



## OFFICE OF SENATOR SABINA FLORES PEREZ

Chairperson

Committee on Environment, Revenue and Taxation, and Procurement

*I MINA'TRENTAI SINGKO NA LIHESLATURAN GUÅHAN*

35<sup>TH</sup> GUAM LEGISLATURE

### PRESS RELEASE

#### **“Procurement problems are destroying our environment”**

#### **Senator Perez Introduces Two Environment-Focused Procurement Bills**

*Guam, April 14, 2019* – On September 11, 2007, the Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle (CRB) was first discovered on Guam. It was confined to Lower Tumon, so attempts were made to quarantine and completely eradicate CRB before it spread further.

The Guam Department of Agriculture reacted swiftly, requesting to purchase traps and equipment to eradicate the invasive species. However, due to the slowness of the GovGuam procurement process, six months passed before the department’s purchasing requests were complete.

During the six-month delay, CRB spread far beyond its initial location, making it impossible to isolate the invasive species. By 2010, CRB had spread to all other parts of the island. Today, CRB is responsible for the death of countless coconut trees around the island, severely damaging Guam’s ecosystem.

Little Fire Ant (LFA) was first found on Guam in November of 2011, in a landfill in Yigo. In an echo of the CRB response, the Guam Department of Agriculture immediately requested access to funds to purchase pesticides and application equipment to isolate and possibly eradicate LFA. However, it took until June of 2013 before the Governor issued an Executive Order declaring a state of emergency and allowing for the purchase to move forward. During that time, LFA spread to over a dozen different locations around the island. The invasive ant kills all animals in its proximity, leaving ecological dead zones in its wake.

On Friday, April 12, Senator Sabina Perez introduced Bills 89-35 and 90-35, to improve GovGuam’s procurement ability when facing environmental threats. Together, they aim to prevent CRB or LFA incidents from happening again. “Procurement problems are destroying our environment,” said Senator Perez. “These measures will provide GovGuam personnel with the tools they need to protect our island from environmental threats,” she added.

Bill 89-35, co-sponsored by Senator Marsh, Senator Shelton, and Senator Ridgell, proposes creating an Invasive Species Rapid Response Fund. The fund will be managed by the Research Corporation of the University of Guam (RCUOG), which has experience administering large grants and funds in an expeditious manner. All expenditures from the fund will be under the direction of the Director of the Department of Agriculture, who is a member of the Guam Invasive Species Council, and the new fund will receive \$75,000 from the Guam Invasive Species Fund, which is intended for invasive species management and eradication efforts and is supposed to generate \$2M annually from surcharges on incoming cargo.



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“The intent is to use both funds in tandem. Following advice from the Invasive Species Council, the Guam Invasive Species Fund will continue to fund staffing and long-term projects, while the Invasive Species Rapid Response Fund will address immediate short-term threats by utilizing RCUOG’s strengths in administering complex funds in a timely manner. Both funds will still be under the purview and oversight of the Invasive Species Council,” said Senator Perez.

“It is important we respond to the threat of invasive species with the same speed with which we respond to all emergencies. Invasive species can ruin industries, livelihoods, and our ecosystem,” said Senator Perez.

“Rapid response is the key to mitigating invasive species and environmental issues before they become environmental calamities,” said Senator Shelton.

Bill 90-35, co-sponsored by Senator Marsh and Senator Shelton, allows the Governor to authorize emergency procurement when facing threats to the environment.

Current Guam law allows the Governor to authorize emergency procurement for “a threat to public health, welfare, or safety”. Bill 90-35 will extend this clause to also include “health or safety of the environment.” By doing so, the Governor may now act sooner when facing serious environmental threats, rather than waiting and having to justify that an environmental threat poses public health or safety risks.

Senator Perez believes the environment should be afforded the same protections as public health and safety. “The environment is something we all rely on, but often take for granted. We need to protect our ecosystem against threats to its safety. Our people deserve a natural habitat that is rich and sustainable for us to use, enjoy, and share with future generations. The only way to ensure that is to place these type of protections for our environment now,” said Senator Perez.

Bill 90-35 also improves transparency in the emergency procurement process. As the Chairperson for the Committee on Environment, Department of Revenue and Taxation, and Procurement, Senator Perez felt that current emergency procurement provisions do not provide enough transparency, leaving room for potential abuse. “Bill 90-35 improves transparency in the emergency procurement process, and provides greater safeguards to protect the public trust,” said Senator Perez.

“These bills will go a long way towards improving GovGuam’s ability to respond quickly and protect our natural resources,” said Senator Perez. “We must put these measures in place now to save our environment and preserve it for our people to enjoy now and for generations to come,” she added.

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