

# Judge delays Molokai cattle ruling

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Circuit Judge Edwin Honda yesterday said he needed more time to decide whether the state may proceed with a controversial program to slaughter all cattle on Molokai.

Honda told attorneys for both the state and a group of Molokai ranchers not to expect a ruling before Tuesday. He earlier had said he'd try to rule "within a day" of a hearing that was held Thursday morning.

At issue is whether the state is justified and acting lawfully in its mandatory program to kill all cattle on Molokai to rid the island of bovine tuberculosis.

About 8,000 cattle have been slaughtered since the government launched its effort to eradicate bovine TB last fall. State officials believe an island-wide slaughter is the only way to guarantee eradication of the disease, which has lingered on Molokai for many years and stymied the island's cattle industry.

The state also believes it should proceed with its program out of fairness to the roughly 200 ranchers who cooperated and now expect eradication of the disease.

About 700 head of cattle remain on Molokai, owned by 19 ranchers who have defied the government program on the grounds that their animals are healthy.

The ranchers, making a last-

ditch effort to save their animals, contend that slaughtering their cattle will hurt them economically and disrupt their lifestyles. They also note that of the roughly 8,000 cattle killed so far, only one animal was found to have TB lesions.

Honda held another hearing in his chambers yesterday morning to hear more arguments on various questions he said he didn't have an opportunity to ask at Thursday's hearing. Among them was

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whether the state Board of Agriculture had identified an epidemic or emergency on Molokai.

Robert Harris, attorney for the ranchers, said he doesn't mind the judge's taking more time to study the matter.

David Waters, a state deputy attorney general representing the Board of Agriculture, said the delay won't upset the timetable for restocking ranches owned by people who complied with the program.