

Proposed Python Ban (S373)

PIJAC expects long battle over proposed python ban S373.

Updated: July 27, 2009, 7 p.m. EDT

*UPDATED: Companion Bill HR 2811>>

The Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC) urged members to respond, but remain “calm” and “professional,” to recent Federal legislation that would ban the importation and interstate commerce of the entire Python genera.

Introduced by U.S. Senator Bill Nelson (D-Florida), Senate Bill S. 373 would add “constrictor snake of the species Python genera” to the Lacey Act, which prohibits the importation and interstate trade of species determined to be injurious to people, agriculture, horticulture, forestry or wildlife.

The Lacey Act also requires importers or consignees to “promptly” export or destroy any prohibited animals or eggs at their own expense.

Nelson cited concerns about the environmental impact on endangered species a feral population of Burmese pythons was causing in the Everglades region of south Florida, noting “If we do not take action now, we will let python populations in Florida continue to grow and further ravage the already-fragile Everglades, as well as risk letting them spread throughout the Southern portion of the United States.”

Nelson acknowledged that Florida in 2008 had implemented a “reptiles of concern” program that required owners of pythons and other snakes to obtain permits for their animals and implant tracking microchips into larger pythons. However, he felt additional efforts were necessary.

In a PetAlert issued Feb. 17, PIJAC warned that the bill was problematic for several reasons and would directly impact pet stores, exporters, breeders and pet owners across the country. PIJAC believes thousands of businesses—breeders, pet stores and manufacturers—currently sell pythons and python-care related products and has begun conducting a survey to determine potential economic damages to the reptile industry and snake keepers.

That survey will be posted within the S373 Forum on PIJAC’s website. PIJAC plans to post future updates on the legislation on the special forum as well. The forum also posts the actual legislation and the contact information for Senators that members may seek to contact.

PIJAC has created a similar forum for HR 669: The Nonnative Wildlife Invasion Prevention Act. That legislation would essentially direct the Fish and Wildlife Service to develop a list of species that can be imported into the United States, thereby banning others. (PIJAC has been monitoring this bill and expects a long battle and therefore encourages calm and professional responses from industry participants to maintain the industry’s credibility).

One major concern was that the proposed python legislation unilaterally bans every species of python without a scientific risk assessment, despite the rationale behind the legislation being the feral population of a single species: Burmese pythons.

Moreover, the bill ignores an ongoing risk analysis being conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. That analysis seeks to determine which, if any, species of pythons, boas and Eunectes warrant listing as injurious wildlife under the Lacey Act. That analysis would provide a scientific basis for any listings and would provide for a public comment period, unlike the proposed legislation that would circumvent the public rule-making process, PIJAC said.

PIJAC estimates that millions of pythons from nearly one dozen species have been imported into the United States over the past 50 years, and only the Burmese python has established a feral population. Moreover, PIJAC contends that several factors combined to help establish that population, including a “mass” escape of pythons from holding facilities destroyed during Hurricane Andrew in 1992, additional but isolated escapes from pet owners and commercial facilities; misguided release by pet owners; the subtropical climate and large area of swampy habitat with relatively little human activity, and ample prey availability in the Everglades region.

A lack of proven methods for python trapping compounds and a lack of funding for research and staffing to actually trap or

eradicate pythons compounds the challenge, PIJAC reported.

In addition, efforts such as Florida's permitting program and related Nonnative Pet Amnesty Days and PIJAC's Habitattitude campaign against releasing unwanted pets should help prevent the additional release or escape of pythons, PIJAC contends.

PIJAC further believes that the ban on interstate transport or trade could result in the release or euthanasia of hundreds of thousands of pythons as python owners (commercial and hobbyist) attempt to comply with the law.

The bill has been referred to the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works.

Survey Response

Everyone involved with keeping, breeding, importing, exporting, or retailing Pythons needs to participate in the survey. The data will be combined into a report so that confidential personal information is protected. Information is needed on the numbers of people involved with the affected species, including data on the numbers of animals by species and certain financial information to show in a consolidated report the scope of interest in, and the economic investment in, these species.

[Click here](#) to go to the PIJAC S373 forum. All responses will be kept confidential and only combined results will be used.

If you are a manufacturer, or sell python related products please contact PIJAC directly.