



Expert Plan to Crush Export Pest

An insignificant creature with the potential to disrupt millions of dollars' worth of Australian exports may have met its match, thanks to the efforts of the Australian Freight Councils Network – of which the Tasmanian Freight Logistics Council is a member.

Snails – common, rare, native or introduced – are treated as pest species when shipping products overseas and can cause expensive and persistent troubles for Australian shippers if they're found when containers reach their destination. For example, just one small snail on an Australian export container can result in 100% mandatory inspection of all local containerised exports to the USA.

After Australian snails were discovered by US authorities in 2006, a dairy exporter was hit with a shipping line bill for more than \$100,000 over a two-year period, to cover the cost of transferring goods into clean empties after the original containers had been quarantined. The exporter also had to enlist the help of the AQIS and the Australian Embassy in Washington to secure the release of their goods. The company now has eight staff employed on the snail trail for four hours each month at a cost of \$24,000 per annum.

In 2008, detection of snails resulted in the exteriors of twenty containers being fumigated for 72 hours after the cargo was unloaded. Only one container was found with one tiny brown snail - but all 20 containers had to be fumigated, and the process totalled \$2,000 per container. Another exporter incurred bills of \$25,000 after thirteen infested containers were detained.

In an effort to ensure clear understanding of this troublesome issue and the remedies for it, the Australian Freight Councils Network (AFCN) has produced a new brochure, *Snail Free Zone*, to advise shippers how to squash this problem once and for all.

“Unfortunately, snail varieties attach themselves to containers, pallets, bins and other transport equipment in container depots, road, rail and sea terminals, storage yards and packing sheds, manufacturing sites and wharf-side storage and loading facilities,” AFCN chairman John Begley said.

“It's so easy to overlook these pests and underestimate the consequences.

“Between August last year and January this year the US upgraded its protection regime from random inspections to 100% mandatory screening, for all Australian exports – whether they be dairy, citrus or even mineral sands.

“Significantly, costs for fumigation are based on a master Bill of Lading, so for example if a snail is detected on one of four containers in a consignment, all four will be fumigated,” Mr Begley said.

“Ignoring the problem can be a very expensive mistake.”

Snail Free Zone – which is itself free – covers topics such as The Cost of Complacency, What To Look Out For, Major Control Points and Industry Responsibilities, and Useful Contacts. It has been compiled using the experience and expertise of AFCN members and relevant authorities.

“As contamination can occur at any stage in the export chain, it is important for all stages of the export chain from the empty container park, through the various transport companies, packing establishments, freight forwarders, depots, rail heads, port operators and shipping companies to be aware of this issue and take measures to address the risk of container contamination,” the AFCN says.

Snail Free Zone can be downloaded from the Tasmanian Freight Logistics Council website.

For more information, contact the Tasmanian Freight Logistics Council on (03) 6236 3663 or email freightlogistics@tcci.com.au

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