

Testimony of Andrew Wyatt President of the United States Association of Reptile Keepers before the California Fish & Game Commission RE Regulatory Proposals to Ban the Import and Trade of Non Native Turtles & Frogs March 3, 2010

Mr. President, members of the Fish Game commission, I want to thank you for the opportunity to be before you and present testimony today regarding proposals to ban the import of non native frogs and turtles.

My name is Andrew Wyatt and I am here representing California members of United States Association of Reptile Keepers (USARK), of which I serve as President.

By way of background, USARK represents the highly sophisticated commercial production of captive bred herpetofauna (reptiles and amphibians) aka herps in the United States. We are a science and education based advocacy for the responsible private ownership of, and trade in herps. USARK endorses caging standards, sound husbandry, environmental protocols, and an integrated approach to vital conservation issues. Our goal is to facilitate cooperation between government agencies, the scientific community, and the private sector in order to produce policy proposals that will effectively address important husbandry and conservation issues. The health of these animals, public safety, and maintaining ecological integrity are our primary concerns.

Over the past 60 years, the practice of keeping herps has changed from an obscure hobby to an incredibly widespread and mainstream part of the American experience. Herps have become intensely popular and are now present in millions of American households (1 in every 25 US Households has 1 or more reptiles). They now permeate pop culture, movies and advertising. Who doesn't know the Geico Gecko?

From early beginnings in the pet trade herpetoculture, the practice of breeding reptiles and amphibians, has grown into a sophisticated and independent \$3 billion annual industry. Herpetoculturists produce high quality captive bred animals for collectors, research, zoos, museums, TV & film. Millions of dollars flow into the national economy from the Reptile Industry. It is interlaced and interconnected with all levels of economies. Purchases of equipment, dry goods, bedding and cages channel money into U.S. manufacturing. Millions of dollars go to support American agriculture with purchases of food, including rodents, grain, bedding, vegetables and prepared diets. Millions of dollars more support airlines and parcel shippers. The Reptile Industry in the United States accounts for 82% of the worldwide export and trade in high quality captive bred reptiles. Thousands of American small businesses and their employees depend on the Reptile Industry.

Herps are an animal interest that have captivated an incredibly diverse cross section of the American demographics; from scientists to school children, Wall Street bankers to construction workers, conservationists, attorneys, teachers, rock stars, actors and even politicians. Your friends and neighbors keep herps. Some member of your family keeps, or has kept, herps. Collectively we refer to this demographic as the Reptile

Nation, comprising more than 5 million Americans.

USARK recognizes the legitimate concerns of the CA Fish & Game Commission in regards to non native turtles and frogs regarding the potential to negatively impact the environment and fuel an already illegal supply of wild caught animals for food markets. The problem is that proposed regulation will do little to address the stated problems, while potentially having a devastating effect on responsible and legal herpetoculture business. Herpetoculturists did not bring the biggest threat to environmental health, the American Bull Frog, into the state. Ironically proposed regulations would exempt this animal from import because of an exemption for "Jumping Frogs" for frog jumping contests. Herpetoculture employs best industry management practices to mitigate entry into the environment. There is little underlying science to support the premise that these animals under controlled conditions pose any real threat. Those that bring animals that have been illegally collected from other states for sale in food markets are already breaking the law. Adding another layer of regulation without resources to enforce them will not solve the problem. They will simply have the unintended consequence of hurting legitimate business interests producing high quality California frogs and turtles.

USARK requests the opportunity to bring our expertise to the aid of CA Fish & Game Commission. We have worked with a number of states to implement best industry management practices. We are currently working with Florida, Georgia and South Carolina. There are property rights considerations and procedural questions that should be fully explored prior to any decisions made. The environmental integrity of California and the interests of our members in this state warrant our sincere contributions to find a fair and equitable solution that will truly address the fundamental concerns of the CA Fish & Game Commission. We humbly request more time to fully engage before the Commission makes recommendations.

Thank you for your consideration.

Andrew Wyatt
President