EDITORIAL

A great Ministry in the making

It gives me real pleasure to bring you this June edition of Surveillance as Deputy Director General for Compliance and Response of MPI – the Ministry for Primary Industries/Manatu Ahu Matua.

I’d like to acknowledge how important the Ministry’s role is in being prepared for a major biosecurity outbreak in New Zealand, should one occur. MPI recognises the significance of maintaining the integrity of the biosecurity system and remains committed to protecting New Zealand and our trading partners from biological risk.

MPI emerged on 30 April 2012 – from an amalgamation of MAF, the NZ Food Safety Authority, Biosecurity New Zealand and the Ministry of Fisheries. With our new Ministry comes a new identity, which you will recognise by the New Zealand coat of arms and a strap of green – so keep an eye out for the fresh look. It will take a while to roll out across all our branding and signage but is starting to emerge and will continue to over the coming months.

As a new Ministry, we also have a new focus. MPI is focused on “Growing and Protecting New Zealand”. While this includes working with partners up and down the country and overseas to foster sustainable business opportunities in the primary sector, it also means being prepared for and anticipating risks. It means having a thorough response ready for any biosecurity event that may impact New Zealand’s economy and environment.

MPI recently ran a detailed exercise designed to test a whole-of-government response to a foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreak. FMD is a highly contagious livestock disease, capable of causing massive economic losses across our economy. It’s something the UK knows only too well, having been hit by outbreaks in 2001 and again in 2007. The losses and costs are significant. They include social community costs, impacts on tourism, flow-on effects to other sectors that service primary production, and negative impacts on international trade. Trade impacts could go as far as exclusion from premium overseas meat and dairy markets, closing some exports for months or even years.

The FMD exercise was therefore simulated to be as real as possible, involving some 250 people from 12 government departments and five industry organisations. It saw teams in lock-down mode working shift changes both in the office and out in the field, and media drilling official spokespeople with questions at every turn.

From it we learned some huge lessons and gained a great understanding of how MPI can work together in a response. It also proved to be an invaluable exercise for what happened just weeks later – a real event with significant potential impact on the horticulture sector.

That event involved New Zealand declaring the incursion of a solitary male fruit fly in Auckland. The fly was found during a routine surveillance check and controls were immediately put in place in the area to limit the transport of fruit and vegetables that could potentially carry the fly or its larvae.

While further investigations took place, a large media campaign was put in place to regularly update the public. This was supported by a direct mail drop to nearby residents so they knew what was happening in their area and what was required in terms of limiting the movement of fruit and vegetables.

The fruit fly incursion highlighted why the work MPI staff do is so important: they have a front-end job carrying out on-the-spot risk assessments on goods and travellers entering New Zealand and a follow-up role with post-border diagnostics, surveillance, investigation and response. It’s widely accepted that no country can have a foolproof border protection management process in place both before and at the border, so post-border surveillance has a vital role to play in ensuring that anything that does get through can then be contained.

In the event that there is a biosecurity incursion, MPI is geared up to rapidly initiate an emergency response – which is what we did when we discovered the fruit fly in one of our regularly monitored surveillance traps in Auckland. We have the right steps in place to provide other countries with robust assurance of our freedom from specific diseases – and to minimise impacts if a disease such as FMD were ever to arrive in New Zealand.

We are moving towards a more integrated border management system. Owing to changing and increasing risks at the border and the need to ensure that we facilitate trade and travel, MPI is also moving to refine its approach to border management. This will include integrating trade and travel risks with biosecurity risks so there is a joint focus on border risks as a whole.
This more integrated approach will bring us closer to other border agencies in New Zealand and enable us to combine resources and activities so we can be more effective together. It’s also a great opportunity to build stronger partnerships with our stakeholders.

I personally am excited about where we are heading with biosecurity in New Zealand and look forward to the enhancements we can make to an already robust system. MPI is coming together under significant change, but showing early signs of developing into a great Ministry that will have far-reaching benefits for our stakeholders and trading partners.

Andrew Coleman  
Deputy Director General for Compliance and Response  
Ministry for Primary Industries/Manatu Ahu Matua  
andrew.coleman@mpi.govt.nz