LINDA LINGLE
Governor

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Hawai'i Invasive Species Council

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Chairpersons and Members
Hawaii Invasive Species Council
State of Hawaii

Co-Chairs and Council Members:

SUBJECT: Call for state agencies to utilize the Hawaii-Pacific Weed Risk Assessment (HPWRA) to assist decision makers in determining whether to accept or reject species proposed for crop or other planting purposes. .

The purpose of the weed risk assessment is to identify high-risk species (likely invasive pests plants), allowing us to make informed decisions that will reduce the economic and ecological harm caused by invasive plants in Hawaii and on other Pacific Islands. The weed risk assessment is a pro-active tool to identify plants that pose the highest risk of causing ecological or economic harm. Many introduced plants provide significant benefits to humans, and such benefits also need to be considered when making planting or importation decisions.

The HPWRA uses 49 questions to obtain a score for each species. A high scoring plant poses a high risk of becoming an invasive pest in Hawaii and other Pacific Islands. It is based on the species' biology, geographic origin, and pest status elsewhere as well as published information on the species' behavior in Hawaii.

Several systems were examined for use in Hawai'i. The Australian AQIS system was most promising after simple modifications. Based on test runs with nearly 200 plant species, the weed risk assessment system correctly identified approximately 95% of serious invasive plants in Hawaii and other Pacific Islands. The system correctly classifies 80-85% of non-pest plants.

The HPWRA system is an objective, effective, transparent tool for identifying and screening out invasive plants. If HPWRA ratings were used for importation and planting decisions, Hawai'i's invasive plant problems could be greatly reduced.

Recommend: That state agencies conducting planting operations request HPWRA scores when available as one of the tools to assist decision makers in determining whether or not to plant a species. For species that have scored as potentially invasive in Hawai'i, this information should underscore the need for containment plans or remediation efforts if it becomes necessary.