Top of the South Marine Biosecurity Partnership Incursion exercise

15 May 2013 at Port Nelson

A marine biosecurity incursion exercise was conducted by the Top of the South Marine Biosecurity Partnership at Port Nelson on 15 May 2013.

The aim of this exercise was to test the effectiveness of the top of the South Partnership response procedures in the event a marine biosecurity threat is discovered. A secondary aim was for participants to learn by being involved or observing the exercise.

The main objectives of this exercise were to:

- Test and evaluate current preparedness, readiness and response processes in the event of a biosecurity incursion.
- Engage participants and stakeholders in a simulation exercise
- Enhance capacity within the participants & stakeholders to respond to a biosecurity incursion event.

The main outcomes expected from this exercise were:

- Development of capacity in participants and observers to respond to biosecurity threats by concretising the issues and increasing familiarity of roles and responsibilities.
- Identification of improvements in procedures for incursion response

Participants

Matt Molloy	Top of the South Coordination Team exercise facilitator
Barbara Graves	Top of the South Coordination Team exercise facilitator
Peter Lawless	Top of the South Coordination Team Leader
Lindsay Vaughan	Tasman District Council
Ken Wright	Tasman District Council
Martin Workman	Nelson City Council
Jono Underwood	Marlborough District Council
Don McKenzie	Northland Regional Council
Derek Richards	Environment Southland
Don Morrissey	NIWA
Fiona Bancroft	Ministry for Primary Industries

Rose Bird	Ministry for Primary Industries
Debbie Stone	Marine Farming Association
Phil Clerke	Department of Conservation
Bruce Lines	Nelson Diving Services
Dave Duncan	Nelson Harbour Master
Thomas Marchant	Port Nelson Environmental Officer

The participants were introduced to the exercise and programme for the afternoon. Participants then lined up from 1-10 (with 10 being really ready) as to where they thought how ready the ToS are to respond to a marine biosecurity incursion. Results ranged from 3-10 initially and after the exercise ranged from 5-9 with more people feeling that the ToS is ready than they thought at the beginning of the exercise.

KEEP IT OUT -exercise

The original plan was to discuss with the three regions Harbour Masters what they would do if a fouled vessel was one hour away from their respective port. The TDC and MDC Harbour Masters were not available; however Dave Duncan from Port Nelson outlined his powers. These appeared to be more comprehensive than the other Harbour Masters as Dave was also operations manager for Port Nelson so had additional powers not available to the others.

Earlier the TDC Harbour Master Steve Hainstock advised that he felt there were few powers available to him to keep a fouled vessel out of port unless life was at risk. MPI do have the powers but it was not clear if they could prevent a fouled vessel entering a port without positive identification of an unwanted organism (or was suspicion enough?).

Need to clarify powers available to H/M and if no powers available then investigate options.

GET RID OF IT -exercise

The following scenario was outlined to participants:

Despite efforts the fishing vessel MV Incursion has made it to Port Nelson 40 days ago and has been tied up at the Calwell slipway since its arrival from Auckland. A port worker noticed the vessel was heavily fouled and saw a 30cm long tube like thing with a fuzzy bit on the end attached to the hull just below the water line. The vessel is in Port Nelson for engine and refrigerator maintenance.

The Management Committee led discussions around what to do, using the Operations Manual as a guide. There were discussions around:

- Sample taking. MPI suggested that they would send someone to do this but it was agreed with the amount of scientific expertise in Nelson, NIWA or Cawthron staff could take a sample and sent it to MITS.
- Operations manual states that no action be taken until positive identification is received from MITS. It was felt that in the 48 hrs it takes to confirm the species, prepare for action, prepare to wrap the boat or slip. Stop it moving and give everyone who may be potentially involved in the next stages a 'heads up'.
- Some pre-confirmation actions included; seeing if a diver is available for survey, stop the vessel moving, contact master of vessel, find out vessel details including last port, see if it can be slipped quickly, availability of treatment tools eg. plastic wrap.
- MPI need to be advised early and may assist in leading a response, even though this organism is present in other parts of NZ. This is similar to the recent response to Sabella in Coromandel where MPI offered a 50:50 cost share, not knowing the costs. Also offered a response manager, CIMS model and support and advice on a communications plan (this process did take a week to finalise). Locals lead project and manage contracts.
- Positive identification triggers delimiting survey and control options. Questions were asked as to who would fund the initial delimiting survey. MPI may fund some if they decide to be involved otherwise the Management committee would fund. Control options were discussed such as plastic wrapping or slipping, both of these required financing. Slipping would be difficult because of the bookings required and potential compensation for delays.
- Ongoing funding of a response is also a potential issue with not funds set aside specifically for this an approach would have to be made to Council. A suggestion that a pre-agreed funding cap could be arranged to ensure the smooth response was discussed and requires following up.
- Once UO is found elsewhere in the port the discussions were around regional powers to use a restricted place declaration, a small scale management plan…. Pathway management plan??
- The ToS Operations Manual was used and some minor alterations are required as a result of the exercise including; acknowledging that pre-confirmation actions can be undertaken while awaiting identification; review regional coordinators role in media release preparation (figure 3 on page 23 and section 3.6 on page 10); cellphone numbers for key contacts.

The nature of the commitment of all partners needs to be resolved. If Unwanted Organism in Nelson – is it the Top of the South or NCC who leads and pays the bills? Who has delegated authority to act? How do you ensure that you reach the right people? Make sure that you have 'in principle' agreements in place before you need them. Then response using CIMS. Locally the three councils need to agree to this and decide who will carry costs for investigations and responses.

MANAGE IT -exercise

A further scenario was proposed:

After further delimiting survey and public notifications the fanworm has been found in multiple areas within Port Nelson and along the inside of the Boulder Bank (all life stages). Small numbers of juveniles have been found in Tarakohe and Wainui Bay, Golden Bay. Further juveniles have been found at French Pass and also the Waikawa marina, both on wharf piles.

The Management Committee continued to lead discussions but at this level control was unlikely. There were discussions around:

- When an unwanted organism becomes established (eg in Port Nelson) they then become an 'exporter', what would NCC do? Have no legal powers to prevent vessel with suspected UO leaving. Requires a voluntary agreement to slip or wrap. Nelson Harbourmaster can direct vessels as he is also the Marine Operations manager for the port. Can also claim it as a biosecurity hazard. Can send it back to previous port, slip it, wrap it or run it up on the hard.
- Department of Conservation advised they still had quite a workforce within the top of the south and would work with Management Committee on control options within conservation areas.
- The Marine Farming Association would also work with management committee to discuss cost and control options when the primary beneficiary is the marine farming industry. This is to be dealt with by GIAs (Government Industry Agreements).
- Due to the short duration of the exercise there was not time to initiate the CIMS structure but all parties were aware of it and when it could be used. MPI, the three Councils and DOC use the CIMS structure for emergency responses.

ISSUES

The main issue that came up repeatedly was funding, particularly initial responses and ongoing funding of an incursion. Some of these issues are discussed below;

- Funding of an initial delimiting survey.

At the Management Committee meeting on 14 May 2013 the following was agreed: *The Committee agreed to a $5K limit of discretionary spending for urgent investigations. Discretion sits with Lindsay as Management Committee Chair.*

Should MPI not fund any part of delimiting survey then the Committee can fund up to $5000 to get things underway.

- Ongoing funding of a response and response funding when organism is found in one ToS port only, is the cost spread over the three councils?

Who and how this is funded was not resolved and this issue requires further investigation.

- Pre-approved funding up to a certain level for initial response

See delimiting survey comment

- Harbour-Masters powers to prevent a fouled vessel entering a ToS Port

Requires further investigation and clarification

- General comment

Observers from Northland and Southland were impressed with the Operations Manual and the processes that have been developed in the Top of the South, including the newsletter and relationships that have been developed to improve marine biosecurity awareness and response. Ongoing communication with these two regions will assist the Top of the South in working more closely with other regions and increasing marine biosecurity capacity and awareness in general.

Lessons from the Manini

- -advise key contacts early.
- -Harbour master does not inspect every vessel and did not know that this vessel was fouled, increase profile with slipway and diving services.