SB 522 would impose a two-year moratorium on introductions of alien plants, animals, and microorganisms into the state, other than for remediation of medical, agricultural, or ecological disasters, or for filming, performance or exhibition.

Our statement on this measure is compiled from voluntarily submitted opinions of the listed reviewers and does not constitute an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

The measure is certainly well intended and speaks to the appalling threat posed by alien species to Hawaii's remaining native habitat. However, the university scientists commenting on this measure unanimously felt that it goes too far, and they expressed strong concerns regarding unwanted consequences of implementing this bill as written. Three general issues were raised in their comments:

1. The proposed moratorium would effectively shut down both research and teaching in fields crucial to the vitality of the university's stature as an incubator of knowledge and technology. It would severely limit the ability of
the state to achieve the governor's stated goal of becoming a world leader in the field of biotechnology. It would threaten or cause interruption of the flow of millions of dollars of federal funding currently supporting such research, and it would instill uncertainty as to the viability of future federal funding in these important areas.

2. It fails to account for existing stringent controls and mechanisms to scrutinize and manage research projects that employ exotic microorganisms. The Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC), staffed through the University's Environmental Health and Safety office, is comprised of leading scientists active in biotechnological research, representatives of state and federal agencies with oversight responsibilities, and experts from the private sector. Proposals to import biological materials or to conduct genetic modifications for research purposes all are brought before this committee for close examination of procedures and protocols for safety, biocontainment, and thorough management of research materials at all stages. This oversight of research operates as an adjunct to existing state Department of Agriculture oversight responsibilities.

3. Finally, the measure fails to target the most problematic source of introductions, which are those relating to incidental arrivals via air or ship and deliberate acts of smuggling. This bill will penalize beneficial research and technological advances while providing no leverage on these illegal or incidental introductions.

A number of past legislative proposals addressed the threat of alien species introductions, the most productive of which have been those that place inspectors and equipment at ports of entry. Although the threat to native flora and fauna posed by exotic species is a grave concern, we suggest that this proposed measure would do more harm than good.