

Committee on Resources

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CONGRESSMAN ED CASE STATEMENT BEFORE THE HOUSE RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONVERSATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS ON H.R. 3479

May 13, 2004

Chairman Gilchrest, Ranking Member Pallone, and other members of the Subcommittee, thank you for providing me with an opportunity to testify today in strong support of H.R. 3479, the Brown Tree Snake Control and Eradication Act. I also wanted to express my deep appreciation for the subcommittee's recent oversight hearing in Hawaii on invasive species.

Last November I was pleased to join with my colleague from Guam, Congresswoman Madeleine Z. Bordallo, and Congresswoman Neil Abercrombie from Hawaii, in introducing H.R. 3479.

This legislation proposes a long-overdue comprehensive approach, through the Departments of Interior and Agriculture, to eradicate the brown tree snake in Guam and to prevent its introduction to affected jurisdictions in the Pacific, including my home state of Hawaii. There are other federal agencies, particularly the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security, that are crucial to our efforts, and I am fully supportive of resources and funding expended by or given to these agencies in combating the brown tree snake.

The devastating ecological, economic, and human health impacts of the brown tree snake have been long known among the affected jurisdictions in the Pacific and the federal, state, and territorial agencies charged with implementing brown tree snake preventative control and eradication programs.

However, it is clear that unless we address this challenge with a long-term, coordinated, and comprehensive approach, Guam will continue to struggle with the adverse impacts of the brown tree snake, and we in Hawaii will increasingly risk the introduction of the snake into our fragile environment. A total of eight brown tree snakes have been found live or dead in Hawaii since the mid-1980s. All have been associated with the movement of civilian and military vehicles or cargo from Guam.

As background, the brown tree snake was accidentally introduced into Guam in the late 1940s and 1950s, likely via U.S. military cargo, from an area in the Pacific where the snakes are native. Unfortunately, because Guam had no natural predator but abundant prey, the brown tree snake population spread throughout the island.

Because the brown tree snake's preferred prey is birds, it is directly responsible for the extinction of 9 of 13 native forest birds and 3 of 12 native lizards on Guam. Economically, the snakes have caused more than 1600 power outages over a 20-year period in Guam, costing the island \$4.5 million per year without considering their impact on transformers, and damages inside electrical substations. The disruptions affect all aspects of everyday life in homes and work, as well as for the government and the business community.

In Hawaii, the brown tree snake represents one of the greatest terrestrial ecological threats due to its potential impact on our endangered bird species, which are found nowhere else on earth. As a result of Hawaii's geographical isolation and lush environment, there were more than 140 endemic bird species in the islands prior to human contact. Today, among the remaining 71 endemic forms, 30 are federally listed as endangered, and fifteen of these are on the brink of extinction. Any negative impact on our native bird species in Hawaii will inevitably impact our native flora as well. Hawaii has the highest known number of endemic terrestrial plants of any major island group.

Economically, a University of Hawaii study estimates that the introduction of the brown tree snake to Hawaii will cause between \$28 million and \$450 million annually in electrical power outages. This does not include the potential devastation to our agriculture industry. In Guam, the brown tree snake has contributed to the decline in production of the island's agriculture industry, particularly the commercial poultry industry, because the snakes eat eggs and chicks. The snake has also impacted the growing of fruits and vegetables

because insects that are no longer naturally controlled by birds and lizards inflict increased damage on crops.

To address the brown tree snake problem, a Brown Tree Snake Control Committee was established subsequent to provisions in the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990. A multi-agency Memorandum of Agreement on Brown Tree Snake Control was also signed in 1992 and renewed in 1999. However, it expired in March of this year.

The Brown Tree Snake Control and Eradication Act will statutorily authorize the Brown Tree Snake Control and Eradication Committee to ensure the ongoing activities of federal agencies, enhance the effectiveness of the Committee, provide the necessary resources from agencies actually conducting the work, and strengthen the coordination between federal and regional stakeholders in Hawaii and the Pacific in a more systemic fashion.

Among the authorized activities is the expansion of science-based eradication and control programs in Guam; the expansion of interagency and intergovernmental rapid response teams in Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and Hawaii; the expansion of science-based efforts to protect and restore native wildlife in Guam or elsewhere damaged by the brown tree snake; continuation and expansion of sustained research funding from the Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services, and National Wildlife Research Center; and the expansion of long-term research into chemical and biological control techniques that could lead to large-scale reduction of brown tree snake populations in Guam.

H.R. 3479 is a product of collaboration between my office, the offices of Congresswoman Bordallo and Congressman Abercrombie, and the key federal, state, and territorial stakeholders in the region. While the brown tree snake is just one of the more serious of many invasive species threats to Hawaii, the mechanisms strengthened and established under H.R. 3479 can serve as an exemplary model for addressing other invasive species issues, not just in Hawaii, but in our whole country.

In Hawaii, we are extremely fortunate to have support for the bill from the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Land and Natural Resources, the Hawaii Invasive Species Council, the Nature Conservancy of Hawaii, the Coordinating Group on Alien Species, and others. Such coordinated support in Hawaii is illustrative of the seriousness that we take this issue and the assistance the federal government can anticipate receiving after enactment of this bill. Hawaii's stakeholders will not be silent and passive partners in this effort.

I am especially proud about the establishment of the Hawaii Invasive Species Council, which includes key state, county and federal head officials in Hawaii, by legislation approved by the 2003 Hawaii State Legislature and Hawaii Governor Linda Lingle.

I understand that Hawaii is now only one of 7 states in the country to establish such a council in addressing invasive species prevention and response measures at the state level.

Again, I appreciate the attention that Chairman Gilchrest, Representative Pallone, and other members of this Subcommittee have given to invasive species in general, particularly in Hawaii, including the brown tree snake, and I urge that expeditious action be taken to favorably move H.R. 3479 to the House floor.