

WILL NON-NATIVE SPECIES *be banned from the* USA?



A new bill entitled “The Non-native Wildlife Invasion Prevention Act” has been introduced into the US House of Representatives, and PIJAC’s Marshall Meyers believes that it will do far more harm than good.

The legislation “The Non-native Wildlife Invasion Prevention Act” (H.R. 6311), which was introduced to the House Natural Resources Committee’s Subcommittee of Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans at a hearing on June 26, 2008, proposes to stop the introduction of non-native wildlife species which are believed to have a detrimental effect on the economy, environment or human or animal species’ health. According to Mr Marshall Meyers, Executive Vice President and General Counsel of the American Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC), the H.R. 6311 legislation would include most animals which are currently kept as pets in the U.S, such as dogs and cats as well as fish, reptiles, birds and small mammals. If it is allowed to go ahead, he says, it will threaten to shut down the U.S. pet industry.

“PIJAC believes that effective measures should be in place to reduce the risk of the adverse impacts of invasive species,” Meyers said at the hearing, which was led by Del. Madeleine Z. Bordallo (D-GU). “In the current economic environment, Congress must carefully consider both the financial costs and benefits of imported species. The loss of certain high-income fish, for example, could result in the collapse of the entire ornamental fish industry and have significant repercussions for product manufacturers, distributors and retailers throughout the country.”

Mr Meyers told the committee that the bill was overly-simplistic and didn’t reasonably address the complexity of the invasive species problem in the U.S.

“Unless socio-economic and cultural considerations are adequately accounted for in this process, numerous domesticated animals (e.g., domestic cats and livestock) are likely to qualify for the ‘black list’ as there is considerable scientific data to indicate that these non-native wildlife species, as currently defined by H.R. 6311, have caused substantial economic harm when they become feral,” he said.

Supporters of the bill, such as Defenders of Wildlife, argue that the current system lacks regulation, allowing non-native species

to enter the U.S. without prior risk assessment. On the Defenders of Wildlife website www.defenders.org, they state: “Every year, thousands of non-native wild animals are legally imported to the United States to supply the pet, aquarium, live food, live bait, and other industries. Some of these animals, once released, may become established and invasive in their surroundings. Invasive species can carry severe consequences for native wildlife populations and ecosystems, can threaten human and wildlife health, and can cause extensive economic losses.”

In her opening statement at the subcommittee hearing, Del. Madeleine Z. Bordallo said: “Intentional introduction is one of the primary pathways by which invasive species become established.

Currently, there is no law that requires species to be evaluated for risk before import. The Lacey Act allows species to be placed on an “injurious list”, but this can only occur after they have caused serious and widespread harm to the economy, environment, and to human and animal species’ health.

“On average, however, it takes the Fish and Wildlife Service four years to list a species as injurious. In the meantime, the impacts caused by a particular species are often irreversible, thereby increasing taxpayers’ costs to mitigate what can be irremediable environmental damage,” she said.

Mr Meyers disagrees; he believes that the majority of non-native species which have been in the pet trade for decades have caused no harm, and in the cases where they have, impacts were generally localised in settings which had already undergone habitat loss and degradation.

“Is the mere absence of biological data, because it does not exist, sufficient to compel the USFWS to ban a species that has been imported in the millions or farmed in this country for 30 to 50 years absent evidence of invasiveness?” he said.

“Based on such a standard, common goldfish, many tropical fish and myriad common species of birds and reptiles would be banned from the entire United States if it could be demonstrated that ... there is a likelihood that environmental conditions suitable for the establishment or spread ... exist anywhere in the United States. Marine organisms would be banned in Kansas because they might become established in Hawaiian waters. A parakeet would be banned in Minnesota because it could survive in south Florida.”

To read Marshall Meyer’s or other witnesses’ testimonies in full, go to http://resourcescommittee.house.gov/index.php?option=com_jcalpro&Itemid=54&extmode=view&extid=197