

Python Ban HR 2811 UPDATE

House Judiciary Committee to hear python ban bill.

Updated: July 28, 2009, 7 p.m. EDT

*UPDATED: The House Judiciary Council will hold a hearing at 10 a.m. EDT on Wednesday, July 29 on a bill that would ban trade in pythons. On Tuesday, the bill passed through a subcommittee markup session without any amendments, the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC) reported.

At Wednesday's full committee markup session, Rep. Thomas Rooney (R-Fla.) is expected to offer an amendment that would limit the ban to Burmese and African rock pythons, PIJAC reported.

As currently written, HR 2811, a companion bill to S. 373, would add "the constrictor snake of the species Python genera" to the Lacey Act as an injurious species that would be "prohibited from being shipped or imported into the United States."

However, PIJAC warned the bill would have broader consequences, as the Lacey Act also prohibits exports and interstate movement of listed species.

Moreover, the legislation as written would cover all species of python, including the common pet ball pythons, rather than just the Burmese python that is of concern in Florida.

PIJAC on Tuesday afternoon encouraged concerned pet owners and industry members to contact members of the judicial committee and request they seek expert input before acting on the proposed legislation. During Tuesday's subcommittee markup meeting, one committee member noted that they lacked sufficient knowledge on the issue to offer appropriate amendments, according to PIJAC.

PIJAC also notes the legislation bypasses the statutory listing process included in the Lacey Act. That process requires the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to conduct a risk analysis and seek public comment before listing a species as "injurious." The Fish and Wildlife Service is currently conducting such an analysis, PIJAC reports.

PIJAC warned concerned pet owners that the legislation, if passed as written, would set a dangerous precedent of adding controversial species to the Lacey Act without hearings and sufficient study. That precedent could affect owners of other pets, including birds, fish and turtles, PIJAC reported.

PIJAC urged concerned industry members to immediately contact every member of the committee because: As drafted, the legislation would affect tens of thousands of pet owners and business owners; There is no scientific justification for a broad ban and that Congress should not circumvent the Fish and Wildlife Service's ongoing risk analysis; Legislation should include resources for dealing with existing populations of Burmese pythons in the Everglades; A ban of Burmese pythons should be limited to importation of the species into the United States; Legislation should include provisions to allow for interstate movement of Burmese pythons subject to meeting housing and management practices; And Legislation should include provisions for financial support to the Fish and Wildlife Service and partners, including PIJAC, to expand the Habitattitude campaign to educate reptile owners not to release unwanted pets.