



Ministerial Statement

By

The Hon. Walter H. Roban, JP, MP

Minister of Home Affairs

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Invasive Alien Species Act 2021

Mr. Speaker, today I am tabling the Bill entitled the *Invasive Aliens Species Act 2021*; legislation that will greatly enhance the island's biosecurity against the introduction and spread of pest species.

Mr. Speaker, Invasive alien species, are “*plants, animals, pathogens and other organisms that are non-native to an ecosystem, and which may cause economic or environmental harm or adversely affect human health. In particular, they negatively impact local ecosystems and ecosystem functions through competition, predation, or transmission of pathogens*”.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that the tabling of this Bill is one watershed moment in the Government's efforts to mitigate the

effects of Climate Change. More will be coming on the subject of Climate Change. Many believe that the impact of climate change will mainly be seen in rising tides and stronger hurricanes. The threat to our ecosystem is another risk that cannot be ignored. Honourable Members will be aware that this year the United Kingdom (UK) serves as the President Nation of COP26. They have published five campaigns for avoiding dangerous climate change. One of these campaigns is titled ***“Nature”***

Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence, I will quote sections from the UK’s description of their Nature campaign:

“Humanity faces the twin threats of climate change and biodiversity loss which, together, are undermining nature’s capacity to sustain healthy life, nutritious diets and national economies. The two are inextricably linked and need to be tackled together urgently, with equal ambition

They go on to write:

“We will use our COP26 Presidency to build on the foundations laid at the 2019 UN Climate Action Summit, working with governments, businesses and civic organisations to raise ambition on tackling the drivers of climate change and biodiversity loss, mobilise financing to protect and restore critical ecosystems, and kick-start a just rural transition towards sustainable land use to benefit people, climate and nature.”

Mr. Speaker, the Departments in the Ministry of Home Affairs, particularly the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) are very focused on the protection of our delicate ecosystem. This Bill offers DENR greater powers to protect against further incursions of species that could threaten and indeed destroy our ecosystem.

Unfortunately, modern global travel and supply chain, while essential to Bermuda's economic survival, also makes the island increasingly vulnerable to the introduction and proliferation of invasive species. New species have been and still are deliberately introduced to Bermuda with the best of intentions; including as pets, as food or for horticultural interest. They can also arrive unintentionally as hitchhikers on planes and boats. Regardless of how they arrive, some species have and undoubtedly will in the future, adapt aggressively, spreading quickly in their new environment to our detriment, and so become invasive.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to illustrate the destructive impacts of invasive species with two telling examples. The first is on the island of Guam in the west Pacific. Unfortunately, they have a problem with the Brown Tree Snake. Like our island home Guam has no natural predators against snakes. In the 1950s the Brown Tree Snake arrived, likely as a hitchhiker in cargo planes from the adjacent Solomon Islands. Since that time, it proliferated, spreading throughout the island, causing significant damage to the island's economy and ecology.

As its name suggests, it is a gifted climber as well as a voracious predator. In 2016 the US Department of Agriculture reported that... *“On Guam, the direct damages from brown tree snakes are clear. Only two (2) of the twelve (12) native forest bird species on the island remain, four million dollars (\$4,000,000) is lost annually in productivity from snakes electrocuting themselves on power lines, one out of every one thousand (1,000) emergency room visits results from a snake bite, and it costs seven million dollars (\$7,000,000) per year to manage.”*

The second is closer to home. Our sister overseas territory, the Cayman Islands, has a major problem with the invasive Green Iguana. The Green Iguana can grow up to five (5) feet long and twenty (20) pounds in weight. With an average lifespan of ten (10) years it can lay up to twenty (20) to seventy (70) eggs per year. It is an excellent climber, swimmer, and burrower.

Apparently, it arrived in Cayman in the early 1990s as a pet. With no predators it quickly became a pest to crops, as well as fruiting and flowering trees. It damaged walls and walkways when digging burrows and caused power outages. Lastly it was found to be a transmitter of salmonella contaminating surfaces and water via their feces.

To combat this problem the Caymanian Government initiated a program in 2018 to eradicate the green iguana. As of January 2021, over one million, two hundred and sixty thousand (1,260,000) iguanas have been culled at a cost of over seven million dollars (\$7,000,000).

The lesson learned from these examples is that the earlier a problem can be detected the more rapid an effective response can be made to hopefully reduce damage and mitigation costs of a problem. That said the best defense is to not let the problem get a foothold in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately we have our own examples of species that have led to destruction of our lands and certain endemic species.

Casuarinas which were brought in to replace cedar trees decimated in the 1940s blight are together with the Brazil Pepper trees contributing to the destruction of our cliff faces which are threatening homes and causing further coastal erosion. The Brazil Pepper trees also contribute to the destruction of many of our mangroves. If you are not aware, mangroves serve as nurseries for several young species of fish.

Pacu fish, a relative of the piranha, was brought in for aquariums but are then dumped into our wetlands, such as Pitman's Pond in Somerset Long Bay, and are now threatening our native plant and animal population.

Some efforts are already underway to manage these species, but this good work can easily be undone as there is, currently, limited legislation in place to control the breeding, selling and release of pests into the environment. Plants such as Casuarina, Indian Laurel, Pothos Vine and Umbrella Tree are still sold commercially. Animals, such as the Red Eared Slider Terrapin and the Lionfish, are both still popular in the pet trade.

Mr. Speaker, this new legislation means to address this deficiency by providing a strong regulatory framework to (a) prevent the introduction of new invasive alien species, and (b) create controls to prevent the spread of any such species that have or do become established.

Mr. Speaker, Recognizing the significance of this Bill, the Government has just completed a month's long consultation seeking feedback from the public using the online *Citizens Forum*; as well as direct requests to stakeholders including Pet Stores, Plant Nurseries, Landscape designers, Veterinarians, Government Boards, and environmental groups.

The Government sought views on how to improve the proposed legislation, the licensing and permitting regime, offenses, penalties, and the species listed on the schedules.

Mr. Speaker, all submissions were considered and consequently several modifications were made to the Bill specifically to the powers, offenses, and schedules. The result is an effective regime tailored to Bermuda's requirements.

Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasise that we are not intending to make criminals of persons who may have species that they are not even aware are growing in their garden. The Bill has been amended to clarify the language to focus on the import, breeding, sale, and intentional propagation of prohibited and restricted species.

At this juncture I would like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere gratitude to all those contributors who made submissions. Their feedback was invaluable.

Mr. Speaker, with that I believe this serves as a good introduction to the Bill and I look forward to the coming debate on the 24th of September.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker**