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HB 1082 and HB 1083
RELATING TO IMPORTATION OF EELS

Statement for
House Committee on Water, Land Use Development and Hawaiian Homes
Public Hearing, 2 March 1977

by

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HB 1082 would make an appropriation to the Department of Land and Natural Resources for the importation of Anguilliformes eels for experimental purposes. HB 1083 would amend Sec. 150A-6 of Hawaii Revised Statutes to make it legal to import and maintain a population of up to 50,000 of these eels. This statement on the two bills has been submitted for review to the legislative subcommittee of the Environmental Center of the University of Hawaii. It does not represent an institutional position of the University.

Although the appropriation that would be provided by HB 1082 would be expended for the importation of eels solely for experimental purposes, the eventual objective must surely be to make it possible to raise Anguilliforme eels in Hawaii for food. Without question eel is a food delicacy. However, potential serious environmental problems with raising such eels in Hawaii are the reason for the specific ban against their importation provided in HRS Sec. 150A-6.

It must be recognized that, although the eels in question live in fresh water, they return to the ocean to breed. Preventing escape of captive eels would be extremely difficult, especially because they can travel for some distance on land. If any escaped, they might easily become established in our streams, and threaten their unique fauna which includes some endangered species.

Even associated with an experimental program, therefore, there is a grave environmental risk. Extensive recognition was given to this risk when importation of these eels was proposed in 1973. The potential benefit of the importation is no greater now than it was then, and the risk has not been abated.