

**TESTIMONY**

**SB 713**



Testimony of the Maui Invasive Species Committee  
Supporting S.B. 713 Making an Appropriation for the Emergency Environmental Workforce  
Before the Senate Committee on Labor  
Conference Room 224

February 17, 2009, 2:45 PM

The Maui Invasive Species Committee (MISC) supports the intent of S.B. 713.

The residents of Hawaii face unprecedented economic challenges. Many residents find themselves without employment for the first time in their adult lives and those with jobs are uncertain about the stability of their current positions. At the same time, Hawaii's environment, tourist-based economy, and way of life are threatened by numerous invasive species. The environmental workforce that was created after the 9/11 tragedy successfully addressed both those issues by offering much-needed employment doing environmental work, such as mosquito control and miconia eradication. It could work again, but increased flexibility should be included in such a program in order to ensure its success.

SB 713 proposes creating jobs that will last only three months. Based on extensive experience hiring, training, and working with field-based crews, greater flexibility in employment duration will greatly enhance the value of the investment. A significant amount of gearing up and training is required to safely and effectively deploy field crews. Basic training includes: safe use of herbicides, hand and power tools, public interaction considerations, identification of native and non-native species, data collection and recording, and GPS operations, among others. The work is challenging, hazardous, and rewarding, but the emphasis is always on safety. Increased familiarity with the project enhances employee safety and productivity. Gear includes: fatigues, t-shirts, machetes, backpacks, boots, compass, GPS units for a team, rain gear, etc. Extending the employment duration will increase the use of the same gear over a greater length of time.

If the Emergency Environmental Work Force is implemented, it would be beneficial to have the flexibility to use these funds to retain existing workers. The Invasive Species Committees currently face significant cuts (50% this year) under the proposed budget for the Hawaii Invasive Species Council and some ISCs may be forced to lay off major segments of their field staff. When the EEWf was implemented in 2001-2002, existing crew members were temporarily promoted to crew leaders to effectively manage the unexpected influx of workers. The same situation would likely play out again. It would not make sense to lay off existing field staff only to hire them again as temporary workers. Moreover, it is quite possible these trained field staff would no longer be available, which would greatly limit the ISCs' ability to effectively absorb large numbers of new hires.

Thank you for considering this bill and the above-mentioned need for increased flexibility.

Testimony for LBR 2/17/2009 2:45:00 PM SB713

Conference room: 224

Testifier position: support

Testifier will be present: No

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Submitted on: 2/17/2009

Comments:

I support SB 718 as I hope it will provide jobs on Molokai and elsewhere