



The Senate Ka 'Aha Kenekoa

STATE CAPITOL
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

July 27, 2023

Sharon Hurd, Director
Hawaii State Department of Agriculture
1428 South King Street
Honolulu, HI 96814

Subject: Concerns Regarding Little Fire Ant, Coqui Frog, and Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle Infestations on O'ahu and Kaua'i

Dear Director Hurd,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to express my grave concerns regarding the ongoing little fire ant (LFA) infestations on O'ahu, the alarming O'ahu coqui frog population estimate provided during a November 2022 Waimanalo neighborhood board meeting, and the recent reports of Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle (CRB) establishment on Kaua'i.

Recently, a constituent shared a social media post by the O'ahu Invasive Species Committee¹ indicating at least 30 active LFA infestations on the island of O'ahu, with 11 of those located in Senate District 24. As you know, LFA are among the worst invasive pests present in the state, and prior infestations of LFA in Kāne'ohe and Kahalu'u highlight the critical need for broad public awareness and vigilant monitoring to detect and address these infestations effectively.

Since viewing the post, I've been informed of allegations that several businesses in Waimanalo may be knowingly transporting and offering for sale plant products that are infested with LFA. This raises profound concerns about consumer protection necessitating a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of Hawaii Department of Agriculture (HDOA) and the Office of Consumer Protection.

Secondly, I was shocked to learn that at a November 2022 Waimanalo neighborhood board meeting² an HDOA official gave a "very conservative" estimate of approximately 10,000 coqui frogs in Waimanalo. That number is alarming. It poses serious threats to our local biodiversity, tranquility, and the well-being of residents on O'ahu, especially in Ko'olaupoko.

¹ https://www.instagram.com/p/Cu2rSPTsFFC/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==
² https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=8290051301067328 (Discussed at 26:30 mark)

In addition to the concerns mentioned above, the recent detection of CRB on the island of Kaua'i underscores the urgency of implementing comprehensive and science-based programs to protect uninfested areas of O'ahu and the neighbor islands. My understanding is that proposed amendments to chapter 72 of the Hawai'i Administrative Rules (HAR) provide an opportunity to strengthen the Hawaii Department of Agriculture's (HDOA) ability to swiftly address invasive species incursions, and it is vital to ensure their swift implementation to safeguard Hawaii's agriculture and natural ecosystems.

Given the severity of these infestations and the scale of the coqui frog population estimate, I kindly request your immediate attention and response to the following questions:

1) Little Fire Ant:

- a) As there are multiple entities involved in invasive species management, please briefly explain the HDOA roles and responsibilities in addressing LFA detection, monitoring, and eradication.
- b) Please provide an update of HDOA's work to address the active LFA infestation sites on O'ahu. As treatment at these sites take time, please indicate new LFA sites that were identified in the last six months.
- c) Is it this administration's objective to eradicate LFA on the island of O'ahu?
- d) My understanding is that under the prior administration, the HDOA proposed amendments to Chapter 72 of the Hawaii Administrative Rules (HAR) include, among other things, explicit authority for HDOA to prohibit the movement of plants or other material that is infested with a pest and offered for sale to the public.
 - i) What is the position of this administration on the proposed rules package?
 - ii) What is the status of this rules package? Will the package be submitted for public hearing?
 - (1) If so, when? And if not, why not?
 - iii) Is it HDOA's position that without the rules, the HDOA may not prohibit the sale of plants or other material that is infested with an invasive pest?

*If that is the case, I would like to understand how that position comports with the routine seizure of large pests like snakes or with the Dept. of Health authority to close food service establishments during the rat lungworm or Hepatitis C outbreaks that took place pre-pandemic.

iv) Is the HDOA aware of reports that businesses are knowingly spreading LFA in their plants or other material being offered for sale. If HDOA is aware, what are you doing about it?

2). Coqui Frogs:

- a) What is the HDOA's strategy for managing and reducing the coqui frog population in Waimanalo and other affected areas?
- b) Is the Coqui population in Waimanalo the only known infestation area on O'ahu? If not, where are the other known areas?
- c) What resources and measures will be deployed to control the coqui frog infestation, and what is the timeline for their implementation?

3). CRB

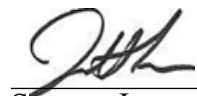
- a) Why was the CRB program allowed to lapse on June 30, 2023?
- a) What measures is the HDOA implementing to control and prevent the spread of Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle on O'ahu and neighboring islands, following the recent detection on Kauai?
- b) Please detail the actions and initiatives that will be funded by the \$2.5 million CRB appropriation passed in HB 300 this year, including your proposed timeline for implementation.

I understand the challenges posed by invasive species require strategic and coordinated efforts. The gravity of these situations necessitates immediate and transparent action to protect our environment and communities. I am committed to a dialogue with your department on how communities in the affected areas, including Ko'olaupoko, can mobilize to assist your efforts. In order to do so, clarity on the above questions is necessary.

Your response is respectfully requested by the **close of business on Wednesday, August 2, 2023.**

Thank you for your attention to these pressing matters. I eagerly await your reply. Should you require any further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Mahalo Nui Loa,



Senator Jarrett Keohokalole