HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, 2025
STATE OF HAWAII

H.B. NO. 643

A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO THE COCONUT RHINOCEROS BEETLE PROGRAM.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

SECTION 1. The legislature finds that *Oryctes rhinoceros*, or the coconut rhinoceros beetle, can have devastating impacts on palm species that are foundational to the State's agricultural economy, cultural heritage, and ecosystems. Native to Southeast Asia, adult coconut rhinoceros beetles feed on emerging palm fronds, causing damage that can often be severe enough to kill the plant. The coconut rhinoceros beetle was first detected in the State in 2013 and is now established on Oahu, with smaller infestations on the windward side of Kauai, Waikaloa village on Hawaii island, and throughout the State.

The legislature further finds that the coconut rhinoceros beetle response program is a coordinated partnership among the university of Hawaii, United States Department of Agriculture, Hawaii department of agriculture, and other key organizations. At the university of Hawaii at Manoa lab, the program investigates new control methods and best practices, and a data team analyzes information from traps, mulch surveys, and tree

damage. An outreach team also provides information to the public and professionals while supporting community response efforts. While the expertise and methodology developed was not available at the start of the infestation on Oahu, it can now be deployed to prevent infestations on islands that are not yet infested. For infested areas, the program currently educates arborists and tree trimmers to protect trees with contact pesticides.

Additionally, the program is working on a long-term solution through a biocontrol, which has been found to be effective in other parts of the world. The program is also working on permitting to bring in agents and hopes to host range studies in early 2026. Researchers have a rearing colony of coconut rhinoceros beetles at the university and need to test whether the viral strains that kill the beetles affect any native species. Once an appropriate strain is identified, it could be released on infected beetles to spread and suppress the population in the wild.

The legislature also finds that emergency response funding from the United States Department of Agriculture is ending, as it is no longer considered an emergency after more than ten

years. Stable year-to-year funding to the university of Hawaii to support key positions within the core coconut rhinoceros beetle response program would assist in leveraging additional federal funds.

The purpose of this Act is to:

(1) Establish short-term management initiatives for the coconut rhinoceros beetle response program; and

(2) Appropriate funds to support the coconut rhinoceros beetle response program's activities and positions.

SECTION 2. In its coconut rhinoceros beetle response, the university of Hawaii shall incorporate the following short-term management initiatives:

(1) Engagement with tree trimmers, arborists, and the landscaping industry by educating them on the current best management practices and combating the misinformation circulating about coconut rhinoceros beetle treatment options; provided that annual workshops shall be held on each island; provided further that a list of companies that receive the training shall be posted online for use by consumers;

(2) Subsidizing canopy treatments for residential palm owners;

(3) Extending services by the coconut rhinoceros beetle response program to Hawaii island and the islands of Maui, Molokai, and Lanai when coconut rhinoceros beetles are detected;

(4) Performing canine inspections, in cooperation with the department of agriculture, on high-risk cargo moving between islands;

(5) Subsidizing container fumigation of high-risk materials traveling between islands; and

(6) Conducting research with an emphasis on biocontrol.

SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of $ or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2025-2026 and the same sum or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 to be allocated as follows:

(1) $15,000 for training tree trimmers, arborists, and the landscaping industry on the current best management practices about coconut rhinoceros beetles;

(2) $160,000 for subsidizing canopy treatments for residential palm owners;

(3) $ for extending deployment of coconut rhinoceros beetle response teams to Hawaii island and the islands of Maui, Molokai, and Lanai when coconut rhinoceros beetles are detected;

(4) $250,000 to perform canine inspections for coconut rhinoceros beetles for high-risk cargo moving between islands;

(5) $ for subsidizing container fumigation of high-risk materials traveling between islands; and

(6) $200,000 for full-time equivalent (FTE) permanent positions for biocontrol research.

The sums appropriated shall be expended by the university of Hawaii for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2025.

INTRODUCED BY: Lisa Marten

JAN 17 2025

H.B. NO. 643

Report Title:
Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle; Prevention; University of Hawaii; Appropriation

Description:
Establishes short-term management initiatives for the coconut rhinoceros beetle response program. Appropriates funds for activities and positions related to coconut rhinoceros beetle infestation control.

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