

## United States Senate

October 31, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue  
Secretary  
United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)  
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable David Bernhardt  
Secretary  
United States Department of the Interior (DOI)  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretaries Perdue and Bernhardt:

I am writing to request your immediate intervention to manage, control, and eradicate a longhorn beetle species (*Acalolepta aesthetica*) native to Australia and first discovered in Hawaii in September 2013. Current assistance from the USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) at the Pacific Basin Agricultural Research Center (PBARC) has already made a difference for Hawaii Island residents and farmers, but further science support is needed from:

- the Institute for Pacific Island Forestry (IPIF) and the U.S. Forest Service (FS); and
- the Pacific Island Ecosystem Research Center (PIERC) and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).

In order to operationalize research findings, coordination and management from the following services within your departments will be critical:

- Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS);
- National Park Service (NPS); and
- Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS).

Finally, please act within existing rules and regulations to give a full and expeditious review of the State of Hawaii's application for funding from the USDA to address this

emerging pest before it establishes and spreads further.

## **BACKGROUND**

*A. aesthetica* arrived in Hawaii in September 2013, but its potential impacts to U.S. agriculture and Hawaii's environment are only now becoming clear. Currently, *A. aesthetica* has been found from Puna to Hilo on Hawaii Island, but its range may be greater because the only confirmed attractant to trap the insect for detection and study is the use of lighting at night.

Although *A. aesthetica* is not a pest in its native Australia, in Hawaii, scientists from the Hawaii Department of Agriculture believes that the larval beetle poses a threat to trees of significant economic and cultural importance:

- Various citrus (*Citrus* spp.)
- Queen sago palm (*Cycas circinalis*)
- Cacao (*Theobroma cacao*)
- Breadfruit (*Artocarpus altilis*)
- Kukui (*Aleurites moluccanus*)

Based on observations in Hawaii, larvae of *A. aesthetica* can cause extensive damage to trees by burrowing through their trunks, resulting ultimately in the death and physical collapse of affected trees. Thus, the beetle poses a direct threat to the \$3.85 billion/year citrus industry, Hawaii's nascent cacao industry, and the kukui (the state tree) and breadfruit trees, which are revered in Hawaii for their importance to Native Hawaiians.

At present, there is an alarming dearth of scientific knowledge about *A. aesthetica*, which means that efforts to manage the pest and prevent its spread in Hawaii and to the mainland United States are suboptimal. Priorities for research include:

- Understanding the basic biology and ecology with a focus on existing and potential hosts;
- Development of trapping and other monitoring tools;
- Pathways analysis to understand how the beetle spreads in order to prevent and control further establishment in Hawaii, and introduction to citrus producing states such as Florida and California;
- Forensic analysis of how the pest originally came to Hawaii to help prevent further introductions;
- Testing of chemical controls and the development of treatments to manage the pest;
- Exploration for natural predators in its native range and other steps towards biological control;

- Science-based advice for the State of Hawaii and the County of Hawaii on appropriate government-level responses to the pest; and
- Development and dissemination of best practices to farmers and individuals to help curb the spread of the pest.

With this scientific foundation, federal land managers should act in coordination with the state, county, and private landowners to implement the practices identified by researchers to contain, mitigate, and hopefully eradicate *A. Aesthetica*. In particular, federal sites such as Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, Hawaii Experimental Tropical Forest, and the Hakalau National Wildlife Refuge should cooperate to control *A. Aesthetica* regardless of where it is found in Hawaii.

The threat to U.S. agriculture and Hawaii's environment justifies immediate, strong intervention from the federal government in order to prevent harm to the U.S. economy and federally managed lands in Hawaii—especially while the threat of *A. Aesthetica* is still confined to a fairly limited area on Hawaii Island. Should it spread and establish across a wider U.S. geography, its impacts could be quite severe, particularly in Florida where Hawaii experts believe that the hot, humid climate could be conducive to its growth and colonization.

Sincerely,



BRIAN SCHATZ  
United States Senator