

MAR 08 2024

SENATE RESOLUTION

REQUESTING THE OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR TO CONDUCT A PERFORMANCE
AUDIT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE'S PLANT INDUSTRY
DIVISION.

1 WHEREAS, the establishment and spread of invasive species
2 is harmful to agriculture, native biota, public health, and the
3 economic well-being of the State; and
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5 WHEREAS, the State's mandated biosecurity program
6 established in 2008, pursuant to part VI of chapter 150A, Hawaii
7 Revised Statutes, is delivered by the Plant Quarantine Branch
8 within the Plant Industry Division of the Department of
9 Agriculture, which also comprises the Pesticides Branch and
10 Plant Pest Control Branch; and
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12 WHEREAS, the Plant Quarantine Branch inspects plants,
13 insects, microorganisms, and non-domestic animals that are
14 imported and certifies plants for export; the Pesticides Branch
15 regulates the manufacture, sale, and use of pesticides; and the
16 Plant Pest Control Branch not only inspects and certifies seeds,
17 but also eradicates, contains, or controls pests of plants that
18 could cause significant economic damage to Hawaii's agriculture,
19 environment, and quality of life; and
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21 WHEREAS, in 2016, the Department of Agriculture,
22 recognizing the challenges in developing a biosecurity program,
23 which include but are not limited to the State's dependency on
24 imports and high cost of controlling and eradicating invasive
25 species; developed the Hawaii Interagency Biosecurity Plan
26 (2017-2027) in collaboration with other state, county, and
27 federal agencies, as well as industry stakeholders and the
28 public, to be the guiding strategy of the State for an
29 effective, interagency biosecurity system that:
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- 31 (1) Prevents the entry and interisland movement of pests
32 and prohibited or restricted organisms without a
33 permit; and
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1 (2) Responds effectively to eradicate, control, reduce,
2 and suppress incipient pest populations and
3 established pests and seize and dispose of prohibited
4 or restricted organisms without a permit; and
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6 WHEREAS, the Hawaii Interagency Biosecurity Plan outlines
7 one hundred forty-seven action items assigned to various state
8 agencies to implement for the protection of Hawaii's
9 agriculture, environment, and people from the impacts of
10 invasive species; and
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12 WHEREAS, the Hawaii Interagency Biosecurity Plan states
13 that adding state staff capacity is essential if the Department
14 of Agriculture is expected to fully meet its obligations to
15 protect Hawaii from invasive species; noting that between 2008,
16 when the state biosecurity program was implemented, and 2016,
17 the Department of Agriculture suffered a decrease of staff by
18 eighteen percent, while both the tonnage of incoming air cargo
19 and cargo moving out of Honolulu Harbor increased by thirty-four
20 percent and twenty-one percent, respectively; and
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22 WHEREAS, the Office of the Auditor, pursuant to Act 243,
23 Session Laws of Hawaii 2016, conducted a financial and
24 performance audit of the duties and facilities of the Plant
25 Quarantine Branch, including the Branch's biosecurity programs
26 and related programs and submitted Report No. 17-05, entitled
27 "Audit of Hawai'i Department of Agriculture's Plant Quarantine
28 Branch" to the Legislature; and
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30 WHEREAS, Report No. 17-05 found that the Plant Quarantine
31 Branch not only lacked the data gathering and data analysis
32 functions necessary to actively and continuously assess risks
33 from invasive species, but also the organizational framework
34 necessary to manage and communicate risks from invasive species.
35 The report states, in part, that while food and farm product
36 imports continue to rise, Plant Quarantine Branch staffing
37 levels have still not recovered from a 2009 reduction-in-force
38 that cut thirty-seven positions, most of which were Inspector I
39 through III positions; and provided seven recommendations to the
40 Department of Agriculture and the Plant Quarantine Branch,
41 collectively; and
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1 WHEREAS, pursuant to section 23-7.5, Hawaii Revised
2 Statutes, the Auditor reviewed the implementation status of its
3 seven recommendations in 2020, and submitted Report No. 20-12,
4 entitled "Follow Up on Recommendations from Report No. 17-05,
5 Audit of Hawai'i Department of Agriculture's Plant Quarantine
6 Branch" to the Legislature, finding that the Plant Quarantine
7 Branch implemented one recommendation, partially implemented
8 five recommendations, and has not implemented one
9 recommendation; and

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11 WHEREAS, a January 2023 progress report on the Hawaii
12 Interagency Biosecurity Plan prepared by the Hawaii Invasive
13 Species Council found that sixty-eight percent of the action
14 items of the Hawaii Interagency Biosecurity Plan are completed,
15 approved, ongoing, or in progress and thirty-two percent of the
16 action items are not yet stated, no longer being pursued, or
17 need reevaluation; and

18
19 WHEREAS, it has been stated in several legislative hearings
20 and informational briefings during the Thirty-Second Legislative
21 Session, that the Plant Pest Control Branch has been utilizing
22 staff and operational capacity from the Plant Quarantine Branch
23 to carry out its duties; and

24
25 WHEREAS, the full and timely implementation of the Hawaii
26 Interagency Biosecurity Plan is necessary to strengthen the
27 State's biosecurity system and mitigate risks associated with
28 invasive species; now, therefore,

29
30 BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate of the Thirty-second
31 Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session of 2024,
32 that the Office of the Auditor is requested to conduct a
33 performance audit of the Department of Agriculture's Plant
34 Industry Division; and

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36 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the performance audit is
37 requested to also include:

- 38
39 (1) Follow-ups to:

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- 1 (A) Report No. 17-05, entitled "Audit of Hawai'i
2 Department of Agriculture's Plant Quarantine
3 Branch"; and
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- 5 (B) Report No. 20-21, entitled "Follow Up on
6 Recommendations from Report No. 17-05, Audit of
7 Hawai'i Department of Agriculture's Plant
8 Quarantine Branch";
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- 10 (2) Reports on the implementation status of the action
11 items of the Hawaii Interagency Biosecurity Plan; and
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- 13 (3) An evaluation of the true operational capacity of the
14 Department of Agriculture to achieve its assigned
15 action items established in the Hawaii Interagency
16 Biosecurity Plan; and
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18 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Auditor is requested to
19 submit a report of their findings and recommendations, including
20 any proposed legislation, to the Legislature no later than
21 twenty days prior to the convening of the Regular Session of
22 2025; and
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24 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this
25 Resolution be transmitted to the State Auditor and the
26 Chairperson of the Board of Agriculture.
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OFFERED BY: 

By Request

