

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
KA 'OIHANA MAHI'AI
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**TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE**

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS

**APRIL 12, 2024
10:00 AM
CONFERENCE ROOM 325 & VIDEOCONFERENCE**

**SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 178
URGING THE STATE TO PROHIBIT THE INTRODUCTION OF BIOCONTROL
AGENTS THAT MIGHT THREATEN ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT FORAGE GRASS
SPECIES.**

Chair Gates, Vice Chair Kahaloa and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Concurrent Resolution No.178 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 In the areas devastated by the spittlebug, the rangeland has been replaced by a variety of weeds.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.

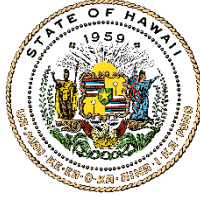
The Department has both roles to develop biological control agents and steward their release into the environment by the Plant Pest Control Branch and to regulate the importation and release of biological control agents by the Plant Quarantine Branch. Until Board of Agriculture approval prospective biological 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.

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

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DAWN N.S. CHANG
CHAIRPERSON
BOARD OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
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FIRST DEPUTY
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BOATING AND OCEAN RECREATION
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CONSERVATION AND RESOURCES
ENFORCEMENT
ENGINEERING
FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE
HISTORIC PRESERVATION
KAHOOLAWE ISLAND RESERVE COMMISSION
LAND
STATE PARKS

Testimony of
DAWN N. S. CHANG
Chairperson

Before the House Committee on
AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

Friday, April 12, 2024
10:00 AM

State Capitol, Conference Room 325 and Via Videoconference

In consideration of
SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 178
URGING THE STATE TO PROHIBIT THE INTRODUCTION OF BIOCONTROL
AGENTS THAT MIGHT THREATEN ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT FORAGE
GRASS SPECIES

Senate Concurrent Resolution 178 urges the State to prohibit introducing biocontrol agents that might threaten economically important forage grass species. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) 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.

LARRY JEFTS FARMS, LLC
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SCR178, URGING THE STATE TO PROHIBIT THE INTRODUCTION OF BIOCONTROL AGENTS
THAT MIGHT THREATEN ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT FORAGE GRASS SPECIES.

House AGR Hearing – 10:00 AM
Friday, April 12, 2024

Testimony By: Larry Jeffs
Position: Support

Chair Gates, Vice Chair Kahaloa, and Members of the House AGR 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.

SCR178 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.



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April 12, 2024

HEARING BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

TESTIMONY ON SCR 178

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

Conference Room 325 & Videoconference
10:00 AM

Aloha Chair Gates, Vice-Chair Kahaloa, 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 178, 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.

SCR-178

Submitted on: 4/11/2024 8:23:14 AM

Testimony for AGR on 4/12/2024 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lani Petrie	Kapapala Ranch	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support prohibiting the introduction of biocontrol species for the purpose of inhibiting forage production. The State has already allocated much funding towards the threats of the two lined spittle bug's devastation of grass lands and it's threat to Hawaii's rangelands and the ranching industry. It doesn't make sense to actively introduce another threat to our industry.



Hawaii Cattlemen's Council, Inc.

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

Rep. Cedric Asuega Gates, Chair

Rep. Kirstin Kahaloa, Vice Chair

SCR178

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

Friday, April 12, 2024, 10:00AM
Conference Room 325 & Videoconference

Chair Gates, Vice Chair Kahaloa, and Members of the Committee,

The Hawaii Cattlemen's Council **strongly supports SCR178** 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. Instead, a holistic management approach should be taken. 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 important of forage grasses that could be unintentionally targeted by a biocontrol meant for another species.

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

SCR-178

Submitted on: 4/10/2024 3:20:14 PM

Testimony for AGR on 4/12/2024 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Randy Cabral	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support

SCR-178

Submitted on: 4/10/2024 5:20:25 PM

Testimony for AGR on 4/12/2024 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Woody Child	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I Strongly support SCR178.

SCR-178

Submitted on: 4/10/2024 5:54:51 PM

Testimony for AGR on 4/12/2024 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Katherine Skow	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose this as I agree with the DNLR's statements. Mahalo, Katherine Skow

SCR-178

Submitted on: 4/10/2024 5:57:58 PM

Testimony for AGR on 4/12/2024 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stephanie Skow, MD	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I **oppose SCR178**, as I agree with the DLNR, these grasses are a wildfire hazard. We would do better with rewilding, planting native species.

Thank you!

Stephanie Skow, MD

SCR-178

Submitted on: 4/10/2024 6:18:41 PM

Testimony for AGR on 4/12/2024 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Gordon LaBedz	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

THIS GRASS IS A DANGEROUS FIRE HAZARD!!!

SCR-178

Submitted on: 4/10/2024 9:17:22 PM

Testimony for AGR on 4/12/2024 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jason Moniz	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair Gates, Vice Chair Kahaloa and members for the House Agriculture Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in SUPPORT of SCR178.

Biocontrol agents are important tools utilized to assist in the control of agriculture pests and also to protect our natural resources. The Hawaii Department of Agriculture goes through great lengths researching, experimenting, propagating, and releasing agents that are beneficial for this purpose. The Hawaii Board of Agriculture further reviews and approves these agents before they can be released. Great care is taken to assure that agents approved have no undesirable effects on our native fauna and flora. The same assurances should be afforded to protect grasses important for grazing livestock and other agriculture crops.

LATE

SCR-178

Submitted on: 4/11/2024 3:17:37 PM

Testimony for AGR on 4/12/2024 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jimmy Gomes	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support SCR178