



**The Biosecurity Bulletin is going online**

This will be the last edition of the Biosecurity Bulletin to be published as a hardcopy publication. From the next issue, it will be published as an online newsletter only. To ensure you don't miss any future editions, please visit [www.daff.gov.au/bulletin](http://www.daff.gov.au/bulletin) and select 'subscribe' to join the electronic mailing list.

## Eleven million good reasons to ditch red tape



*The management team responsible for screening low-value consignments.*

### Going paperless has paid off big time for air-freight biosecurity screening in Australia.

It is saving more than a million dollars a year and has replaced the time-consuming paperwork associated with processing consignments with electronic web-based processing. It's gotten rid of the paperwork and the manual handling for some 11 million low-value consignments each year and the benefits are still being calculated.

For the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the paperless initiative project is a ringing example of the benefits of effective government-industry cooperation. It removes at a stroke traditional bottlenecks in biosecurity screening, financial handling, environmental and administrative processing. It ends manual processing and gets rid of outdated and overworked computer systems and software, a system once referred to as "unsustainable".

DAFF's paperless initiative project has been in effect since June, processing commercial documentation in an electronic, web-based format for 11 million low-value consignments (where the value is declared at less than \$1000 and therefore not liable for GST).

*Continued on Page 6.*

## Meeting Australia's emerging biosecurity challenges

Australia's changing risk profile is likely to be the biggest challenge for biosecurity, according to the new Chief Veterinary Officer of Australia, Dr Mark Schipp.

Climate change, globalisation, changing demographics, industries and land use all influence the emergence and spread of disease and how their management is approached.

Dr Schipp is responsible for the national coordination of responses to diseases like Hendra virus (Hendra is a new virus affecting horses, first detected in 1994) and other diseases, such as Newcastle Disease.

"We like to think we are a clean and green country and that we are never going to have a disease situation," Dr Schipp said. "But waiting to respond to diseases after they emerge locally or arrive on our shores is not effective. Instead, we need to have sound prevention and preparedness measures in place in advance of any outbreak."

There are many layers to DAFF's biosecurity work and Dr Schipp's role is to give leadership to each of those layers. Much of his work is focussed on preventing diseases from entering Australia by strengthening veterinary systems in our near northern neighbours and through intelligence, which provides advance warning of threats. A number of DAFF veterinarians are posted to Indonesia, where they work to strengthen veterinary systems and controls. Likewise, the department conducts regular animal health surveys and provides support in Papua New Guinea and East Timor. "We also monitor developments internationally to see how the risk environment is changing so we can adjust our controls accordingly," Dr Schipp said. "These measures support Australian agriculture and Australian exports." As part of his focus on

*Continued on Page 4.*



## DEPUTY SECRETARY MESSAGE

intensive agriculture, globalisation and climate change.

We need an effective biosecurity system to protect Australia's primary production industries, our productivity more generally and our environment from the severe and negative impacts of exotic animal and plant pests and diseases.

The Australian Government has endorsed reforms that DAFF is now implementing to build a smarter biosecurity system for Australia built on a risk-return approach. These reforms include targeting inspection activities on higher-risk items instead of having mandatory intervention targets at the border.

Reforming the way we deliver the biosecurity system will take time and changes will be achieved incrementally. The risk-return approach enables us to focus our efforts and resources on the things that matter most and recognises good biosecurity compliance behaviour.

We will shift our focus from the border only so we are managing biosecurity risks across the biosecurity continuum – working offshore, at the border and onshore (post border). We will

continue to strengthen partnerships with key stakeholders and make decisions and adjust our approach built on new information and evolving science. Our systems will be backed by audit and verification regimes.

Some reforms will require new legislation or are dependent on new information and computer technology systems, and will take longer to implement.

We are still engaging with our staff and stakeholders during the reform process.

The Australian Government and DAFF are taking biosecurity risk very seriously in a world that is increasingly globalised to facilitate better outcomes and risk protection for our vital food and agricultural industries.

We look forward to continuing to work with governments, industry and the community to strengthen and improve our biosecurity system.

**Rona Mellor**  
**Deputy Secretary, Biosecurity**  
**Department of Agriculture, Fisheries**  
**and Forestry**

### Welcome to the 2011–12 summer edition of the Biosecurity Bulletin.

A comprehensive program of biosecurity reform is now driving much of our work in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry – and this edition of the Biosecurity Bulletin is an opportunity to showcase some of the changes that are taking place.

Biosecurity risks to Australia are growing for a number of reasons, from increasing imports, movement of people, goods and vessels,

### Audit fees halved for artificial breeding centres

Audit fees will be halved for export-approved artificial breeding centres across Australia as a result of changes to the international standards of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry proposed the changes to the OIE's Terrestrial Animal Health Code (the Terrestrial Code) to reduce the number of biosecurity audits of artificial breeding centres from once in

six months to once a year. The changes were adopted at the General Session of the OIE World Assembly in May 2011.

Australia has 30 export-approved semen collection centres that will benefit from the change, applying to cattle, sheep and goats. The centres act as quarantine centres and they collect, process, freeze, store, transfer and distribute breeding resources to inseminators, veterinarians and farmers.

Dr Tamira Ford from DAFF's Animal Quarantine and Export Operations said the reduced audit frequency would help to cut export costs for artificial breeding centres, yet still provide the

protection that overseas trading partners required.

Dr Jill Mortier from the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer said an important factor in the proposal's success was the long-term investment in DAFF's relationship with the OIE and with counterparts in Canada, New Zealand, the United States and the European Union.

"DAFF's investment in relationship building provided the mechanism to garner support from these countries for the proposal within OIE processes," Dr Mortier said.

For further information contact animal exports at [animalexport@daff.gov.au](mailto:animalexport@daff.gov.au).

### Early warning for aquatic animal health

A new online open-source website – [www.aquatichealth.net](http://www.aquatichealth.net) – has dramatically improved intelligence-gathering and analysis capacity for aquatic animal health. The system searches internet sites worldwide and collates all information available on aquatic animal diseases and signals, such as market prices, giving early warnings of outbreaks.

Dr Geoff Grossel and Dr Mike Nunn from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry worked with Professor Mark Burgman and Assistant Professor Aidan Lyon of the Australian Centre of Excellence in Risk Analysis (Melbourne University) to develop this innovative information technology.

The website captures emerging disease information, analyses disease trends, maps

diseases, organises data, forecasts disease events, provides biosecurity alerts, builds biosecurity risk profiles and supports decision-making relating to imports and exports. Some forecasting applications have already shown to be accurate and potentially very useful for improving biosecurity planning in the area of aquatic animal health.

For information visit [www.aquatichealth.net](http://www.aquatichealth.net).

# Upgrades under way at five post entry quarantine sites

**The Government has allocated \$19.1 million for the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry for urgent repair and maintenance work at five existing post entry quarantine sites. A wide range of work is now under way in Spotswood and Knoxfield in Victoria, Eastern Creek in New South Wales, Byford in Western Australia and Torrens Island in South Australia.**

The work addresses occupational health and safety, animal welfare, building maintenance and improved business risk protection (such as protecting against bushfires, power outages or storm water overflows).

Parliament's Public Works Committee (PWC) gave its approval in August for work valued at more than \$2 million. This allowed work to start on detailed planning and procurement and the department is providing the PWC with regular progress reports.

Members of the House of Representatives and senators from the PWC visited Eastern Creek in October to see its operations first-hand.

The Government's budget funding demonstrates a strong commitment to post entry quarantine. It is the biggest capital works package committed to post entry quarantine facilities and the first time such capital works have been undertaken through a coordinated, whole-of-DAFF approach. DAFF staff and industries are working together across all animal and plant species to ensure better outcomes and efficiencies.

An interim works project team is completing procurement of activities and services to deliver the upgrades. Examples of works already underway include:

- laboratory refurbishments at Eastern Creek and Knoxfield
- repairs to cat runs, dog kennels and associated animal handling facilities
- maintenance and upgrade of glass houses
- replacement of key equipment and fittings, such as autoclaves, pumps and other mechanical and electrical plant.

The Australian Government also announced funding in the May 2011 Budget for the Department of Finance and Deregulation to acquire land and to undertake initial scoping and design work to address future arrangements for post entry quarantine services.

Progressive reports are available on the DAFF website at [www.daff.gov.au/aqis/quarantine/future-post-entry-quarantine-arrangements](http://www.daff.gov.au/aqis/quarantine/future-post-entry-quarantine-arrangements).

Please direct any questions to our dedicated phone line on 1800 134 497 (toll free for callers in Australia) or email us at [peqproject@daff.gov.au](mailto:peqproject@daff.gov.au).

## Multipurpose labrador detector dogs join front line

Multipurpose labrador detector dogs, trained especially for both passive and active quarantine risk screening operations, are being introduced at Australia's international airports, mail centres and cargo facilities.

Phasing in the larger and more versatile labradors signals a move away from the highly recognisable and iconic beagles, which have been working diligently in airports around the country since 1992.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry carried out a successful pilot program in Brisbane in 2010 of training and deploying multipurpose dogs to carry out specific responses to target material in all passenger, mail and cargo environments.

Active responses by detector dogs are essential for screening in mail centres and cargo facilities, allowing the dogs to quickly and accurately identify target material among many packages, often on a moving conveyor belt. Passive responses are needed for airports and cruise vessel passenger terminals, where dogs are trained to sit beside a passenger or baggage containing detector dog target material.

Matt Holloway, the National Program Manager for the Mail and Detector Dog Program, said there were 22 passive Labradors working in airports around the country with a further 10 currently in training. All these dogs have the capacity to be converted to multipurpose dogs.

"Because the labrador breed generally possesses both a strong food drive and a strong retrieve drive we are able to exploit both drives to maintain environmentally specific responses," Mr Holloway said. "This characteristic makes them highly suitable as multipurpose dogs".

"Multipurpose detector dogs will deliver a greater operational return through exploiting the mobility, flexibility and adaptability of the labrador breed," he said.

Two multipurpose labradors are already working in Brisbane and there are plans to introduce two more before the end of the year, in addition to a broader rollout in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth.



*The detector dog Flame is seen here screening mail at Melbourne Gateway Facility.*

# Remote microscope opens online window on PNG plant pests

A remote diagnostic microscope installed recently in Papua New Guinea has enabled better collaboration and information sharing on emergency plant pests.

The Office of the Chief Plant Protection Officer, through the International Plant Health Program, installed the microscope in March in collaboration with PNG's National Agriculture Quarantine Inspection Authority (NAQIA).

PNG officers are now able to share real-time imagery of suspect exotic plant pests on the internet with experts in domestic and international institutions, including those within Australia. They have already used the microscope successfully on two occasions to determine the identity of suspect exotic pests.

Dr Bart Rossel from OCPPO said NAQIA officers were working with Australia to identify suspect exotic pests detected in PNG.

"NAQIA uses the system to share the information with us and we release it to other stakeholders with appropriate clearances," Dr Rossel said. "The system strengthens regional pest information sharing and early



notification of emerging pests, and provides input and diagnostic expertise to the pests and diseases image library."

The microscope was used in collaboration with mite experts from the Australian National Insect Collection to identify the exotic honey bee mite, *Tropilaelaps mercedesae*. It was also used to identify a scolytid beetle, trapped in coffee plantations in PNG's Jiwaka province, suspected of being the exotic coffee berry borer *Hypothenemus hampei*. The CSIRO, using the

*The remote diagnostic microscope in action in PNG: Dr David Tenakanai, senior entomologist with PNG's National Agriculture Quarantine and Inspection Authority.*

digital images of important scolytid characteristics, determined that the beetles were not the damaging coffee berry borer.

## Meeting Australia's emerging biosecurity challenges (continued from page 1)

the pre-border end of the biosecurity continuum, Dr Schipp attended the Stop Transboundary Animal Diseases and Zoonoses meeting in Vietnam, which discussed ways of controlling the transmission of diseases such as rabies, avian influenza and foot-and-mouth disease in South-East Asia.

He was struck by the contribution veterinarians can make in protecting the lives and livelihoods of people in developing countries. "One example that immediately comes to mind is rabies control, a disease that is readily and economically controlled through vaccination of dogs. Yet every year people, usually children, die agonising deaths following dog bites and vast sums are spent on rabies treatment of people who have been bitten."

"Internationally, Australia is playing a role in the region by enhancing the capability of neighbouring countries by assisting them to build regulatory controls and improve their veterinary and quarantine services." While DAFF is Australia's biggest employer of veterinarians,

many of who develop policy and manage regulatory functions, Dr Schipp is also keen to work directly with private veterinarians. He met with the deans of Australian and New Zealand veterinary schools to explore further collaboration with DAFF in teaching animal health and epidemiology.

Private veterinarians contribute considerably to the prevention, control and eradication of animal disease in Australia. A number of private veterinarians are members of the Australian Veterinary Reserve, trained to step in and provide response assistance during an exotic disease outbreak.

"The main contribution veterinarians make to Australian biosecurity is through being alert and calling authorities whenever there is a suspicion of a notifiable disease," Dr Schipp said. "Disease modelling has established conclusively that the key determinant of effective outbreak response is early detection."

"I think private veterinarians now understand the importance of good personal protective

equipment when they are called to see a horse that may have Hendra disease, but these principals of good biosecurity apply to any private practitioner who is seeing ill animals and moving between farms."



*Australia's changing risk profile is likely to be the biggest challenge for biosecurity, according to the new Chief Veterinary Officer of Australia, Dr Mark Schipp.*

## Food import compliance agreements up and running

Food Import Compliance Agreements – FICAs for short – have been phased in across Australia over the past 18 months.

FICAs offer food importers an alternative to inspections by imported food program officers under existing regulatory arrangements. They allow the Australian Government and a food importing business to enter into a binding agreement with terms outlined in legal documents, or deeds.

This new approach ensures that food imports comply with the food standards set out in the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code. Six importers have entered into a FICA agreement so far and these have been running smoothly for more than a year. Feedback and interest from the food importing industry have been positive.

Approved importers have welcomed the increased logistical control of their imports and DAFF Biosecurity officers have built strong relationships with and gained increased knowledge of the general food importing industry.

The deeds are based on quality systems and offer the flexibility to accommodate many types of food importing businesses. They are possible because it is common in the food industry for a business to maintain compliance of its products in a variety of ways, through quality systems. Where possible, recognition is given for existing measures that many food importers already have in place to ensure compliance.

FICAs are a voluntary option for Australian food importers – but they are not suitable for all businesses. Important criteria must be met

before consideration is given to entering into a FICA. For example, a FICA candidate must have a history of importing safe and compliant food. All candidates must have comprehensive and well-documented food management practices that facilitate compliance of their food imports in accordance with their FICA deed requirements.

FICAs help to ensure the compliance of food imports. Measures by food importers include programs to ensure supplier reliability, internal testing and verification regimes (both offshore and onshore). These measures cannot be considered under the standard model of inspecting, testing and passing food following its import into Australia.

DAFF's oversight of FICA imports is primarily through regular audits of an importer's warehousing records, staff and facilities. Audits are usually undertaken at the importer's head office. However, auditors also visit secondary warehouses throughout the country as part of the audit process.

### CASE STUDY – PEANUTS

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry recently received a FICA application from the Peanut Company of Australia from Kingaroy in Queensland.

Peanut imports show how FICAs can offer a comprehensive way to monitor food import compliance. A number of existing measures are undertaken across the peanut supply chain to minimise mould growth and the resulting aflatoxin contamination in a peanut consignment. These are documented in international food safety standards and include maintaining good farming practices, keeping the

assistance to the meat industry to implement its delivery model, which has been in place since 1 October. A further \$2.5 million in assistance has been provided to the grains industry to implement its delivery model, with industry able to transfer to new arrangements from 1 January 2012. Staged implementation of the service delivery models for the other commodities will occur progressively as arrangements with industry are finalised.

Joint ministerial task forces for each export commodity were established in 2009 with membership from industry and government (represented by DAFF). The task forces sought to create more efficient export processes for the agricultural industry, reducing what is often described as chronic regulatory burdens, and providing an environment to support and enhance market access.

Greg Read, the First Assistant Secretary of



*Brendan Burns (FICA auditor based in Melbourne) at the company warehouse in Kingaroy, Queensland.*

peanuts dry and screening for aflatoxin on an ongoing basis, during processing.

While sampling and testing imported consignments is an effective way of regulating food imports, this approach does have its challenges for aflatoxin screening and offers a limited snapshot of a consignment and its likelihood of compliance. The FICA approach allows DAFF to consider more information about imported peanuts and to recognise systems developed by an importer.

Importers interested in a FICA can contact the Imported Food Program on (02) 6272 5488 or by sending an email to [foodimp@daff.gov.au](mailto:foodimp@daff.gov.au).

## DAFF leads nation's overhaul of food exports certification

Far-reaching reforms to the way food export commodities are certified by government are being rolled out across Australia.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is developing the reforms in partnership with industry to free up the regulation of Australia's \$32 billion agricultural export industry. They are designed to remove administrative bottlenecks, enable government to target regulatory effort more efficiently and adopt more effective web-based technology.

New industry service models for all food export commodities – meat, fish, dairy, grain, horticulture and live animal exports – have been developed over the past two years. The government has provided \$25.8 million in

DAFF's Food Division, said the reforms to certification and inspection services represented the high level of outcome achievable through implementation of DAFF's national biosecurity reform agenda. He said the main priority was to continue meeting importing country requirements and facilitating market access to foster growth across Australia's agricultural export industry.

"These reforms will enhance Australia's already world-class export certification system," Mr Read said. "Overall, agricultural export reform will secure and improve market access and position Australia's inspection and certification processes at the forefront of export industries worldwide."

For more information about Australian agricultural export reform visit [www.daff.gov.au/ecri](http://www.daff.gov.au/ecri).

# Eleven million good reasons to ditch red tape (continued from page 1)

DAFF is responsible for screening all imports into Australia to protect agriculture, the food supply, population and environment from unwanted pests and diseases. This task, however, is becoming more challenging with a measurable, significant increase in imports to Australia. In large part this is due to a robust Australian economy and strength of the Australian dollar.

This is how the process used to work.

Ninety-five per cent of air cargo consignments referred to DAFF are carried by Australia's four main air express companies: TNT, FedEx, DHL and UPS. These four carriers form the industry body Conference of Asia-Pacific Express Carriers, or CAPEC. The air express carrier business is highly competitive and time sensitive.

Importers or their agents would lodge their import declarations on the Australian Integrated Cargo System, which is screened electronically for potential biosecurity risk. High-level information on potential biosecurity risk consignments are then referred to DAFF for further investigation (in 2010–11, DAFF quarantine officers assessed documents for more than 675,000 individual self-assessed clearance air freight consignments).

DAFF Biosecurity officers look for information to confirm or eliminate a biosecurity risk. The express couriers (CAPEC) would need to print pre-scanned documentation then manually



*Angelo Papadopoulos, Harpal Kaur and Sarah Osmani from Air Cargo.*

scan these printouts and email them to DAFF for risk assessment. When scanned documents were unclear, DAFF Biosecurity officers would then have to attend the air express carriers' premises to examine the original documentation. This system was manual, time-consuming, expensive and inefficient for government, industry and clients.

Now the original paperwork is transmitted electronically from the air express couriers to DAFF's biosecurity screening using web-based files.

The air courier industry committed staff from Australia and overseas to work with DAFF's

operational staff to ensure a stable, secure and effective ICT solution to the slowdowns and stoppages. The savings now being delivered to industry and government are estimated to be well in excess of a million dollars a year.

The project's governance includes independent board members and a mix of operational, technical and business skills. The paperless initiative was delivered on time and on-budget in six months using DAFF project management methodology.

This project was nominated for the 2011 IPAA Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Public Sector Management.

## Border agencies streamline international mail screening

Australia's border agencies have successfully completed trials of international mail screening at the Australia Post international mail centres in Sydney and Brisbane.

The Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry and the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service have traditionally undertaken dual screening meaning officers from both agencies screen incoming mail. With the aim of improving efficiency in mail centres, recent trials have evaluated the effectiveness of a single agency performing primary x-ray screening of international mail. The responsibility for screening is based on information gathered on incoming mail and the potential border risk.

A team from both agencies directed the trials, which began at Sydney Gateway Facility in May. The two-week trial in Sydney focussed specifically on air parcels and express mail from the United States and express mail from Japan and Korea. Informal arrangements to screen these items have been in place in Sydney for some time, so the trials gave an opportunity to formally validate the activity.

Results from the Sydney trial showed that single border agency screening of mail items is achievable while appropriately addressing border risks.

Following the success in Sydney, the Brisbane Airmail Transit Centre began a trial that encompassed all mail entering the centre and was conducted throughout August. A collaborative training package was developed and provided to facility staff ahead of the Brisbane trial, which showed similar outcomes to those found in Sydney.

During the trials both agencies conducted sampling to verify the effectiveness of screening

methods. Australia Post also contributed to the success by presenting the mail according to border agency requirements.

As a result of the trials, a number of initiatives will be implemented across the four mail centres in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and Perth. A collaborative intervention strategy will be developed and risk assessments undertaken in all four states to identify other mail categories where single-agency screening can apply. Training packages will be developed for each individual centre to provide an understanding of the risks for both agencies. Further work is continuing with Australia Post at a national and regional level to improve mail presentation.

This latest effort to streamline international mail handling comes as Australia experiences a significant rise in the volume of incoming international mail. This increase is partially due to the growing popularity of online shopping and a strong Australian dollar.



## Proudly joining DAFF on the front line of biosecurity operations

Seven Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Biosecurity officers who recently completed their traineeships are already carrying out general baggage inspections at Darwin International Airport.

Robert Langlands, the regional manager for DAFF, said the seven recruits had attained a Certificate III in Government and they would now move into the department's biosecurity operations at the airport.

Mr Langlands said the group would be ideally placed to deliver targeted inspections as the department continued to develop its risk assessment approach to biosecurity.

"It is always a special occasion when we have the opportunity to welcome new recruits into the department and I wish them all well as they embark on their careers as quarantine officers," Mr Langlands said.

*The new cadre of DAFF Biosecurity officers show their crescent shape department crests after graduating, with regional manager Robert Langlands (centre back row) and training coordinator Sue Rayner (far left).*

One of the DAFF Biosecurity officers, Daniel McQue, said he couldn't wait to put his theory and hands-on training into practice at the workplace. "The varied training methods and techniques, such as role playing, should stand us in good stead to hit the ground running," he said.

"The fact that I'll be a part of the frontline of Australia's biosecurity efforts is certainly something I take pride in. Personally, I can't wait for my first early morning shift."

## Indigenous partnerships underpin biosecurity in the Top End

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is working with Indigenous park rangers in the Northern Territory to strengthen a 'partnership approach' to managing biosecurity across a 7300km swathe of northern Australian coastline.

DAFF Biosecurity officers from the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy (NAQS) joined with Indigenous rangers to explain biosecurity to Indigenous communities during the 2011 Garma Festival between 5 and 8 August, seen as Australia's leading indigenous cultural exchange event.

The festival was held at the remote Gulkula traditional meeting ground on the Gove

Peninsula near Nhulunbuy in Arnhem Land. The Dhimurru rangers from Nhulunbuy and the Yirrkala rangers from the Yirrkala community led guided walks to demonstrate scientific sampling methods and quarantine monitoring activities delivered under the quarantine strategy.

They demonstrated fruit-fly trapping, pest identification and the use of i-trackers (handheld computers) to record potential threats to biosecurity, and the challenge of pest and disease surveillance in Australia's top end. These include the effects of natural pathways from monsoonal wind patterns or by human involvement, such as landings of foreign fishing vessels carrying exotic species from countries to Australia's north.

Participation by Indigenous communities has been a key to the success of the quarantine strategy since its inception in 1989. Since 2006 DAFF has increased the level of engagement with Indigenous communities in high-risk areas

along the northern coastline to assist with surveys and for monitoring for various target organisms. DAFF Biosecurity officers work closely with 46 ranger groups across northern Australia.



*NAQS manager NT/WA Chris Dale demonstrates to Garma participants how exotic mosquito larvae are collected.*



## Major military exercise tests DAFF's biosecurity capability

*ADF personnel at the AQIS stand at the Talisman Sabre Open Day in Rockhampton, QLD.*

Talisman Sabre 2011 (TS11) is the largest combined military training activity in Australia – it is also a great opportunity to test biosecurity risk capabilities for the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

For most of July TS11 took place in Queensland, the Northern Territory and the Coral, Timor and Arafura seas, with around 14,000 United States and 8500 Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel participating, and involving approximately 200 military vehicles, 20 maritime vessels and 25 Australian and 135 US aircraft.

Talisman Sabre is held every two years in Australia and is designed to train Australian and US forces in planning and conducting Combined Task Force operations in order to improve ADF/US combat readiness and interoperability.

Talisman Sabre presents DAFF with unique challenges to manage biosecurity risks presented by visiting US military vessels, aircraft, vehicles, weaponry and personal equipment. These challenges require innovative approaches and DAFF's Machinery and Military National Coordination Centre in Brisbane and the Major Infrastructure Program in Canberra remain committed to refining and improving guidelines and resources for managing biosecurity risks involved with Talisman Sabre.

In the months leading up to TS11 at least 17 DAFF biosecurity officers travelled overseas to conduct offshore pre-inspections in Alaska, Washington, California, Hawaii, Guam and Japan. Altogether, more than 90 DAFF

biosecurity officers were involved during the exercise in Australia, carrying out quarantine inspections and clearances and providing advice and information to both the US and Australian forces.

The US works cooperatively with Australia and is committed to maintaining Australia's favourable pest and disease status. The US has demonstrated this commitment by developing specialised teams known as Tiger Teams to clean vehicles and equipment of quarantine risk material prior to coming to Australia. DAFF biosecurity officers trained US Marine Corps Tiger Teams and provided technical advice on cleanliness requirements.

A DAFF biosecurity officer was deployed to the Combined Military Command Centre in Rockhampton throughout the exercise. Having a DAFF officer at the nerve centre of the exercise ensured the smooth clearance of military vessels, aircraft, personnel, vehicles and cargo for the exercise to ensure that Australia's biosecurity requirements were met.

### Sovereign immunity – what this means for biosecurity?

The US Government asserts sovereign immunity on all US state aircraft, maritime vessels and amphibious craft. Under international law, the assertion of sovereign immunity meant that DAFF biosecurity officers could not board to inspect US sovereign immune aircraft or maritime vessels participating in TS11.

DAFF respects US sovereign immunity and developed bilateral arrangements with the US to

manage any biosecurity risks. Agreements were signed with the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the US Department of Defense enabling the USDA to certify that sovereign immune US aircraft, maritime vessels and amphibious craft met Australia's biosecurity requirements.

To support these arrangements DAFF officers provided training on Australian biosecurity requirements to officers from the USDA, US Marine Corps Reserves and the US Navy Reserves. These trained officers inspected US aircraft and vessels to ensure they met Australian biosecurity standards. The whole experience has further strengthened DAFF's relationship with our USDA counterparts.

The arrangements with the US proved very successful in TS11 when a trained US military Reservist discovered an ant infestation in cargo on a US Air Force aircraft arriving in Australia. The nest was destroyed and samples sent to DAFF scientists for identification. They were identified as larval and pupal ants as well as ant workers and alates from the genus *Monomorium* – insects that are of a biosecurity concern.

The biosecurity outcomes of Talisman Sabre 2011 were reviewed at the conclusion of the exercise. The review involved all key organisations including the Australian Department of Defence, ADF, US military, US Embassy, USDA, and Australian Customs and Border Protection Service.

Findings from the review will be used to further refine the biosecurity management arrangements for Talisman Sabre 2013.

# Dutch solo sailor breezes through quarantine

Laura Dekker, a 15-year-old Dutch teenager with aspirations of becoming the youngest person to circumnavigate the world solo, docked recently in Darwin for her only Australian stop and a mandatory quarantine inspection.

Ms Dekker sailed her 11.5-metre ketch, Guppy, into Cullen Bay where quarantine staff from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry carried out biosecurity checks. She stayed in Darwin for two weeks to recuperate and carry out repairs.

DAFF Biosecurity officer Hugo Espinoza said vessel inspections played an important role in managing biosecurity risks across northern Australia. "One of our main focuses for visiting yachts is the management of pest and disease of incoming fruit and vegetables and waste," Mr Espinoza said. "In keeping with the quarantine legislation, Laura satisfactorily completed all required documents, and her vessel cleared quarantine following inspection in the port of Darwin."

Ms Dekker was 14 when she sailed from Gibraltar in August 2010. She told quarantine



staff that the solo round-the-world trip was her lifelong ambition. "I just love sailing," she told them. "The experience is much more important than the record."

Ms Deckker expects to complete her journey in May 2012 aged 16 years and eight months. This would eclipse the set by Australia's Jessica Watson, who unofficially became the youngest

*DAFF Biosecurity officer Hugo Espinoza guides solo sailor Laura Dekker through Australian quarantine regulations.*

person to sail non-stop and unassisted around the world when she returned to Sydney on 15 May 2010, three days before her 17th birthday.

# Antarctic waste given final burial in WA

Around 160 shipping containers contaminated with soil and rock waste from the Australian Antarctic base at Casey Station were shipped to Western Australia for inspection by quarantine staff from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

At least a dozen DAFF Biosecurity officers from Fremantle were involved in inspecting and disposing of more than 1000 tonnes of Antarctic waste. Soil can carry weed seeds, disease-causing agents such as nematodes, and fungi and other invertebrates, all of which pose risks to Australian agricultural industries and the environment.

DAFF worked with seven private companies and the Australian Antarctic Division to organise and

dispose of the waste, which was 'deep buried' at the Red Hill landfill site in Western Australia. Casey Station is on Vincennes Bay in the Australian Antarctic Territory, and is managed by the Australian Antarctic Division, part of the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. The Australian Antarctic Division spent five months preparing the shipping containers.

Previously, Antarctic waste was taken to Tasmania for clearance and disposal. But now quarantine officers in Fremantle can expect to process future consignments.

The Madrid Protocol, adopted in 1991, designates Antarctica as a natural reserve and establishes environmental principles for the conduct of all activities, including returning waste to the originating country. Before this Antarctic waste was dumped in open tips and landfills or burnt. 'Sea icing' was also used, where rubbish was dumped onto sea ice during winter so it floated away and sank as the ice melted.



*Tonnes of waste from the Australian Antarctic base, Casey Station, have undergone biosecurity clearance in Western Australia.*

# Key biosecurity role in animal products seizure

Biosecurity officers from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry played a key role in identifying biosecurity and quarantine risks during a very large multi-agency seizure of illegal wildlife products in Sydney.

The macabre find at a house in Parramatta on 3 August included the full skins of large cat breeds, an assortment of animal skulls of monkeys and possums, a wolf pelt, carved ivory goods and weapons. It was one of the largest wildlife product seizures in Australia and followed detailed monitoring and investigative work by several agencies.

The investigation, code named Operation Bonaparte, was led by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, and it included officers from the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service, the NSW Office of the Environment and Heritage, the NSW Police and the RSPCA. The Sydney-based DAFF Biosecurity officers who assessed biosecurity risks were Jessica Hammond, Catharine Whitney, Bruce Smith and Michael Oldfield.

They were later commended for determining the biosecurity risk from almost 400 illegal wildlife



*Orangutan skulls seized in Parramatta.*

artefacts discovered at the house after a search warrant was issued under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

DAFF Secretary Dr Conall O'Connell said: "Our officers played a key role in the operation by providing advice on quarantine issues, searching for and locating specimens, and handling exhibits posing a quarantine risk. This is one example of how our staff can work with other agencies to meet common objectives."

Australia is one of more than 175 countries that are party to the *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)*, which was established in 1975 to

regulate international trade in endangered species or those at risk of endangerment. It is enforceable under Australia's national environment law and helps protect 5000 threatened species of animals and 28,000 species of plants. Penalties for the illegal importation of wildlife include fines of up to \$110,000 and/or up to 10 years in jail.

The unregulated global trade in wildlife products has become a major factor in the decline of many species of animals and plants. It has had a devastating impact on the wild populations of certain plant and animal species, such as the impact of the ivory trade on elephants.

# Post border pest and diseases report

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry works closely with the states, territories and industry bodies to eradicate, contain and manage pests and diseases. This is done through national arrangements that cover both emergencies and non-emergency situations. Within these arrangements the department has a key role in providing national leadership and coordination, including managing national technical and decision making committees and groups.

**Green snail** – The exotic plant pest, green snail, has been detected in Victoria for the first time in a lucerne crop near Cobram in the north of the state. The snail is native to southern Europe and

North Africa. It became established in the Perth metropolitan area in the 1980s.

The Victorian Department of Primary Industries is the lead agency responding to this pest. The Australian Government, through DAFF, manages the Consultative Committee on Emergency Plant Pests, which has met on this issue.

**Cocoa pod borer** – Cocoa pod borer (*Conopomorpha cramerella*) was detected on a single cocoa plantation north of Cairns in Queensland in April 2011. DAFF chairs the national management group, which has agreed to a nationally cost-shared response program to eradicate this plant pest. It is not known how the pest entered Australia.

The response has been implemented under the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed – a legally binding agreement between the Australian Government, all state and territory governments, national plant industry body signatories and Plant Health Australia.

Cocoa pod borer, also known as cocoa moth, is a major pest of cocoa plantations in South-East

Asia and the Pacific. The borer reduces crop yields in cocoa and has the potential to reduce rambutan fruit production, since rambutan is also a host. The cocoa and rambutan industries are small niche industries in far north Queensland, extending from north of the Daintree to south of Tully.

**Branched broomrape** – The Branched Broomrape National Management Group met on 11 August 2011 and agreed it was no longer technically feasible to eradicate this weed and the eradication program will be wound-up by the end of this financial year.

The management group recognised that branched broomrape weed is potentially damaging to trade and production, and it requires a national approach to containment and ongoing management. Biosecurity South Australia, with support from a steering committee, will prepare a strategy for the branched broomrape's future management.



In this section we highlight some of the unusual and exotic finds encountered by our front-line officers as they perform their duties. These stories highlight the need for government, industry and the community to work together to manage the risks to Australia's biosecurity system by being aware of and reporting items of biosecurity concern.

## Pigeons hit by rare virus in Victoria

Australia's Chief Veterinary Officer Dr Mark Schipp called for the imposition of strict biosecurity measures in September when the avian virus, paramyxovirus (PMV1), was detected for the first time in Australia.

Victorian authorities discovered the outbreak in hobby pigeons near Shepparton. Infected pigeons appeared tired or showed neurological signs, such as circling or head flicking before dying suddenly.

Dr Schipp said the paramyxovirus virus could cause mild, short-term conjunctivitis or influenza-like symptoms in people. "Human infection is extremely rare and usually occurred after contact with an infected bird," he said.

On 28 September the Victorian Government issued a 90-day ban prohibiting shows, exhibitions, markets, sales, auctions, tossing and racing pigeons anywhere in Victoria.

## Company pays price for illegal salmon imports

A Sydney company was fined \$10,000 in the Brisbane Magistrates Court for illegally importing more than 50 kilograms of Scottish salmon on 24 June 2010. Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Biosecurity officers detected the salmon in a consignment of frozen seafood that arrived in Brisbane from Sweden. The company had provided false and misleading documents and lacked the required import permits.

DAFF investigators executed a search warrant at the company's offices and found fraudulent documents used to facilitate the illegal importation. The company was charged with illegal importation under the *Quarantine Act 1908* and producing false or misleading documents under the *Commonwealth Criminal Code Act 1995*.

## Quarantine officers detect something fishy

A Sydney woman was fined more than \$5000 for illegally importing prohibited ornamental fish into Australia. The woman pleaded guilty in Sydney's Downing Centre Court on 27 September of attempting to import 240 featherfin catfish by falsely declaring them as *Synodontis nigriventris*, 'upside-down catfish', a species permitted to be imported into Australia.

DAFF Biosecurity officers detected the fish during an inspection of live ornamental fish in a consignment from Indonesia and correctly identified the fish as *Synodontis eupterus*, the prohibited featherfin catfish. Featherfin catfish are a prohibited import into Australia under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* and the *Quarantine Act 1908*. She was charged for aid and abet in the importation of a regulated live specimen under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

The maximum penalty for breaching this law is \$110,000 and/or 10 years jail.

## Swarm of giant honey bees stopped dead



A swarm of giant honey bees, *Apis dorsata binghami*, was detected and destroyed in August on a ship from East Timor arriving in Darwin.

Stevedores alerted the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry about seeing the swarm attached to the ship's prow. Biosecurity officer Keshia Clark identified the swarm as giant honey bees which included a queen. With help from a local apiarist, the bees were removed and destroyed.

The Senior Manager, Quarantine Operations in the Northern Region, Kevin Langham, said the ship was subject to quarantine. "This is exactly why we have quarantine procedures in place and why a strong working relationship with stevedores is so important in managing biosecurity," Mr Langham said. "From time to time bees, mosquitoes and other insects will hitch a ride on cargo and vessels. We have strategies in place to monitor and treat them."

Incursions by *Apis dorsata binghami* could lead to the rapid reduction of domestic and commercial bee hives. They are found in China, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Indonesia and the Philippines and have been reported in East Timor.



Bee swarm detected on ship in Darwin.



## Bensen wows Torres Strait students

Detector dog Bensen and his handler Ash Downs thrilled many of the students attending Tagai College's careers market on Thursday Island in the Torres Strait in July.

Biosecurity officers from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry ran a stall during the annual careers market, where Bensen soon attracted wide interest. The event promotes quarantine awareness and compliance with Australian Government quarantine requirements in the Torres Strait. Detector dogs are regularly used to assist in Torres Strait quarantine clearance operations.

Barrie Goedecke, the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy Manager for the Torres Strait/Northern Peninsula Area, said: "It was a great day for us. We had a lot of student enquiries about career opportunities with DAFF and I wouldn't be too surprised to see some budding quarantine officers in the near future."

Tagai State College is the largest educational institution in the Torres Strait island chain with facilities on all 15 inhabited islands, including preschools and primary schools and a secondary school and TAFE on Thursday Island.

Less than a year ago Bensen made the front page of the Cairns Post when he befriended television icon Oprah Winfrey during a quarantine inspection on her private jet.



## DAFF helps find a new home for army detection dog

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has facilitated the efforts of the Department of Defence to find a new home in the United States for an Australian explosives detection dog, Harry.

Harry returned to Australia in October 2010 for mandatory post-arrival quarantine period at Eastern Creek Quarantine Station, where he underwent a series of veterinary inspections, testing and treatments. However, he tested positive for *Ehrlichia canis*, which he had acquired while serving with Australian combat forces in Afghanistan. Despite several months of

treatment he was ineligible for release from quarantine to return to the general dog population of Australia. Infection with *E. canis* causes fever, depression and weight loss and can be fatal in dogs.

DAFF Biosecurity officers ensured Harry remained happy, healthy and posed no biosecurity threat to the dog population at Eastern Creek while officers from the Department of Defence worked to find him a new home. Inquiries were made with defence services in the US and the UK until a home was found with a US Army major still serving in Afghanistan. Harry will live with his new owner on an army base near San Diego where he will serve as a mascot.

Before leaving Australia, DAFF staff gave Harry a farewell party at Eastern Creek. His former handler, Joshua Colbourne, came to say goodbye and a retired Australian Army colonel presented Harry with combat service medals.

## THE BIOSECURITY BULLETIN IS GOING ONLINE

This will be the last edition of the Biosecurity Bulletin to be published as a hardcopy publication. From the next issue, it will be published as an online newsletter only. To ensure you don't miss any future editions, please visit [www.daff.gov.au/bulletin](http://www.daff.gov.au/bulletin) and select 'subscribe' to join the electronic mailing list. We're currently in the process of making changes to the format of the online newsletter to embrace the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's new visual identity, so you can expect to see changes to the look and feel of the Biosecurity Bulletin in the new year.

Any person with information about breaches to Australia's quarantine, meat or food inspection laws is encouraged to contact the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF). This will assist the Government to protect Australia's valuable primary industries, environment and way of life.

**CALL 1800 803 006**

or write to: DAFF

GPO Box 858 Canberra ACT 2601

Information about biosecurity services, including inspection and quarantine services, is available from the DAFF website: [www.daff.gov.au](http://www.daff.gov.au).

REGION	LOCATION	PHONE NUMBER
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Northern	Darwin office	08 8920 7000
Northern	Cairns office	07 4030 7800
South East	Melbourne office	03 8318 6700
South West	Perth office	08 9334 1555
South West	Adelaide office	08 8201 6000
Central East	Sydney office	02 8334 7444
National	Canberra office	02 6272 3933

Readers who wish to comment on any article in the Biosecurity Bulletin or obtain further information, please contact the editor at: [pr@daff.gov.au](mailto:pr@daff.gov.au) or by post to: Biosecurity Bulletin, GPO Box 858, Canberra ACT 2601. The Biosecurity Bulletin is issued free on request to individuals and organisations with an interest in quarantine and inspection matters. The Biosecurity Bulletin is available online at: [www.daff.gov.au/bulletin](http://www.daff.gov.au/bulletin).

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