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Testimony of Vicente (Ben) C. Pangelinan 2 Speaker of the 27th Guam Legislature Hearing on the Brown Tree Snake Control and Eradication Act

Hafa adai, Mr. Chairman. This is testimony in favor of H.R. 3479, the Brown Tree Snake Control and Eradication Act.

As the Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans now knows very well, Guam has been drastically affected by the introduction of the brown tree snake. The arrival of the snake on the island has not only decimated the indigenous bird populations, but also has caused significant losses to the island's economy. The snake, on occasion, also brings alarm to the average family household, attacking chickens and entering houses. Once in a while, the snake, which is mildly venomous, would bite a person.

Guam's native birds, some of which can be found nowhere else in the world, have been the hardest hit. Species like the Mariana Mallard (Nganga) and the Micronesian Megapode (Sasangat) are now locally extinct because of the brown tree snake. Other species, like the Koko, or Guam Rail, are struggling to hang on. Many in my generation can still recall the days when many Koko can be seen racing along the roadsides. Now, the silence of the birds is eerily noticeable, especially when one compares today's Guam to the sounds heard on the neighboring islands of Rota and Saipan, where the snake fortunately has not invaded. H.R. 3479 is legislation that I hope will finally stop the invasion of the brown tree snake, and will finally allow Guam to restore the populations of our surviving native bird species.

The economy of Guam, too, has been hit hard by the brown tree snake through the years since its arrival on the island. Because of its affinity for electrical power lines and power substations, the brown tree snake has often caused short circuits, resulting in power outages. In the past five years alone, the snake caused a total of 241 incidents in power outages. Some of these outages were severe enough to have spread island-wide and to have lasted more than six hours. The loss in electricity means a loss in productivity—both within the private and public sectors.

H.R. 3479 recognizes that the successful eradication or control of the brown tree snake requires a coordinated approach, an effort that draws upon the expertise and resources of various entities. I believe that this is a sound approach, and one that will be highly effective if the responsible entities are also provided with all of the necessary resources and tools. In addition to a coordinated approach, H.R. 3479 adopts a comprehensive means of eradication and prevention. It not only emphasizes science-based control efforts, but it also strengthens the transportation barriers that would help to block the spread of the snake to other locations. Scientifically developed eradication methods and statutory controls should prove to be a good combination.

Controlling Guam's brown tree snake population will help to reverse some of its negative impact, even if much of its impact is irreversible. With the snake controlled or eradicated, Guam can begin to re-introduce some of its native bird population. The hard work of local and federal agencies, as well as several off island zoos, kept these species from becoming extinct. The recovery of their population into Guam remains a long-term goal. The eradication of the snake from the island would also bring noticeable benefit in the reduction of snake-induced power outages, which in turn would reduce the losses incurred by the outages.

One added benefit that I hope snake eradication would bring is a more positive light on Guam from the national media. If the national and international media issue a report about Guam again, our people would prefer a story about Guam's natural beauty and vibrant culture, rather than another exaggerated report about snakes crawling everywhere, reminiscent of a Biblical plague. Yes, the snakes have caused a tremendous negative impact on Guam. However, we do not find them sharing our beds and living rooms—even though a few manage to invade our houses from time to time—nor do we encounter them hanging from trees like spaghetti noodles. With the snake gone, we can begin to repair some of the harm the snake has brought to the national and international public perception of Guam.

For island territories, including the Hawaiian islands, the brown tree snake is something to be scared about. The other islands must continue to be vigilant against the introduction of the snake into their ecosystems. If we are to promote environmental preservation throughout the Pacific region, then stopping the spread of the brown tree snake should be one of the top items in every island's agenda. Only a coordinated and cooperative effort among the various islands will help to ensure that the brown tree snake population is contained and controlled, if not completely eradicated.

On behalf of the 27th Guam Legislature, I am in full support of HR 3479, and I thank you for this opportunity to present our position.