



Testimony Presented Before the  
State of Hawai'i Board of Land and Natural Resources  
Friday, May 24, 2024

By  
David Lassner, President  
University of Hawai'i  
WRITTEN ONLY

**Agenda Item C-5: Approval of an Interagency Memorandum of Understanding for the prevention, rapid response, and control or eradication of high priority pests among the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture, the Department of Land and Natural Resources, and the University of Hawai'i**

Aloha Chair Chang and Members of the Board of Land and Natural Resources,

I write in strong support of the approval of the Interagency Memorandum of Understanding (“MOU”) among the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture, the Department of Land and Natural Resources, and the University of Hawai'i for the prevention, rapid response, and control or eradication of high-priority pests.

The recent and rapid spread of little fire ants, coconut rhinoceros beetles, and coqui frogs is a matter of immediate and grave concern for the well-being of Hawai'i. These pests pose a tremendous threat to our standard of living, the health of humans and pets, our nursery and landscape industries, our tourism economy, our endemic and endangered wildlife, and our culture.

Unfortunately, widespread infestations already exist of little fire ants and coqui frogs on Hawai'i Island and of coconut rhinoceros beetle on O'ahu. Dozens of infestations of little fire ants have alarmingly materialized in the past year+ on O'ahu, and they have now also been detected on Kaua'i, Maui, and Lāna'i. Coconut rhinoceros beetle infestations now occur on Kaua'i and have recently been found on Maui and Hawai'i Island. Persistent coqui frog infestations have also vexed Maui and O'ahu for years, and previously Kaua'i.

To prevent these pests from spreading further, early detection and rapid response for new outbreaks, focused intensive control and eradication efforts for incipient infestations and unified long-term control efforts are required.

The Hawai'i Department of Agriculture, Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources, and the University of Hawai'i, each with their unique and crucial roles, are united in this effort. Recognizing the urgency of these battles, the dedicated staff across the agencies have worked tirelessly over the past few months to establish a framework for close coordination and collaboration. This collective effort has led to the creation of the Interagency Memorandum of Understanding you are considering today.

Chair Chang  
Members of the BLNR  
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The University of Hawai'i is fully engaged and committed to doing everything it can to protect Hawai'i from these pests, including applied control research efforts in the field and the labs.

We thank you for your support of the adoption of this MOU.