



July 15, 2019

Plant Quarantine Branch
c/o Hawai'i Department of Agriculture
1428 S. King Street
Honolulu, HI 96814

**Testimony in Support of
the Proposed Administrative Rules to prohibit the introduction of Myrtaceae (Myrtle) family
plants and plant parts**

Aloha Plant Quarantine Branch – Hawai'i Department of Agriculture,

On behalf of the Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species (CGAPS), we appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony **in strong support** of the proposed Administrative Rule to Prohibit the Introduction of Myrtaceae (Myrtle) Family Plants and Plant Parts to restrict (prohibit unless via permit with conditions) the domestic importation of Myrtle family plants into Hawai'i to minimize the risk of introduction of new strains or genetic variation of myrtle rust, *Puccinia psidii*, a wind-borne fungal disease that affects plants in the Myrtle Family.

Hawai'i is the only state where a native myrtle tree species, 'ōhi'a (*Metrosideros* spp.), comprises 80% of the native forests. 'Ōhi'a is well-recognized as an ecologically, culturally, and economically significant plant species. Our 'ōhi'a forests are under threat from the importation of non-native myrtles that can be carriers of myrtle rust, a disease that may infect and kill 'ōhi'a trees. Additionally, about 200 species of non-native Myrtaceae exist in Hawai'i, including those comprising the local *Eucalyptus* and nursery industries. With such a potentially vast plant host range, the rust's potential for damage to plant species within the Myrtaceae family in Hawai'i is extensive and significant.

Once infected, myrtle rust can slowly kill a Myrtaceae plant by attacking new leaves and shoots. Infected cut flowers, other plant parts, and live plants may introduce myrtle rust to a new location when moving from an infected area to a non-infected area because myrtle rust spreads easily and rapidly through wind. Up to twenty-five known strains of myrtle rust exist in the world. Hawai'i already has one strain of myrtle rust, called the Pandemic strain, and researchers have seen some impacts to Hawai'i native forests from this Pandemic strain in the state. Additional research has shown that there are strains of *P. psidii* that are not currently present in Hawai'i, and that would be destructive to 'ōhi'a plants. These destructive strains are present on Myrtaceae species and may be imported on cut flowers and live plants of the Myrtaceae family, further providing a sound, scientific foundation to support this proposed rule. Plant pathologists and other researchers believe

that even the importation of the same strain would provide additional genes that could make the Pandemic strain more virulent.

Of further importance, this proposed restriction could also protect 'ōhi'a from additional pests that are not currently in Hawai'i – such as insects or diseases similar to Rapid 'Ōhi'a Death – that could arrive on Myrtaceae plants or plant parts imported into the state. Our 'ōhi'a forests are already under duress and do not need any new pests with which to contend.

CGAPS commends the Board of Agriculture for moving forward to address this serious threat to 'ōhi'a species, the 'ōhi'a forests of Hawai'i, and horticultural and agricultural industries from the introduction of new strains of the 'ōhi'a rust, *Puccinia psidii*, and other disease pathogens and insects not now established in Hawai'i.

CGAPS strongly supports this proposed amendment. Mahalo for your consideration.

Aloha,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lara S. Reynolds". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Lara Reynolds, CGAPS Planner

A handwritten signature in blue ink that appears to be "Christy". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Christy Martin, Program Manager/PIO
CGAPS