaphycus/Eucheuma; cover declined after 350 2008/09 on the un-manipulated reefs and virtually disappeared from all six reefs by 2014, 351 352 even though this species was not targeted for manual removal (Fig. 2B). The mean % cover

values are low on these reefs because the 40-m survey transects on some reefs crossed
large areas of sand substratum on the reef flat, with few attached macroalgal thalli.

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In Survey D (commencing in 2006), Eucheuma/Kappaphycus reached its maximum cover on 356 357 Reef 19 by 2010 (Fig. 3A), then declined in the summer and fall of 2014, coincident with 358 both herbivorous urchin stocking in the HDAR control program and elevated water 359 temperatures. Eucheuma/Kappaphycus reached its maximum cover on Reef 20 in 2008, 360 then declined sharply but did not disappear until 2013; Reef 20 was stocked with urchins in 361 September 2013. G. salicornia cover peaked on Reefs 19 and 20 in 2007/2008, then disappeared from Reef 19 by 2009, and persisted on Reef 20 until the time of the urchin 362 stocking in September 2013 (Fig. 3B). Neither species of algae established on Reef 21 during 363 the study. 364

365 3.2 Surveys of algal cover in 2014

A comparison of *E. denticulatum* cover on reef flats and reef slopes of the 10 unmanipulated 366 reefs in the summer and fall of 2014 (Survey E) showed that reef flats had significantly 367 higher cover by Wilcoxon's signed rank test (P<0.01, Tab. 1). The cover of *E. denticulatum* 368 369 was about 5% on the reef flats of unmanipulated reefs and higher on the two manipulated 370 reefs; the manipulated reefs had been selected for macroalgal control by HDAR due to their 371 high initial *E. denticulatum* cover. *G. salicornia* only occurred on the reef flats of two of the 10 unmanipulated reefs in Survey E; G. salicornia cover on these reefs was 5% and 15%. 372 373 Since the reefs in Survey E were selected for the study of *E. denticulatum* growth and grazing intensity, they do not comprise a random sample of reefs in Kane'ohe Bay in terms 374 375 of presence or cover of *E. denticulatum* and *G. salicornia*.

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The cover estimates made in January 2016 indicated that *E. denticulatum* cover had sharply declined since survey E in 2014. On four unmanipulated reefs with high *E. denticulatum* cover in 2014 cover declined to 0 in 2016, and cover declined on an unmanipulated reef not used in Suvey E in 2014. Most of the remaining *E. denticulatum* thalli in 2016 had morphological features characteristic of high grazing intensity, with short, tightly packed branches and blunt apices.

383 **3.3** Eucheuma denticulatum growth and grazing intensity on reef flats and slopes

384 Caged (ungrazed) E. denticulatum sustained net growth on reef flats and reef slopes during the summer and fall of 2014. The mean specific growth rate of E. denticulatum thalli on reef 385 flats was 0.023 g g⁻¹ d⁻¹ on 12 patch reefs and 0.016 g g⁻¹d⁻¹ on the fringing reef flat of Moku 386 o Loe. Mean specific growth rates *E. denticulatum* thalli on patch reef slopes (0.012 g $g^{-1}d^{-1}$) 387 and the Moku o Loe reef slope (0.006 g g⁻¹d⁻¹) were significantly lower than on the adjacent 388 reef flats (Table 2). All 4 of these mean specific growth rate values are significantly different 389 390 from 0. (The experiment coincided with a period of elevated water temperatures (~30° C) 391 and coral bleaching.

392

Grazing intensity, calculated as the difference between weight changes of caged and 393 uncaged E. denticulatum thalli on each experimental platform, was significantly higher on 394 395 patch reef slopes than on patch reef flats, but was not significantly different between these 396 habitats on the Moku o Loe fringing reef. Grazing intensity was a decreasing function of E. denticulatum cover on reef flats (Fig. 4). Five runs of the experiment were carried out prior 397 398 to the end of August 2014, after which the average daily water temperature at Moku o Loe 399 rose above 28 ° C. In each of these early runs, mean grazing intensity exceeded mean 400 growth on both reef flats and reef slopes, suggesting that the high grazing intensity was not 401 necessarily the result of high temperature.

402

3.4 Effects of water temperature on the growth of *Eucheuma denticulatum and Gracilaria salicornia*

E. denticulatum growth in outdoor laboratory tanks increased with increasing temperature
from 25°C to 28 °C, then declined at temperatures up to 30 °C; (Fig. 5A). A quadratic
polynomial curve fitted to the data was significant and explained 35% of the variation in *E. denticulatum* specific growth rates (F= 10.47, df = 2,43, P < 0.0001). In contrast, the growth
rate of *G. salicornia* was neither a linear function of temperature (F=2.81, df=2,16, P=0.113)
or a curvilinear function.

411

413 3.5 Herbivorous fish abundance and biomass

414 Data from two surveys of herbivorous fishes were used to examine whether an increase in herbivore density and biomass could have contributed to the reductions in E. denticulatum 415 and G. salicornia cover evident in Figures 2 and 3. A large recruitment of acanthurids was 416 responsible for a peak in herbivore abundance on Reefs 19, 20, 21 and 23 in summer 2014 417 (Fig. 6) however, this event did not result in a markedly higher acanthurid densities in 418 subsequent years. Over the period from 2007 to 2013, during which much of the decline in 419 420 Eucheuma/Kappaphycus and G. salicornia took place, there was a statistically significant 421 positive temporal trend in the density of acanthurids on three of the four reefs (Reefs 19, 20, 21, Table 3). The estimated biomass of scarids and acanthurids on the Moku o Loe reef 422 slope and outer reef flat did not increase significantly from 2007 to 2013 (Y = 423

0.0001X+3.4856, $R^2 = 0.0204$). 424

425 426

427

4 Discussion

428 The survey data reported here indicate that E. denticulatum and G. salicornia underwent a 429 substantial reduction in cover on Kane'ohe Bay coral reefs in the 2009 to 2017 period and 430 that the areal cover of both species approached zero by 2016. These reductions in 431 macroalgal abundance are the second such alteration of Kane'ohe Bay reef communities in the last 10 years. The first of these was the abrupt decline in D. cavernosa cover in 2006, 432 which ended nearly four decades of *D. cavernosa* dominance on reef slopes through most of 433 434 Kāne'ohe Bay (Stimson and Conklin 2008). The abrupt decline of D. cavernosa was 435 attributed to persistent rain and overcast conditions over 42 days in February and March 2006. Support for this explanation came from outdoor laboratory experiments, conducted in 436 the spring of 2007 which showed that D. cavernosa growth was very slow at water 437 temperatures and irradiance levels comparable to those in February and March 2006 438 (Stimson and Conklin 2008). As of 2017, the abundance of *D. cavernosa* in Kane'ohe Bay 439 remains very low. The meteorological conditions associated with the D. cavernosa decline in 440 441 2006 did not appear to have long-term adverse effects on E. denticulatum and G. salicornia 442 (Figs. 2, 3). In contrast, the declines in *E. denticulatum* and *G. salicornia* after 2013 appear to

be associated with high grazing pressure and possibly high summer water temperatures, asdiscussed below.

445

446 The decline in *E. denticulatum* cover on Kāne'ohe Bay reefs after 2013, and that fact that 447 this decline occurred independently of manual and biological control efforts was not 448 recognized until January 2016, and was verified by Survey F. In retrospect, the decline in E. denticulatum may have begun as early as 2008, based on the survey results from un-449 450 manipulated reefs shown in Figure 2. The survey results for *G. salicornia* suggests that the 451 decline of this species could have begun at the same time on un-manipulated reefs (Figs. 452 2B). By 2016 both *E. denticulatum and G. salicornia* were virtually absent from all surveyed 453 reefs.

454

455 The reduction in *E. denticulatum* abundance on Kāne'ohe Bay reefs is likely to be wholly or 456 partly due to an increase in grazing pressure. Mean grazing intensity in the herbivory 457 experiments conducted on *E. denticulatum* in the summer and fall of 2014 equaled or exceeded the growth rates of caged *E. denticulatum* thalli, which suggests that herbivores 458 459 reduced *E. denticulatum* abundance by consuming tissue in excess of production. 460 Additionally, data from one of two surveys of herbivorous fishes indicate that grazer densities increased on several reefs over the 2007 to 2013 period and that a major 461 herbivore recruitment event occurred in 2014 (Table 3, Fig. 6); these increases in herbivore 462 densities may have caused the high grazing intensities we observed. No field measurements 463 of *G. salicornia* growth and grazing intensity were made in this study, but previous 464 experiments indicate that G. salicornia ranks higher in preference for Kane'ohe Bay 465 herbivores than E. denticulatum (Stimson et al. 2001, Westbrook et al. 2015). Therefore, the 466 467 effect of high grazing pressure on the abundance of G. salicornia is likely to be similar to or greater than the effect on *E. denticulatum* abundance. 468

469

470 Native acanthurids and scarids are the grazers most likely to be responsible for the high
471 grazing intensity we observed. Siganids do not occur in Hawai'i, pomacentrids and
472 macroalgae-grazing kyphosids are rarer than acanthurids or scarids, and large grazing
473 urchins are generally restricted to areas on and near the barrier reef (Hinegardner 1961).
474 Five common acanthurids in Kāne'ohe Bay have been directly observed feeding on *E*.

475 denticulatum and G. salicornia: Zebrasoma velliferum, Acanthurus triostegus, Acanthurus dussmerili, Zebrasoma flavescens and Naso unicornis (Russell 1983, Bierwagen 2014, 476 authors' observations). In addition to herbivorous fishes, green sea turtles may have 477 478 contributed to the recent declines in *E. denticulatum* and *G. salicornia*. Green sea turtles 479 have been increasing in abundance in Hawai'i since protective management was initiated in 480 1978, and they are abundant in Kāne'ohe Bay. Kappaphycus/Eucheuma and G. salicornia both occur in the diets of green sea turtles in the bay (Russell and Balazs 2009). G. salicornia 481 is a particularly important component of green sea turtle diets; it is estimated to comprise > 482 483 30% of the macroalgae consumed by Kane'ohe Bay turtles (Russell and Balazs 2009, 2015). 484

485 Assuming that the rapid decline of *E. denticulatum* and *G. salicornia* was at least partly due to an increase in grazing pressure, it appears to be the first example of a natural (i.e., non-486 487 experimental), large scale reversal of macroalgal dominance of coral reefs attributable to 488 grazers other than sea urchins. Previous reports of reversals of coral-macroalgal phase shifts 489 in the Caribbean involved the recovery of urchin populations following their collapse in the 1980s, and subsequent increases in macroalgal grazing (Edmunds and Carpenter 2001, 490 491 Carpenter and Edmunds 2006, Myhre and Alcevedo-Gutiérrez 2007). Previous shifts from 492 macroalgal to coral dominance due to fish grazing are limited to field experiments (Bellwood et al. 2006, Mumby et al. 2006, 2007, Hughes et al. 2007). 493

494

In addition to increased grazing pressure, elevated water temperatures may have

496 contributed to the decline in *E. denticulatum* in Kāne'ohe Bay. The decline in *E.*

denticulatum cover evident in early 2016 followed two consecutive warm water events in 497 the late summers of 2014 and 2015. These events resulted in coral bleaching and mortality 498 in the bay in both years (Bahr et al. 2015a, 2017; Cunning et al. 2016). Water temperatures 499 at 2 m depth at Moku o Loe in southern Kāne'ohe Bay reached 29.8 °C in 2014 and over 30 500 501 °C in 2015 (www.pacioos.hawaii.edu), and water temperatures at 2-3 m depth at 8 sites in the bay were between 29 and 31.5°C from late August to early September of 2015 (Bahr et 502 al. 2017). In contrast to the research efforts focused on the responses of corals to the high 503 water temperatures of 2014 and 2015 in Kane'ohe Bay, the effects of high temperatures on 504 505 macroalgae have not been considered . A second hypothesis to account for the abrupt 506 decline of *E. denticulatum* is that the high temperature events in 2014 and 2015 reduced

thallus growth rates to the point that consumption by herbivores exceeded grossproductivity.

509

510 The results of the laboratory experiments on the effect of high temperature on the growth 511 of *E. denticulatum* indicate that the growth rate of this alga does decrease at high water 512 temperatures (Fig. 5). High temperature growth inhibition has been reported for several species of tropical macroalgae (Pakker et al. 1995, Hwang et al. 2004, Tsai et al. 2005). 513 However, some species do not appear to be inhibited by naturally occurring high water 514 515 temperatures; we observed no inhibition of growth in *G. salicornia* over a temperature 516 range of 26 to 30°C (Fig. 6b). The failure to detect a decline in growth at high temperatures 517 in G. salicornia may be related to the differences between these two species in their distribution among habitats in the bay. E. denticulatum utilizes reef slopes and those outer 518 519 reef flat habitats also occupied by corals. G. salicornia however, is almost entirely restricted 520 to inner reef flat areas, areas generally devoid of corals and potentially is subject to higher 521 temperatures associated with shallow waters and high-tide exposure.

522

523 While high water temperatures (> 28 °C) and high grazing pressure may have contributed 524 jointly to the decline of *E. denticulatum*, grazing alone was sufficient to cause the decline. This conclusion is based on our observation that grazing loss rates exceeded tissue growth 525 rates in runs of the field experiment prior to August 2014, when temperatures were < 28° C. 526 527 Grazing appears to have been the primary cause for the decline in *G. salicornia* cover, given that experimentally increasing water temperatures increase did not reduce G. salicornia 528 growth. Elevated water temperatures in 2014 and 2015 may have also caused grazing rates 529 to increase, by increasing metabolic rates in herbivorous fishes (and perhaps sea turtles), 530 531 thereby increasing food requirements (Clarke and Johnstone 1999, Smith 2008).

532

533 Studies of coral bleaching events that include responses by macroalgae, generally report an 534 increase in macroalgal abundance following the event (McClanahan 2000, Ostrander et al. 535 2000, McClanahan et al. 2001, DiazPulido and McCook 2002). The fact that this did not 536 occur in Kāne'ohe Bay after the 2014 and 2015 bleaching events may be associated with 537 rapid recovery of bleached corals and relatively low coral mortality (Bahr et al. 2017). It is 538 possible however, that the increase in *Eucheuma/Kappaphycus* and *G. salicornia* cover evident in Figs. 2 and 3 was related to a bleaching event in 1996 that caused more severecoral mortality (Bahr et al. 2017).

541

542 The recent declines in *E. denticulatum* and *G. salicornia* cover on reef flats comprise the first 543 of two steps in a reversal of the coral-algal phase shift that followed the establishment of 544 these species in Kane'ohe Bay. The second step in the phase shift reversal is the recovery of coral cover. If corals recolonize the reef flat substrata made available by the loss of E. 545 denticulatum and G. salicornia, then a complete phase shift reversal will have occurred. The 546 547 potential for that recolonization exists. In a recent study of a 44-year (1970-2014) record of 548 Kāne'ohe Bay coral surveys, coral cover increased in most surveys over the last 20 years 549 (Stimson 2017). In the surveys where coral cover decreased over time or remained stable, it was usually because the initial coral cover was high, i.e., the rates of change in coral cover 550 551 were inversely related to initial coral cover. Increased substrate availability due to the 552 decline of the E. denticulatum, and to a certain extent G. salicornia, and observations of relatively rapid increases in coral cover reported by Stimson (2017), suggest that a complete 553 554 phase-shift reversal is underway, barring a setback to corals in future bleaching episodes. Bahr et al. (2017) estimated that mortality of corals in the Kane'ohe Bay due to bleaching 555 556 was 13% in 2014 and 22% in 2015, so while the cover of the macroalgae on reef flats has been greatly reduced, the ability of the corals to regain spatial dominance may be limited by 557 periodic bleaching. 558

559

It is evidently not the case that coral-macroalgal phase shifts are irreversible, as some 560 researchers have suggested (Scheffer et al. 2001, Rogers and Miller 2006, Mumby et al. 561 2012, Mumby et al. 2013). However, detecting reversals of coral-macroalgal phase shifts 562 563 may require long-term monitoring programs. Furthermore, it may be necessary to monitor a wide range of ancillary variables (e.g., grazer abundance) to identify causes of reversals. The 564 565 data sets assembled in this study document the expansion, reduction and neardisappearance the dominant non-native red algae in Kane'ohe Bay, and they suggest that an 566 increase in grazing intensity played a role in the phase-shift reversal. Graham et al. (2013) 567 have argued that major changes in environmental conditions (e.g., decreasing fishing 568 pressure, thereby increasing herbivory) are prerequisites for phase-shift reversals and that 569 570 ecological 'pulse' disturbances may also be required to initiate reversal. The ecological

- 571 disturbance in this case may have been the high water temperature events of 2014 and
- 572 2015. The high water temperature events may have been functionally equivalent to the rain
- and overcast event that initiated the *D. cavernosa* phase shift reversal in Kāne'ohe Bay in
- 574 2006 (Stimson and Conklin 2008), a phase shift which in many parts of the Bay lasted for at
- 575 least 36 years.
- 576

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806	Fig. 1 Map of Kane'ohe Bay, its fringing, patch and barrier reefs. Patch reefs are numbered
807	according to the system of Roy (1970).

Fig. 2. A) Change in *Kappaphycus/Eucheuma* cover on the reef flats and upper slopes of six
reefs in Survey C. Manual removal of *Kappaphycus/Eucheuma* on Reef 29 began in 2012,
urchin addition began in 2013. Points corresponding to "Unmanipulated reefs", those not
subject to manual removal or urchin addition, are means ± 1 standard error for all six reefs
until 2012, and thereafter the points represent the values from the five unmanipulated
reefs. B) Changes in *Gracilaria salicornia* cover on the reef flats and upper slopes of six
reefs in Survey C. Manual removal did not target *G. salicornia*.

815

816 Fig. 3. Changes in: A) Kappaphycus/Eucheuma cover and B) Gracilaria salicornia cover on

817 the reef flats and upper slopes of two reefs in Survey D. Large numbers of urchins

818 (*Tripneustes gratilla*) were outplanted on Reef 19 in 2014 and to Reef 20 in 2013 to

819 consume macroalga as part of a biological control program.

820

Fig. 4. Grazing intensity on experimental *E. denticulatum* thalli on reef flats in summer, fall and early winter 2014, plotted against *E. denticulatum* cover on the corresponding reef flats in 2014.

824

825 Fig. 5. Specific growth rates of *E. denticulatum* thalli over a range of seawater

temperatures. Each data point represents the growth of three thalli.

827 Curves represents the fitted quadratic equation: $Y = -1.379+0.1004X-0.0001782X^2$

828

Fig. 6. Density of acanthurids over time on four patch reefs in central Kāne'ohe Bay.

- 830 Acanthurid density is expressed as number of fish per 100 m of reef perimeter
- 831

832

833

- 835 Table 1.
- 836 Percentage cover of *Eucheuma denticulatum* in 2014 in survey E. The survey included
- 837 separate estimates of algal cover on reef flats and reef slopes.

		Reef flat	Reef slope
	Mean % cover	13.7	2.8
Manipulated reefs	Range	0-27.4	0-5.5
	Sample size	2	2
	Mean % cover	5.7	0.5
Unmanipulated reefs	SD	7.6	1.1
	Sample size	10	10

Table 2. Specific growth of *E. denticulatum* (caged thalli) and grazing intensity on *E. denticulatum* (difference between caged and uncaged weight change) on reef flats and reef
slopes in Kāne'ohe Bay. "Patch reefs" refers to 12 patch reefs used for experimental runs.
"Fringing reef" refers to the eight experimental runs the windward fringing reef of Moku o
Loe. Values are means ± 1 SD in g g⁻¹ d⁻¹, with sample sizes in parentheses. "t"-tests are for

857 comparisons between reef flats and reef slopes.

858				
859	Growth rate in cages			
860	Patch Reefs			
861	Reef flat	Reef slope	t	Р
862	0.023±0.010	0.012±0.005	5.61	<0.001
863	(12)	(12)		
864	Fringing reef			
865	0.016±0.008	0.006±0.005	5.39	< 0.01
866	(7)	(8)		
867	Grazing Intensity			
868	Patch Reefs			
869	0.023±0.017	0.047±0.035	2.29	<0.05
870	(12)	(12)		
871	Fringing reef			
872	0.089±0.096	0.1541±0.121	1.53	ns
873	(7)	(8)		

876 Table 3

Regression statistics for the test of the slopes of the regressions of numbers of acanthurids
per 100 m of reef perimeter vs time (days)

880	Reef	slope	S _b	Number	F	Р
881				of surveys		
882	19	0.0359	0.0054	40	44.58	<0.001
883	20	0.0434	0.0053	22	66.37	<0.001
884	21	0.0266	0.0062	33	18.56	<0.001
885	23	0.0135	0.0123	11	1.19	ns
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