

Importers adopt watchdog role

by Stan Malcolm

Importers are becoming New Zealand's biosecurity watchdogs because of new Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) regulations.

MAF's biosecurity import health standard, which must be fully operational by December 31, applies to containers shipped into New Zealand.

The regulations aim to increase border protection against unwanted pests, such as the Asian gypsy moth and the striped mosquito.

The new standard requires port stevedores, freight forwarders and those involved in clearing imported goods to have MAF-accredited staff performing checks on all containers that land in New Zealand. Previously MAF did random inspections.

Some industry sources say about 15,000 staff may need to obtain accreditation from MAF. Staff involved in the handling and unloading of containers are being trained in basic bio-security regulations and practice.

Sandy Gibson, general manager of Axis Intermodal, a Ports of Auckland subsidiary company, has welcomed the changes.

"The major change is that MAF are moving from a random-based inspec-

tion process to an intelligence-based process. They will use a model that will rank shipments according to their risk profile, based on such things as where the containers are loaded, and their contents," says Mr Gibson.

Ports of Auckland land 250,000 imported containers each year. But as the port is a transitional facility, where containers are not usually unloaded on the docks, Axis Intermodal staff will mainly be required to do only exterior container checks.

The situation is different at unloading facilities, where industry staff will be required to thoroughly check all imported containers. Previously MAF inspected only containers carrying biological cargo, those without internal cleaning and packing certificates, plus a random 10% selection.

Simon Tapper, part-owner of Tapper Transport Ltd, says around 20 of his 135 staff will need accreditation to carry out the inspections.

"I think it has been reasonably well sorted out. Because we are in such an isolated position and have lots of coastline, what they are proposing is necessary."

Mr Tapper says the consequences of non-compliance will ensure companies overlook the conflict between

commercial imperatives and the extra work involved.

"It relies on the MAF audit process. But if they pop out to a warehouse and see some infested cane being unloaded and no-one does anything about it... there's a \$200,000 fine.

"You've blown all your trust and MAF may insist that all your containers get unloaded by a third party, which could cost millions."

MAF programme manager Mike Alexander agrees that potential conflicts of interest could arise.

"It is a possibility, but there will be audits of the clearance process. Measures in place for non-compliance and education of those responsible for checking will be instituted."

MAF will receive \$1.1 million in funding this financial year to implement the scheme, but will require minimal department resources, says Mr Alexander.

Training is not expected to be a significant burden on companies.

"It will probably be something like three or four hours in a classroom for each staff member to get accreditation," says Mr Tapper.

The freight industry has faced numerous changes recently, including new import transaction fees and stricter rules for approving customs.

AUT student joins literary luminaries

by Jodie Marinkovich

An AUT student feels honoured she can add her name to the list of famous previous winners of the Bank of New Zealand Katherine Mansfield Short Story Award.

Natasha Leitch, who is enrolled in the MA in communication studies, says she still can't believe she won first prize in the professional section of the short story competition.

"I'm amazed. I look at some of the other past winners — Keri Hulme, Maurice Shadbolt, Vincent O'Sullivan, and Frank Sargeson — and I can't quite fathom how my name could be added to such a list," she says.

Miss Leitch, 22, won \$5000 and a portrait of Katherine Mansfield for her story about teaching in Oratia and Korea, growing up, relationships and religion.

In addition to her prize, Miss Leitch, who graduated with a BA in communication studies, has had her story published in the *Listener* and

broadcast on National Radio.

Miss Leitch's father, Graham Leitch, says he is so proud of his daughter winning New Zealand's most prestigious prize for writing.

"We always thought she was good at writing, but thought that could've been a biased parent thing. Now she has won this award and it just proves how good she is."

Dr Alan Cocker, the associate head of AUT's school of communication studies, says Miss Leitch is a multi-talented student.

He says she was studying a creative writing paper at the University of Auckland under well known New Zealand writer Witi Ihimaera, as well as doing her MA at AUT.

Miss Leitch says although she is working as the information officer for Interchange Respite Care and as an editor for Australia's national youth media portal, Vibewire.net, she is sure she will find time to write more poetry, a collection of short stories or a novel in the near future.

"I'm amazed... I can't quite fathom how my name could be added to such a list."

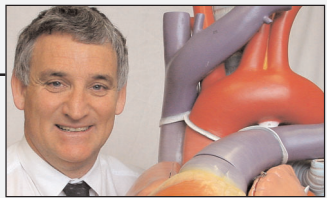
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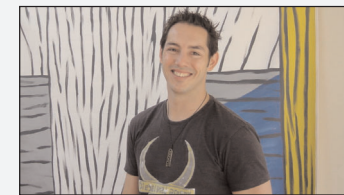
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School of Communication Studies
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Private Bag 92006
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Fax: (64-9) 917 9987, wahanui@aut.ac.nz, www.journalism.aut.ac.nz

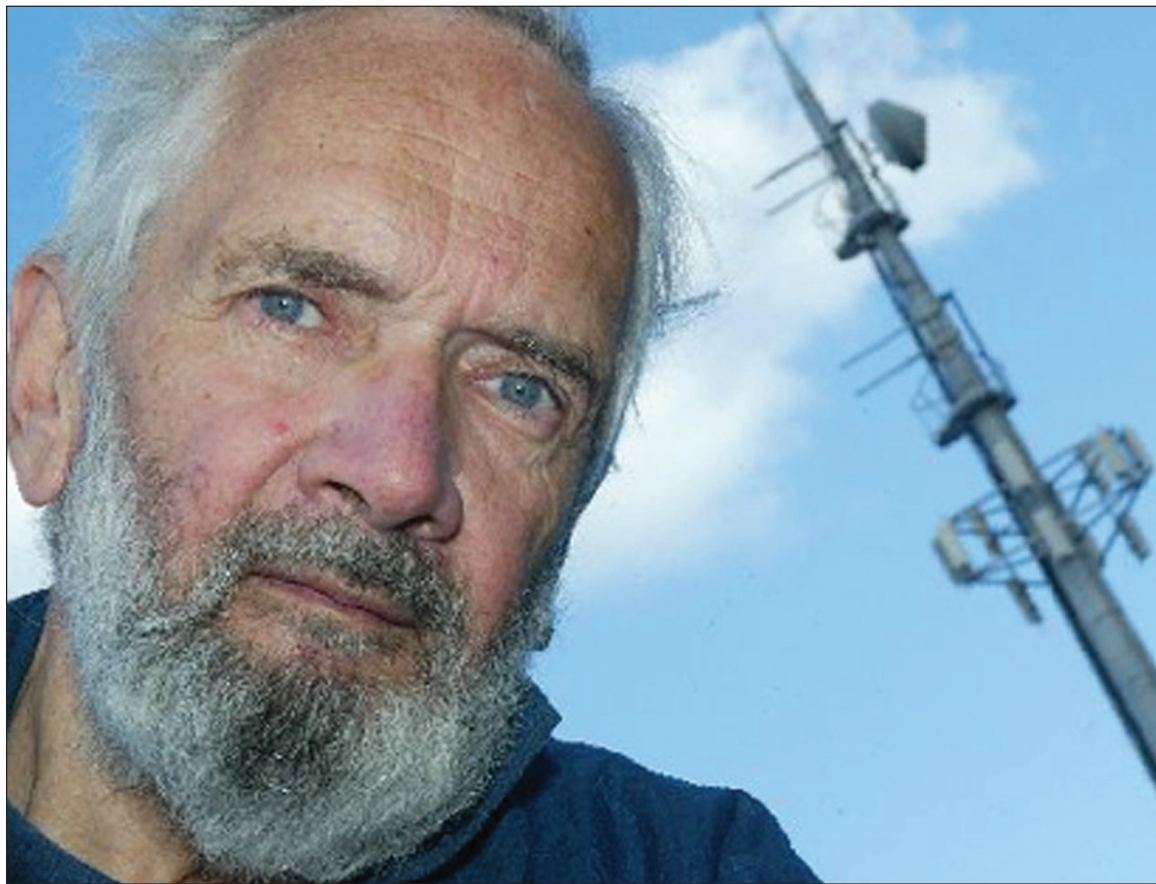


PHOTO: NORTHERN ADVOCATE

Northland man's search for intelligent alien lifeforms

by Michael Otto

The first clear proof of intelligent alien life might be in a Northland computer right now — and that's not science fiction.

Mangonui man Alan Brooker's computer is one of 4.5 million worldwide and 21,000 in New Zealand that are linked together to process radio signals coming from space.

The aim is to see if there are any patterns that might have originated from intelligent life.

Mr Brooker is a former Kaipara Health Service area manager, who also writes science fiction in electronic book form, and is working on an interactive CD cookbook.

His computer recently processed its 500th "work unit" for the Search

for Extra Terrestrial Intelligence League, which has an office based in New Jersey.

Mr Brooker has been a bit reluctant to let people know he is doing this work.

"You get a bit worried that people might point the finger and say, 'Ooh, you think there might be aliens out there,'" he says.

But he would be very surprised if intelligent extraterrestrial life wasn't somewhere in the universe.

"We are on the outer fringes of the youngest part of the galaxy and we've developed life.

"So the older parts are bound to have done so too."

He said people in the league had occasionally become very excited about signals they picked up, only to

find the patterns were nothing more than television signals reflected off the Earth's stratosphere.

"We knew television signals could do this anyhow," he says.

He is a bit worried that some television signals might give extraterrestrials the wrong impression.

"God help us if they pick up something like *Scooby Doo* or *South Park*.

"They'll never want to come here." None of his units has turned up any patterns worth noting thus far, he says.

"I've just been crunching boring old stuff."

The 500 work units have taken up over 7000 hours of CPU time since he started in the mid-1990s.

The data software runs as a background task or a screen-saver.