

National Environmental Coalition on Invasive Species

THE FACTS VS. THE MYTHS Why We Need H.R. 669 To Prevent Invasive Species

Our lakes, rivers, forests, and native organisms are threatened every day by the worldwide movement of invasive species that spread disease, alter ecosystems, and cause serious economic harm to industries and communities. H.R. 669, the Nonnative Wildlife Invasion Prevention Act, requires evaluation of nonnative animal species before allowing them to be imported. Here are the **facts** compared to the myths about H.R. 669.

Myth: *This bill is not necessary.*

Fact: Hundreds of millions of animals are imported and traded each year in the U.S. with little oversight, and at significant risk to people, native species, the environment, and economic activity. The current system for restricting imports of problematic species (the Lacey Act) takes years and typically occurs only after substantial damage by the species has been done. H.R. 669 would prevent harmful species from entering the country in the first place, taking a proactive approach to protecting our nation's resources and public health. Also, it would ensure that imported organisms are properly and scientifically identified.

Myth: *This bill is not based on science.*

Fact: H.R. 669 requires a science-based evaluation of species to determine whether they should be allowed or prohibited from importation and interstate commerce. For over 20 years, scientists have urged the federal government to employ an analytical process as the most effective means of preventing harmful invasive species from being intentionally imported into the country. Scientists have developed rapid risk assessment techniques to differentiate between invasive and non-invasive species. By assessing the traits of a nonnative species, as well as the climate of its native range, any history of invasiveness, and other factors, wildlife biologists can determine whether importing a nonnative animal species into the country poses serious risks. See sections 3(c), 4 and 5 of the bill for more details.

Myth: *All nonnative species will be banned.*

Fact: H.R. 669 does not ban any species *per se*; rather, it establishes a science-based process to analyze animal imports for their likelihood to cause harm to our economy, our health, our environment, or other animals. The evaluation process put in place by H.R. 669 will only prevent the importation of species that are judged to be a serious risk. Further, the bill requires that this process be transparent and that stakeholder input be considered in decision-making.

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Myth: *My pets will be taken away from me and possibly killed.*

Fact: Any decisions to prohibit species' import will not affect current pets or domesticated animals. Under H.R. 669 all current pets, even those species that cannot be imported in the future, may be kept by their owners. See section 3(f) of the bill for more details. Domesticated animals, including those listed in Section 14 such as dogs, cats, rabbits, horses, goldfish, and others identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, would be exempt from the risk analysis process.

Myth: *This bill recommends appropriating excessive amounts of taxpayer dollars to fund the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.*

Fact: H.R. 669 does not include a specific appropriation for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to implement this program. Instead, it authorizes the establishment of a fund to pay for this program partly by fees the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service could charge applicants who recommend species to be evaluated for importation. Congressional decisions to spend taxpayer money to fund federal agencies are through an annual appropriations process, which is separate from consideration of this bill. Furthermore, the costs of not acting would be greater; without legislation like H.R. 669 to prevent the introduction of invasive and harmful species into the country the nation will spend even more money controlling these species – costs that already total tens of millions of dollars per year.

Myth: *The benefits of this bill are questionable and non-quantifiable.*

Fact: Risk screening programs like the one H.R. 669 would set-up have shown significant economic benefits. Australia, New Zealand, Israel, and other nations have implemented this type of proactive screening system. If the United States had H.R. 669 in place 20 years ago, we could have prevented many damaging and costly invasions, including snakehead fish, Burmese python, silver carp, red lionfish, giant Gambian rat, and others.

Myth: *This bill will shut down the pet industry overnight, costing jobs and hurting the economy, and will stop the work of zoos, aquariums, and research institutions.*

Fact: Much of the pet trade will be unaffected by H.R. 669; further, the evaluation process it creates will take more than three years to come into effect, allowing the industry time to adjust. H.R. 669 would have no impact on the trade in domesticated animals including cats, dogs, and so on. (See section 14 of the bill for a list of animals that are exempt, a list the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service can expand.) Any nonnative wild animal species could continue to be imported and traded if it was evaluated and found, after stakeholder and public input, not to pose threats to people, native species, the economy, or the environment. Accredited zoos and aquariums, as well as research and educational institutions, will be able to acquire special permits to hold species that are otherwise not approved for import.

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