

FRONTLINE NEWS

Win-win from offshore container management programme

A programme to better manage the risk from unwanted pests, such as ants and snails, arriving in New Zealand on containers is paying dividends all round.

In 2006, MAF Biosecurity New Zealand (MAFBNZ) implemented a cooperative offshore management programme (EQ2) with Swire Shipping to manage contaminants and pests, such as ants and giant African snails, in or on containers. The system, designed to be “equivalent to quarantine” (EQ) activities conducted by MAFBNZ in New Zealand, involved cleaning and treating containers in the country of origin to remove contaminants and exclude pests.

EQ2 trials were run in Honiara, Solomon Islands and in Lae and Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea in 2006 (see *Biosecurity* 70:4, September 2006). Trial threshold levels for general contaminants and ants were set at 5 percent and 0.16

percent respectively. The trials were successful, with levels dropping below the thresholds.

MAFBNZ and Swire reached an agreement whereby assessment audits would occur every six months. In addition, if container compliance from the ports was maintained, then port approval would be granted. This would result in a progressive reduction in inspection rates for containers arriving in New Zealand.

Honiara and Port Moresby met EQ2 requirements in December 2006, and inspection levels for containers from both ports were reduced from 100 percent to 50 percent in April 2007. A second audit in June 2007 showed compliance was maintained, and inspection levels were reduced to 20 percent.

Lae also met EQ2 requirements (with agreed implementation of corrective actions) in April 2007. Containers from Lae finally met full EQ2 compliance in November 2007 and inspection rates were reduced from 100 percent to 50 percent.

All ports met full EQ2 compliance and inspection levels following a MAFBNZ second audit in December 2007. Inspection rates were reduced to 10 percent for Honiara and Port Moresby.

These ports can now be regarded as among the best in the world at managing biosecurity risk in or on containers. This claim has been borne out by the significant reduction in ant incursions and marked reductions in associated methyl bromide fumigations in New Zealand.

Continual monitoring of containers arriving in New Zealand (including the beginning of 2008) from all of the EQ2 ports has shown a very high level of compliance and a continual reduction in volume and incidence of contaminants and pests. Since EQ2 began, ant infestation has dropped by 98.5 percent and giant African snails, another significant pest, have not been detected on system containers.

The EQ2 system has led to:

- reduced biosecurity contaminant and pest levels in New Zealand
- MAFBNZ inspection actions reduced by 850 hours per annum, freeing staff for other vital work
- improved MAFBNZ/importer relations
- significant cost reductions for importers and faster container clearance in New Zealand
- less congestion in New Zealand ports as containers move off-port faster
- an increase in Pacific Island export trade and greater regional employment.

MAFBNZ has established the expanded system (EQ3) as another cooperative relationship with a shipping company consortium. The companies involved are Pacific Direct Line, Pacific Forum Line, Polynesian Shipping, Reef Shipping and Sofrana Unilines. MAFBNZ and shipping companies will work towards further reducing biosecurity risk and importer compliance costs by introducing the system to ports in American Samoa, Western Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu during 2008.

MAFBNZ auditors and consortium representatives conducted EQ3 scoping trips (pre-set up) to American Samoa and Western Samoa in February 2008 and Tonga in April 2008. A trip to Vanuatu was made in June 2008.

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Scoping trip to Tonga carried out in April 2008.