

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR | KE KIA'ĀINA

SYLVIA LUKE  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR | KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII'  
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
KA 'OIHANA KUMUWAIWAI 'ĀINA

P.O. BOX 621  
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CHAIRPERSON  
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ENGINEERING  
FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
KAHOOLAWE ISLAND RESERVE COMMISSION  
LAND  
STATE PARKS

Testimony of  
DAWN N. S. CHANG  
Chairperson

Before the Senate Committee on  
AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

Wednesday, April 10, 2024  
1:15 PM

State Capitol, Conference Room 224 and Via Videoconference

In consideration of  
HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 189 HOUSE DRAFT 1  
URGING THE STATE TO PROHIBIT THE INTRODUCTION OF BIOCONTROL  
AGENTS THAT MIGHT THREATEN ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT FORAGE  
GRASS SPECIES

House Concurrent Resolution 189 House Draft 1 urges the State to prohibit introducing biocontrol agents that might threaten economically important forage grass species. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) respectfully opposes this measure.**

The Department opposes this measure because extensive scientific and public review are already required for the release of biological control agents into the State. Biocontrol releases require Chapter 343 review and permits from the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture (HDOA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). HDOA's permitting process includes public hearings, consultation with technical experts and advisory committees including the Small Business Regulatory Review Board, and then approval by both the Board of Agriculture and the Governor. These safeguards were created to prevent damage to Hawai'i's environment and economy and have been very effective for the many decades they have been in place.

A blanket ban on types of biocontrol would not be based on the scientific and socio-economic information on individual target invasive species that is required by regulators to release an organism for biocontrol. The Department notes the use of biological control does not lead to eradication of species. Indeed, it is plausible that researchers could find natural enemies of invasive grasses that would reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, while increasing the value of the grass as forage to ranchers. A blanket ban that is not based on scientific studies would preempt such win-win scenarios from being realized.

Finally, the proposed resolution does not state which grasses would be included under such a ban, nor who would determine which grass species are “economically important.”

DLNR works closely with its partners including the ranching industry on finding appropriate tools for land management and feels existing consultation requirements will prevent damage to Hawai‘i’s ranching industry by biological control.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in opposition to this measure.

**JOSH GREEN, M.D.**  
Governor

**SYLVIA LUKE**  
Lt. Governor



**SHARON HURD**  
Chairperson, Board of Agriculture

**DEXTER KISHIDA**  
Deputy to the Chairperson

State of Hawai'i  
**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**  
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**TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD  
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE**

**BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

**APRIL 10, 2024  
1:15 PM**

**CONFERENCE ROOM 224 & VIDEOCONFERENCE**

**HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 189 HD1  
URGING THE STATE TO PROHIBIT THE INTRODUCTION OF BIOCONTROL  
AGENTS THAT MIGHT THREATEN ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT FORAGE GRASS  
SPECIES.**

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Concurrent Resolution No.189 HD1 urging the state to prohibit the introduction of biocontrol agents that might threaten economically important forage grass species. The Department strongly supports this measure.

The Department recognizes the role of ranchers as stewards of the land and specifically their role in managing the range lands of the state. Grazing is by far the most efficient way of managing our rangelands. The Department also acknowledges many rangeland grasses are introduced. However, introduced grasses typically have a quality which native grasses do not: they are suitable for use as forage for livestock. Targeting rangelands for biological control will create a cascade of issues. Native grasses are unsuitable for grazing so replacing forage with native grasses increases the acreage we would need to manage through mechanisms other than cattle, thereby increasing fire risks.



While not a biological control agent, we can look at the impacts of two-lined spittlebug on the kikuyu rangeland of Hawaii Island to see what kind of impacts biological control can have. In the areas devastated by the spittlebug, the rangeland has been replaced by a variety of weeds. Managing these weeds (fireweed, Christmas berry, pamakani, etc.) is more time consuming. Ranchers affected by the spittlebug are now caught with managing weeds they know are more damaging to the environment and have lost grazing lands for their cattle. Herd sizes have roughly dropped in half in areas where TLSB has devastated the range while management costs are sky rocketing.

The Department has both roles to develop biological control agents and steward their release into the environment by the Plant Pest Control Branch and to regulate the importation and release of biological control agents by the Plant Quarantine Branch. Until Board of Agriculture approval prospective biological agent occurs through the public hearing and rule making process for Chapter 4-71, the introduction and release into the environment of a potential biological control agent is prohibited. Both Plant Pest Control and Plant Quarantine Branches will examine closely any requests to move forward with targeting rangeland forage for biological control and its subsequent release.

Finally, the Department strongly supports a holistic approach to wildfire risk. Managing ecosystems will require the integration of a variety of tools and technologies to reduce wildfire risks as climate change exacerbates issues and the Department recognizes the need to maintain grazing capacity to mitigate these risks.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.



**Hawaii Cattlemen's Council, Inc.**

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

Senator Mike Gabbard, Chair

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

**HCR189**

**URGING THE STATE TO PROHIBIT THE INTRODUCTION OF BIOCONTROL AGENTS THAT MIGHT THREATEN ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT FORAGE GRASS SPECIES.**

Wednesday, April 10, 2024, 1:15PM  
Conference Room 224 & Videoconference

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

The Hawaii Cattlemen's Council **strongly supports HCR189 HD1** which recognizes the importance of rangelands management for land stewardship and urges the State to prohibit the introduction of biocontrol agents that might threaten economically important forage grass species.

As wildfires become more common and devastating, we turn our attention to ways to prevent these catastrophes. Some organizations and agencies have suggested the introduction of biocontrol to reduce the presence of invasive grasses, but these biocontrol agents have the potential to cause damage to important forage grass species. These forage grasses are important tools for ranchers to use to feed their herds, which in turn produces ecosystem services that benefit the wider community. Ensuring that ranchers can continue to successfully raise their cattle means that there is stewardship of the land and benefits such as carbon sequestration, soil health, invasive species removal, groundwater recharge, fire fuel load reduction – all on top of the production of beef.

We urge the State to protect these important forage grass species and ensure that Hawaii's cattlemen can continue to manage these lands. Rangeland management can actually be a tool for reducing wildfires, and ranchers have proven to be great assets when fires break out as they have the tools, equipment, personnel, and expertise of the area to assist. Whether it's through contributing water from the reservoirs they manage, cutting fuel breaks with dozers they operate, or generally keep fuel loads down through managed grazing, Hawaii's ranchers are an asset when it comes to wildfire management.

Hawaii's climate allows for grass growth at a rate only seen in a few places worldwide, which is an economic advantage necessary for our geographically isolated businesses to remain competitive in the domestic market. Introducing a biocontrol that has the potential of negatively impacting this strength, could have catastrophic consequences on our industry and ability to manage large landscapes.

The introduction of a biocontrol for grasses could be devastating to Hawaii's cattle industry. We are willing and able to be part of the solution for wildfire management and urge the State to recognize the importance of forage grasses that could be unintentionally targeted by a biocontrol meant for another species.



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Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this matter. 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



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April 10, 2024

HEARING BEFORE THE  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

**TESTIMONY ON HCR 189, HD1**  
URGING THE STATE TO PROHIBIT THE INTRODUCTION OF BIOCONTROL  
AGENTS THAT MIGHT THREATEN ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT FORAGE GRASS  
SPECIES

Conference Room 224 & Videoconference  
1:15 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 HCR 189, HD1**, which urges the State to prohibit the introduction of biocontrol agents that might threaten economically important forage grass species.

As wildfires become more common and devastating, we turn our attention to ways to prevent these catastrophes. Some organizations and agencies have suggested the introduction of biocontrol to reduce the presence of invasive grasses, but these biocontrol agents have the potential to cause damage to important forage grass species. These forage grasses are important tools for ranchers to use to feed their herds, which in turn produces ecosystem services that benefit the wider community. Ensuring that ranchers can continue to successfully raise their cattle means that there is stewardship of the land and benefits such as carbon sequestration, soil health, invasive species removal, groundwater recharge, and fire fuel load reduction – all on top of the production of beef.

We urge the State to protect these important forage grass species and ensure that Hawai'i's cattlemen can continue to manage these lands. Rangeland management can actually be a tool for reducing wildfires, and ranchers have proven to be great assets when fires break out as they have the tools, equipment, personnel, and expertise of the area to assist. Whether it's through contributing water from the reservoirs they manage, cutting fuel breaks with dozers they operate, or generally keeping fuel loads down through

managed grazing, Hawai'i's ranchers are an asset when it comes to wildfire management.

The introduction of biocontrol for grasses could be devastating to Hawai'i's cattle industry. We are willing and able to be part of the solution for wildfire management and urge the State to recognize the importance of forage grasses that could be unintentionally targeted by a biocontrol meant for another species.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on this important subject.



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HCR189hd1, URGING THE STATE TO PROHIBIT THE INTRODUCTION OF BIOCONTROL AGENTS THAT MIGHT THREATEN ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT FORAGE GRASS SPECIES.

Sen AEN Hearing – 1:15 PM  
Wednesday, April 10, 2024

Testimony By: Larry Jeffs  
Position: Support

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

I am Larry Jeffs, owner and operator of Larry Jeffs Farms, LLC. We have more than 42 years of Hawaii farm experience on Molokai and Oahu. Our family farms grow about 1 million pounds of import replacement produce weekly. I am a volunteer director, serving as Chair of the West Oahu Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). I have been an officer of the Hawaii Farm Bureau for many years.

We appreciate the recognition of ranchers as land stewards of the rangelands that represent about 750,000 acres of the state's total land mass. As rangeland stewards, ranchers are an essential and active part of wildfire management. Livestock grazing is a practical tool for managing forage grasses to reduce the threat of fire.

HCR189hd1 is supported because introducing biocontrol agents in these grasslands might cause unintended consequences for ranching and beef cattle production. We strongly support policies, funding and other resources for the undermanagement of vegetation on lands in the public and private sector.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony.

**HCR-189-HD-1**

Submitted on: 4/8/2024 2:57:19 PM

Testimony for AEN on 4/10/2024 1:15:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Sara Moore	Testifying for KEALIA RANCH	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please approve HCR189 in support of Hawaii's ranchers.

**HCR-189-HD-1**

Submitted on: 4/6/2024 9:12:30 AM

Testimony for AEN on 4/10/2024 1:15:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
penny levin	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha;

The downhill invasiveness of many grasses originally introduced for pasture decades ago is well known; they have become an ongoing problem for farmers as well as in natural habitats and riparian areas. At the same time, ranch lands are challenged by numerous weed species including fireweed which is toxic to ungulates, and for which no solution has yet been developed. The cattle ranchers association names no specific grasses that are being targeted for biocontrol, yet, is asking for a blanket ban which seems excessive. Some of the forage grasses and feeds introduced to Hawaii in last century have been rapidly invasive - molasses grass being one example, which can also cause highly allergic reactions in some people. The importance of good pasture feed for cattle is recognized, and at the same time, we need to recognize the critical necessity of protecting the diminishing native habitats we still have, most especially for their role in watershed protection. Non-native grasses and shrubs/trees are significant drivers in wildfires in our islands. This issue should be dealt with on a case by case basis by the proper agencies with the proper expertise to determine degree of invasiveness, and not the legislature.

Mahalo for the opportunity to comment.

**HCR-189-HD-1**

Submitted on: 4/6/2024 7:13:59 AM

Testimony for AEN on 4/10/2024 1:15:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Woody Child	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I STRONGLY SUPPORT HCR189.

**HCR-189-HD-1**

Submitted on: 4/6/2024 9:55:21 AM

Testimony for AEN on 4/10/2024 1:15:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Jimmy Greenwell	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this measure. It sends a clear message that we need to be very careful in how we use biocontrol technology. It has its place, but we must remember the critical need to keep our ranchers and farmers in business through their resource management practices as they provide stewardship for over 20% of the land in our State. Ranchers are grass farmers who use cattle and other grazing species to generate income and food AND IMPORTANTLY IN THE PROCESS to manage the landscape to control fuel loads, foster biodiversity, minimize bare soil, mitigate erosion and loss of topsoil, improve water qualities such as retention and infiltration, etc. We cannot let biocontrols risk damage to those grass species which play such a vital role in our ecosystem. Thank you

**HCR-189-HD-1**

Submitted on: 4/6/2024 1:58:24 PM

Testimony for AEN on 4/10/2024 1:15:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Jacqueline S. Ambrose	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

Yes to;- URGING THE STATE TO PROHIBIT THE INTRODUCTION OF BIOCONTROL AGENTS THAT MIGHT THREATEN ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT FORAGE GRASS SPECIES.

**HCR-189-HD-1**

Submitted on: 4/6/2024 2:23:35 PM

Testimony for AEN on 4/10/2024 1:15:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Randy Cabral	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Strong support

**HCR-189-HD-1**

Submitted on: 4/9/2024 9:37:03 AM

Testimony for AEN on 4/10/2024 1:15:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
carolyn auwelo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Since the fires in 2023 there has been talk about seeking out biocontrols for "invasive african grasses" that have been blamed for the fire - namely buffel grass. The reality is buffel grass was brought to Hawaii and intentionally released for erosion control and forage for livestock. The problem is not the grass but lack of management and planning for fuel load suppression and wildfire suppression.

I support this resolution because we need to protect our forages to feed our cattle and continue managing the land. Buffel grass is a valuable forage that makes agriculture possible on marginal lands that are usually not feasible for other agriculture due to soil conditions, topography or lack of water. These areas are naturally arid. If buffel grass was not there, another, equally flammable vegetation would be. The advantage of buffel grass is that **IT IS MANAGEABLE WITH PROPER GRAZING**. If we tamper with this and lose buffel grass, we may also hinder our ability to manage these lands in an environmentally friendly way.

Good grazing managers can be a solution to wildfire management and we need to support them staying in business. Unleashing a biocontrol that would damage an important forage undermines our agricultural economy, food security and can further an important part of our community that has the ability to manage these highly modified lands.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

aloha,

carolyn auwelo.