

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
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Lt. Governor



State of Hawai'i
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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SHARON HURD
Chairperson, Board of Agriculture

DEAN M. MATSUKAWA
Deputy to the Chairperson

TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

MARCH 14, 2025
1:00 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 224

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 94
RELATING TO MAUI AXIS DEER CONTROL AND VENISON INITIATIVE

Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Concurrent Resolution 94. SCR94 urges the State Department of Agriculture and the County of Maui Department of Agriculture to address axis deer overpopulation, including: (1) implementing policies to make the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) certified in state inspectors, certified inspections, and certified processing facilities more accessible, capable, and affordable for local hunters to utilize in order to sell or gift venison; and (2) implementing policies to increase the amount of certified USDA in state meat inspectors for game mammals; and that the State Department of Agriculture and Maui Department of Agriculture convene a joint task force to oversee the County of Maui program that, in coordination with the USDA certified processing facilities, would investigate and develop plans to make affordable the processing of locally hunted axis deer meat and the distribution of this venison to the community; and that the joint task force submit a report of the program's accomplishments and barriers to the accomplishment of the program with its findings and recommendations, including any proposed legislation, to the Legislature no later than November 30, 2025.



The Hawaii Department of Agriculture (Department) makes the following comments. The Department recognizes the threat axis deer overpopulation poses to the state and the benefits axis deer can provide as a protein to under resourced segments of the community. Investigation to determine how to best accomplish this is needed.

The Department notes that axis deer is not an amendable species under the Federal Meat Inspection Act. The USDA Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) therefore, conducts meat inspections on a voluntary basis. Voluntary inspections by FSIS are charged to the processor and not subsidized.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



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March 14, 2025

HEARING BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

TESTIMONY ON SCR 94/SR 77
MAUI AXIS DEER CONTROL AND VENISON INITIATIVE

Conference Room 224 & Videoconference
1:00 PM

Aloha Chair Gabbard, Vice-Chair Richards, 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 SCR 94/SR 77, which urges the State Department of Agriculture and the County of Maui Department of Agriculture to take further meaningful action to address the axis deer overpopulation and facilitate the processing and distribution of venison. Axis deer are a major agricultural and environmental threat in Hawai'i, particularly on Maui, where unchecked populations have caused significant damage to crops, pasturelands, and native ecosystems.

The uncontrolled spread of axis deer results in devastating consequences for farmers and ranchers. Deer consume valuable forage, leaving little for livestock, while also damaging irrigation systems, farm infrastructure, and young crops. This loss of agricultural productivity directly impacts local food security and increases costs for farmers who must invest in additional fencing, damage repairs, and mitigation efforts. Beyond agriculture, the overgrazing of vegetation by axis deer exacerbates soil erosion and increases the risk of wildfires, creating broader environmental hazards for the community.

Venison processing offers a sustainable solution to managing axis deer populations while providing a valuable local protein source. However, existing barriers make it difficult for hunters and ranchers to process and distribute venison effectively. The high costs and limited availability of USDA-certified meat inspection facilities have made it financially impractical for many to participate in deer management programs. Establishing in-state meat inspectors, expanding certified processing facilities, and increasing access to

inspections will lower costs, improve efficiency, and allow locally harvested venison to be made more widely available to consumers and food assistance programs.

Other states have successfully implemented venison donation programs that contribute to food security while addressing wildlife overpopulation. Programs such as Pennsylvania's Hunters Sharing the Harvest distribute thousands of pounds of venison annually to food banks and those in need. Hawai'i should follow these successful models by ensuring the necessary infrastructure is in place to support similar efforts.

We strongly support the resolution's call for the establishment of a joint task force between the State Department of Agriculture and the County of Maui Department of Agriculture to oversee a coordinated effort to manage axis deer populations and increase venison processing capacity. A collaborative approach is necessary to develop long-term, sustainable solutions that balance wildlife management with agricultural protection and food production.

We urge the committee to pass SCR 94/SR 77 to support farmers, ranchers, and the broader community in addressing the challenges posed by axis deer overpopulation while enhancing local meat processing capabilities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on these resolutions.



COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

Senator Mike Gabbard, Chair

Senator Herbert M. "Tim" Richards, III, Vice Chair

SCR94/SR77

Friday, March 14, 2025, 1:00PM
Conference Room 224 & Videoconference

Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards, and Members of the Committee,

The Hawaii Cattlemen's Council **supports SCR94/SR77** which urges the legislature to implement a Maui Axis Deer Control and Venison Initiative.

Currently, work is being done by various entities in an Axis Deer Task Force to take steps toward addressing the overpopulation of axis deer on Maui while promoting local food security and economic growth. By making USDA-certified inspections and processing facilities more accessible we can better utilize this increasingly growing invasive species through language that enables flexibility and support for diverse control measures and strategies that help more people be a part of the solution is needed.

As the population grows across this region, deer are increasingly moving onto smaller lands – many of which near roads, neighborhoods, and communities. Understanding ways to ensure reliable throughput of deer to a USDA certified processing facility is key to removing animals and also utilizing the meat for distribution to the community. In addition these measures, funding is needed for herd reduction that allows for a variety of methods of capture for inspected kills, meat processing, and continued incentive payments.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify on this measure. The Hawaii Cattlemen's Council (HCC) is the Statewide umbrella organization comprised of the four county-level Cattlemen's Associations. Our member ranchers represent over 60,000 head of beef cows; more than 75% of all the beef cows in the State. Ranchers are the stewards of over 750 thousand acres of land in Hawaii, or 20% of the State's total land mass. We represent the interests of Hawaii's cattle producers.

Nicole Galase
Hawaii Cattlemen's Council
Managing Director



SCR-94

Submitted on: 3/11/2025 7:12:57 PM

Testimony for AEN on 3/14/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Theresa M Thompson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support SR 77 MAUI AXIS DEER CONTROL AND VENISON INITIATIVE.

Mahalo,

Theresa Thompson

SCR-94

Submitted on: 3/12/2025 10:29:00 PM

Testimony for AEN on 3/14/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
William Jacintho	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Strong support for Axis Deer controll, and agree with the Hawaii Cattlemen's Councils Testimony.

Thank you for bringing this much needed legislative support forward.

I am available for comment