

The VOICE

[april 2003 issue 18]

FISH TREATMENTS AND MALACHITE

THE PAST

For almost a decade OATA and ornamental fish treatment manufacturers have been discussing the status of remedies available for sale. Progress has been at best stuttering. Occasionally the issue comes briefly to the fore, in the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), only to be overtaken by other priorities such as the BSE enquiry, the foot and mouth epidemic, a review of the Pharmacy Merchant List or whatever.

Two years ago failure was snatched from the jaws of success, in the form a resolution that looked as though it would "work". On this occasion a list of active ingredients that

would be permitted in ornamental fish treatments was produced. This included malachite green at certain concentrations and in certain size packs. As is required, by government rules, consultation this list was subject to a 12 week period. At the end of this time, the issue was stood on its head when this list was changed from one of active ingredients to a list of previously registered products. There in lay the first problem, no products were registered. So none of the active ingredients required in fish treatments would be available. The second problem was that this massive change was made with only a two week consultation period. A week later the foot and mouth epidemic broke out and

progress ground to a halt. Protests over the skulduggery surrounding the consultation was fruitless.

THE PRESENT

Recently an enforcement officer from the VMD wrote to a manufacturer pointing out that some of their products contained malachite green and that this was illegal and requested a letter explaining how the company proposed to deal with issue.

The statement made that malachite was illegal was only partially correct. Malachite is banned from use on food fish farms, a ban that has no relevance to ornamental fish.

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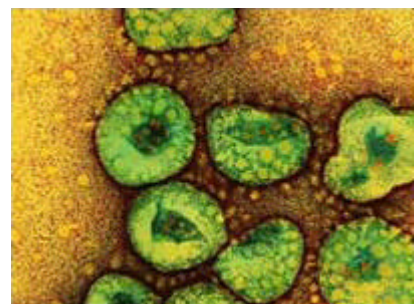
SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (SARS)

As the serious disease SARS is getting so much publicity and as the principal infected areas include Southern China, Hong Kong and Singapore which are also major sources of ornamental fish, OATA issued a press release dated 11 April. The press release was copied directly from the OIE (World animal Health Organisation) website, but issued in conjunction with WHO (the World Health Organisation)

and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

We will continue to monitor this website and keep members informed of any updates on the situation. ■

Image top right downwards: SARS checks at airports have been introduced; SARS screening at a Toronto hospital; Corona virus may cause SARS; a team of WHO experts is touring hospitals in Shanghai.



PRESS RELEASE

"Information to Member States regarding goods and animals arriving from SARS affected areas.

It has been hypothesized that one of the potential sources of the SARS virus could be animals. WHO is therefore working closely with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Office International des Epizooties (OIE), to determine if there is any evidence to suggest that SARS - related disease has occurred in animals.

WHO, FAO and OIE have reviewed reports received regarding SARS transmission, and to date there is no epidemiological information to suggest that contact with goods, products or animals shipped from SARS - affected areas has been the source of SARS infection.

For the above reasons, WHO does not at present conclude that any goods, products or animals arriving from SARS affected areas pose a risk to public health. WHO will continue to closely monitor the evolution of SARS, in collaboration with Member States and our partner organizations."

A POINT TO PONDER

There are about 700 tonnes of live hard coral traded internationally each year. One giant humphead parrotfish (see right) consumes 5 tonnes each year. ■

AQUARAMA POSTPONED

Due to the SARS problem Aquarama has been postponed until 30 October - 2 November this year. ■

CABINET OFFICE REPORT IDENTIFIES FISH DISEASE PROBLEM

Recently the Cabinet Office produced a report, which principally concerned the dangers associated with illegal meat imports. Given the last foot and mouth outbreak cost the country £8 billion, the concerns giving rise to the report are easy to understand.

It was perhaps a bit more surprising that they then branched into a number of different areas. They reported that introduction of the salmon disease *Gyrodactylus salaris* could cost £1 billion a year. It also pointed out that invasive aquatic weeds could cause flooding. ■



CHECKS ON IMPORTED PLANTS

The checks on imported plants that we reported in "The Voice" June 2002 issue 16 have been causing both importers and the Plant Health Seeds Inspectorate difficulties. The potential need to fax details of imports and the names and addresses of their destinations each week has made both sides nervous. Importers are unhappy at releasing commercially sensitive data, such as copy delivery notes for each order, every week. On the other hand the Inspectorate are concerned that they may be requiring more information than is necessary and the sheer volume may obscure their view of trade patterns, they might also fall foul of the data protection laws, especially when relatively few inspections are physically carried out.

Since they are inspecting to protect UK plc from invading pests, it is remarkable that there is no feedback to the industry of the problems encountered. Instead the route envisaged is via DEFRA in York, and thence via London to the EC in Brussels. Such a lengthy feedback process makes it virtually inevitable that the tobacco whitefly or whatever will have bolted long before the problem becomes public and action can be taken.

OATA is hoping to hold a meeting with Plant Health Inspectors to implement a more streamlined and effective means of achieving the target outcomes. ■

THEFTS OF HIGH VALUE FISH

The office has noticed that there has been yet another theft of ornamental fish. This time of 388, including koi and goldfish, worth up to £10,000. from a garden centre site in York.

There have been a number of such thefts over the last couple of years. These include raids netting £10,000 in Croydon, £4,000 in Birmingham, several raids in Kent netting several thousands of £'s as well as raids in Kent and Lincolnshire. Some thefts are very large, and a considerable degree of organisation, equipment and expertise would be required. We would advise members to ensure that their premises are secure.

It may be that all these incidents are entirely separate, but we are compiling reports of ornamental fish thefts. The office would request that if members are aware of ornamental fish being stolen, whether from businesses or residential properties in their local area, that they contact us. Local newspaper reports are particularly useful. ■

HEATHROW BORDER INSPECTION POST

OATA has another meeting with DEFRA officials to discuss the costs and delays that are occurring at Heathrow. OATA estimates that the requirement for fish to go to the BIP adds £1 million per year, either in charges or extra costs, to the industries bills.

We emphasised that Vet Checks Directive says that it is the importer or his/her agents responsibility to transfer fish and other live animals to the BIP but Customs refuse to allow the importer or his agent to carry these materials.

At least half the additional costs, so £500,000, are carried by tropical species. We posed the question as to how it was a proportionate cost when the fish health directive recognised that these species offered no practical threat to UK native species.

We will keep members informed about progress. However, it is likely that the SARS virus and avian flu in the Netherlands will be higher priorities, in the immediate future, for this policy group. ■

NON NATIVE SPECIES RULES CHINA AND THE PHILIPPINES

Both China and the Philippines are tightening their controls on non-native species. In the southern Chinese Province of Guangzhou a list of 16 species that have caused the most harm so far included water hyacinth, the American bullfrog and an Amazonian snail.

In the Philippines the Agricultural Secretary announced that all live fish imports should be subject to risk analysis. High risk species will be deemed to be those that are likely to impact the environment adversely. In particular those species that could spread disease to local species or aquaculture.

This merely serves to reinforce the message that biosecurity, disease prevention and alien invasive species are not just UK or EU issues. ■

CORAL SEIZED AT WATERLOO

HM Customs and Excise issued the following press release at the end of March:

"Three boxes of live coral were seized by Customs officers at the Waterloo Eurostar Terminal on Wednesday 26th March.

The coral originally from Indonesia travelled from France as parcel freight. There was no supporting documentation with the consignment. It was on its way to a supplier in the UK.

Customs officers contacted the French importer and obtained the documents which showed the coral as substrate – often used in aquariums. The coral was in fact live and is on Appendix 2 of the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) regulations.

Customs spokesperson, Shona Lowe, said "one of our responsibilities is to ensure that CITES regulations are followed. In this case documentation was inaccurate and officers seized the consignment pending further information. Customs enquiries are continuing."

In our January's Newsletter we produced an item concerning the dangers of prosecution that corals illegally imported into the EU might pose, or have posed to you and your business. The fact is that corals imported illegally, remain illegal, even when moved from one EU member state to another. By displaying illegally imported stock you would be inadvertently committing an offence*.

If you believe that your business has been put at risk, especially if you have any supporting documents such as availability lists that you have been offered, you may wish to contact the **Customs Confidential telephone number which is 0800 59 5000.**

* The penalties for CITES offences under Customs legislation could be up to 7 years imprisonment and/or unlimited fines. ■

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Secondly, since fish treatments were deliberately excluded from the listings proposed two years ago by the VMD, using a flawed (and that is being charitable) consultation process, they had created the situation in spite of, rather than because of, the actions of the treatment manufacturers.

It appears there will be no immediate follow up on malachite by VMD with manufacturers concerned or anyone else for that matter. Thus the sale of malachite green in ornamental fish treatments in our view remains as valid today as its sale for that purpose, with the full knowledge of VMD, as it has been for past decades.

THE FUTURE

VMD are asking Ministers for permission to consult (again!! - we have been here several times before) on the issue of treatments for "minor species" including ornamental fish. OATA play an active, and probably robust, part in any discussions and will of course keep members informed.

In the meantime, please let the office know if any official challenges are made to the sale of malachite. ■