

# Biosecurity Monthly Newsletter



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## No Invasive Ants Detected!

The Biosecurity Service concluded an Invasive Ants Surveillance program for Rarotonga this month of March 2021 that initially commenced in December 2020.

The goal of the exercise was to confirm whether invasive ant species such as the Red imported fire ant (*Solenopsis invicta*) and the Little fire ant (*Wasmannia auropunctata*) are present in an area or country.

There are ten species of ants regarded as the worst ants in the world and some of these species are in our neighboring Island countries. The high number of people, vessels, aircrafts, cargo and food movement around the world also comes with a high likelihood of an unintentional introduction of invasive species into a new area.

The last invasive ant surveillance for Rarotonga was in 2007 and therefore one was long overdue.

Pre-surveillance activities commenced with the Biosecurity team completing a weeklong training to understand the requirements of implementing the surveillance program in accordance with the

“Pacific Invasive Ants Training Manual”.

Preparatory work included the preparation of the ant attraction baits. 2 types of baits were used—the Protein Bait (Peanut Butter & sausage) and the sugar bait (20% solution of sugar water).

The surveillance program was carried out at the Avatiu Ports. This area was identified by biosecurity as a potential pathway for the introduction of invasive ants. The actual surveillance work commenced late December with the placement of baits (a total of 274 baits). Of the 274 baits laid, 153 vials attracted ants and were taken into the laboratory for recording and identification.

Following the identification of ants within each vial, tirelessly completed by Biosecurity Officer Mari Syme, the Biosecurity Services findings confirm there is **no** invasive ant species present at the

Avatiu  
Ports.



Above: Biosecurity Officer- Mari Syme

# Importation of vegetable seeds

The Biosecurity Services team continues to carry out inspections of incoming cargo through the mail, air and sea.

Over the past few weeks, the inspection team has seen an increase in the importation of commercially packaged vegetable seeds. More than 15kgs of assorted vegetable seeds were imported into the country by various commercial and private importers.

The team was pleased to note that “all imported seeds were in compliance and import permits valid”. The seeds were released to the importers and Biosecurity would like to thank the importers for being compliant with the requirements.

**For more information, refer to the seed importation process below.**

1. Fill out an application form listing the seeds that you wish to import. The form can be accessed on the Ministry website: [www.agriculture.gov.ck](http://www.agriculture.gov.ck) or uplifted from the Arorangi Office.
2. Ensure the seeds to be imported are from the “List of Approved Seed Suppliers”. This can also be found on the Agriculture website.
3. Complete the application form correctly and submit for processing via email to [moa.support@cookislands.gov.ck](mailto:moa.support@cookislands.gov.ck) or drop into the Arorangi office. Processing will take 3 working days.
4. If the application is approved, an import permit with import requirements will be issued. The applicant will be contacted for collection and the payment of a fee.
5. If an application is declined, the applicant will be contacted also.



Above: Commercially packaged seeds imported by various commercial and private importers.

# Ongoing Fruit-fly surveillance program

Biosecurity Officers Mr Tamarua Teroi and Ms Greta Remuera alongside Entomologist Maja Poeschko continues to maintain the fortnightly fruit-fly surveillance program for Rarotonga.

The surveillance program consists of 22 trapping sites located at different areas on Rarotonga. Each trapping site consists of 2 types of traps.

1st trap = Cue lure pheromone to attract *Bactrocera melanotus* (BM) and an insecticide.

2nd trap = Methyl Eugenol pheromone to attract *Bactrocera Xanthodes* and other fruitfly spp and an insecticide.

The traps are regularly checked fortnightly and re-dipped quarterly.

The results for this month's surveillance shows an increase in the number of fruit flies caught in both traps. This is due to an increase in the

number of fruits available for fruitflies to lay eggs and populate.

We are happy to report that these are not the fruit-flies that caused an outbreak some years ago.



Above: *Bactrocera melanotus* fruitflies in a cue lure trap.

## Virtual Talanoa session

On Thursday 25th March, the 4th Talanoa session was convened by host country Fiji. The Talanoa session is an informal virtual meeting designed to update regional National Plant Protection Organisations (NPPO) on biosecurity matters and any other trade related matters.

The meeting was co-hosted by the Cook Islands who delivered a country update and presented a video showcasing some of the activities carried out in-country.

Highlighted in the Cook Islands country presentation was the following;

1. International Year of Plant Health 2020 celebrated with tree planting activities in primary schools;
2. World Food Day 2020 activities;
3. The Ant Surveillance activity completed for

the Rarotonga Avatiu ports.

4. Taro Export program initiated by Aitutaki in February 2021.



Above: Biosecurity team preparing for the virtual talanoa session

The session was most beneficial for all Biosecurity staff and we look forward to the next Talanoa session.



## Ongoing partnership with Customs

On the 24th March, the Biosecurity division hosted a meeting with Cook Islands Customs service. The purpose was to discuss and strengthen collaboration towards trade related issues.

The Customs team included Walter Tangata – Senior Customs Officer Maritime & Cargo, Maria loane—Senior Customs Officer Trade and Shane Panetierre – NZ Customs.

A few areas of concern highlighted were clearance of cargo at points of entries – mail, air, sea.

Biosecurity would like to acknowledge the Customs Service for their ongoing support in utilizing the CUSMOD system for risk assessment purposes.

Apart from the meeting, Biosecurity and Customs have recently signed an Agreement of Cooperation (AOC) effective 01 March 2021 acknowledging that cooperation with each other will assist



**Back row:** BO– Mari Syme, SBO– Takapi Kora, SCO– Walter Tangata, SBO– Moetu Tangitamaiti.

**Front row:** BO– Tamarua Teroi, Biosecurity Director– Ngatoko Ngatoko, NZ Customs– Shane Panetierre, SCO– Maria loane, SBO- Sherro Tomokino.

with minimizing quarantine risks and enhancing biosecurity and safety.

## Aitutaki Taro Export Program

In late 2020, Aitutaki registered their interest in reviving the export of peeled frozen taro from Aitutaki to New Zealand. Although the pathway requirements for frozen fruits/vegetable is less stringent than fresh fruits/vegetable, technical issues like standardized processing procedures still needed to be compiled with to enable access to the market.

To assist, the Ministry developed in consultation with MPI NZ, a Root Crop export protocol for Aitutaki, in accordance to the import protocol for frozen root crops exported into New Zealand.

Furthermore, the Ministry's senior Biosecurity officials, Ngatoko Ta Ngatoko, Director and Piririki Maa, Senior Biosecurity Officer travelled to Aitutaki from the 10 to 12 February 2021 to confirm the taro export pathway with the registered taro growers with TNM Ltd and carry out an inspection of TNM transitional pack house facility. This inspection had to be undertaken prior to approving the premises as a 'Biosecurity approved

premises' in accordance with Section 88 of the Biosecurity Act 2008.

The first trial shipment of over 2000kgs of peeled, frozen taro arrived in New Zealand last week.

The team congratulates Mr Bishop in pursuing this export venture of frozen root crops to NZ. Mr Bishop took the initiative to meet with the Ministry's Biosecurity team to ensure compliance with NZ's import standards and provide for ease of entry into NZ.



**Above:** Bags of 4kg taro ready for export.

The Ministry remains committed to supporting Mr Bishop in his export venture and will carry out the same process with other potential exporters.