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COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Wednesday; February 28, 2024 10:01 AM
Conference Room 211

Testimony SENATE BILL 2501 SENATE DRAFT 1 RELATING TO THE HAWAII INVASIVE SPECIES COUNCIL

The **Hawaii Invasive Species Council (HISC)** provides the following comments on **Senate Bill 2501 Senate Draft 1** that requires the Hawaii Invasive Species Council to prioritize the protection of exceptional trees.

The HISC understands the importance of protecting trees for cultural, historical, aesthetic, and environmental value, however, the inclusion of language that prioritizes the Council to protect “exceptional trees” does not align with the Council’s purpose and function as outlined in Hawaii Revised Statute 194 and could pose an inherent conflict.

The legislature created the HISC in 2003 with the special purpose of providing policy level coordination and planning for the control and eradication of harmful invasive species. The proposed amendments to the statute could pose an inherent conflict with HISC’s mandate if a tree that is invasive or considered “high-risk” is designated as an “exceptional tree”. Hawaii Revised Statute 58 establishes the Exceptional Tree Act and outlines criteria for designation which includes Historic or Cultural Value, Age, Rarity, Location, Size, Esthetic Quality and Endemic Status. The criteria does not include consideration for whether a tree is invasive or an assessment to determine if it is high-risk for invasion. This could lead to the HISC potentially protecting invasive tree species.

HRS 58 further mandates each county to establish a County Arborist Advisory Committee which enacts regulations to protect trees of exceptional stature. Each county has its own program, set of rules and operating guidelines. HISC is strongly supportive of actions to protect native flora and culturally or environmentally significant trees, but Counties have already been designated by the legislature as lead agencies on protecting exceptional trees.

HISC and its public and private partner agencies continually strive to raise awareness and take mitigative actions concerning high-priority pests. The HISC is able and willing to engage with the counties on this program and advise on how to protect designated trees from pests and plant diseases like Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle, Little Fire Ant, and Rapid Ohia Death.

We greatly appreciate the work of legislators on this measure and the opportunity to testify.



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February 28, 2024

HEARING BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

TESTIMONY ON SB 2501, SD1
RELATING TO THE HAWAII INVASIVE SPECIES COUNCIL

Conference Room 211 & Videoconference
10:01 AM

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice-Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee:

I am Brian Miyamoto, Executive Director of the Hawai'i Farm Bureau (HFB). Organized since 1948, the HFB is comprised of 1,800 farm family members statewide and serves as Hawai'i's voice of agriculture to protect, advocate and advance the social, economic, and educational interests of our diverse agricultural community.

The Hawai'i Farm Bureau supports SB 2501, SD1, which requires the Hawaii Invasive Species Council to prioritize the protection of exceptional trees from invasive species.

Invasive species have become one of the most devastating problems impacting Hawai'i. Many invasive species are damaging Hawai'i's environment and economy. Agriculture has a vested interest in this matter. Agriculture suffers when invasive species are introduced. Every year, numerous new pests are introduced into the State, such as the coqui frog, coffee berry borer, macadamia felted coccid, little fire ant, coconut rhinoceros beetle, small hive beetle, and varroa mite, to name a few. Control measures take time to develop, leaving farmers and ranchers at risk. This is not consistent with the State's goal of increasing self-sufficiency and sustainability.

We support the protection of exceptional trees from invasive species, however, proper funding for HISC is critical for the protection of Hawai'i's environment and economy and the health and lifestyle of its people through the support of invasive species prevention, control, research, outreach, and planning.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important matter.