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HB 155 RELATING TO ANGUILLA ROSTRATA

Statement for
House Committee on Agriculture
Public Hearing, 2 February 1983

By
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HB 155 would modify the present prohibition against the importation of anguillid eels in HRS 150A-6 so as to allow a government agency to import the particular species, Angilla rostrata, for experimental purposes. This statement on the bill reflects concerns expressed in Environmental Center reviews of bills introduced in previous legislative sessions that were intended to allow importation of the eels. It does not reflect an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

Because the question of allowing the importation of anguillid eels (unagi) has been considered so often and so long, it seems unnecessary to repeat all of the arguments in favor and opposed. In reviews for the legislature last year we recognized that neither the economic success of a unagi industry that is the motive for allowing the eel importations, nor the escape of unagi to Hawaiian streams with serious detrimental effects are certain. We recommended that the environmental concerns be referred to the Animal Species Advisory Committee of the Department of Land and Natural Resources for study, and that the economic concerns be referred to some agency with resource-economics competence, before eel importation was allowed. It may be that those in favor of allowing the eel importation thought that the passage of one of the bills was assured in spite of the opposition, or possibly that they were worried that the results of the studies recommended would be adverse to their desire. For whatever reason, the studies recommended have not been done, so far as we are aware.

HB 155 would at least restrict initial unagi importation to importation for experimental purposes alone. However, it is difficult to see what could be accomplished by experimentation except on a very large scale. The economics of an unagi industry could not be determined by a laboratory-scale study. The environmental effects of unagi escapes could not be well tested except by releases of unagi to a stream, and with such releases could probably not be reversed. The possibilities of accidental release of the unagi could not be tested by any experiment.

Hence, it to seems pertinent to recommend again that both the economics of and

the environmental effects associated with a unagi industry be evaluated before any importation of the eels is permitted.