

In brief...

Vienna fish supermarket under fire

The environmental organisation WWF has accused the Eurofisch-Markt fish supermarket in Vienna-Meidling of selling fish species that are threatened by extermination.

The WWF cited shark, swordfish and skate at the supermarket, which opened late last year. It also said that the fish dealer and supermarket operator, Lasar Chassidov, had failed to keep his promise not to stock fish from threatened species and to make customers aware that they are endangered.

Solomons ban sea cucumber harvests

The Solomon Islands Fisheries Ministry says it will ban the harvesting and selling of sea cucumbers from April.

Solomon Islanders and Asian companies have sold sea cucumbers to many Asian countries over the past months, where they're regarded as delicacies.

The permanent secretary of the ministry, Dr Christian Ramofafia, says it now needs to protect the declining numbers of sea cucumbers.

"The ministry has planned to close the fishery for an indefinite period starting on April 1. The fishery is over-harvested now and we plan to close it to enable us to develop a management plan for the fishery."

Whale meat is climate-friendly, says lobby group

Harpooning whales was less damaging to the climate than farming livestock, the Norwegian pro-whaling lobby group known as the High North Alliance said on March 3.

It released a survey focussing on the fuel use of 30 Norwegian whaling vessels it said showed that greenhouse gas emissions caused by one meal of beef were the equivalent of eight meals of whale meat.

"Basically, it turns out that the best thing you can do for the planet is to eat whale meat compared to other types of meat," said Rune Froevik of the High North Alliance, which represents the interests of coastal communities in the Arctic.

The environmental group Greenpeace dismissed the survey, saying almost every kind of food was more climate-friendly than meat.

Ferries play their part in public transport

WITH THE RIGHT support and encouragement, ferries can make a greater contribution to public transport patronage in Auckland, says Auckland city's biggest ferry operator.

Fullers carries almost four million passengers annually on its fleet of 10 vessels, or nearly as many passengers as the rail service, the company said in its first annual review of operations, released on February 27.

The chief executive, Douglas Hudson, said the company believed that its existing routes could be carrying around 18 percent more people per year, or about 720,000, in five years.

Future ferry routes envisaged in the Looking Forward review are down the East Coast Bays to Takapuna and downtown, the eastern suburbs beaches, and along the Tamaki River to Panmure, Pt England and Glendowie.

If these routes became a reality they could increase patronage by a further 21 percent to 5.7 million passengers a year.

Hudson says the company sees a bright outlook for ferries in the city, and that people enjoy commuting by ferry. However, appropriate all-weather shore facilities, parking and feeder buses are needed if Auckland is to make better use of the harbour and gulf to battle road congestion.

The review said that Auckland bus operators carried 42.9 million passengers last year and received a subsidy of \$1.59 per passenger. By comparison, 4.2 million people travelled by ferry, and ferry operators received a subsidy of 84 cents per passenger.

With the high cost and delays of sourcing suitable ferries abroad, or building new boats, Hudson says ferry operators need long-term contracts on subsidised services.

CAPTAIN CLAIMED RADAR WAS DISTORTED

THE PILOT OF the container ship *Cosco Busan*, which collided last November with San Francisco's Bay Bridge, has been found guilty of criminal negligence and breaking environmental laws. The pilot, Captain John Cota, was fined US\$100,000 and is likely to spend up to 18 months in gaol.

Cota was in charge of the ship when she hit a fender surrounding one of the bridge's support towers. The impact ruptured one of the ship's oil tanks, spilling around 220,000 litres of oil and killing about 2000 sea birds. The governor of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger, declared a state of emergency, and beaches in the area were closed to the public.

Captain Cota, a veteran pilot with over 25 years service in San Francisco Bay, had been charged by the Justice Department with, among other things, failing to adequately review the proposed course with the ship's captain and crew on official navigational charts.

Cota told the hearing how the *Cosco Busan's* radar had become "distorted" and "unreadable". As a consequence he had resorted to the ship's electronic charting system.

Lawyers for the defence said that when all the facts were presented, it was most likely the jury would return a "Not guilty" verdict.

The US Coast Guard said it was generally pleased with its response to the *Cosco Busan* oil spill, but issued a list of over 100 "lessons learned," reports our United States correspondent, Hugh Ware. Medication for the pilot's sleep apnea may have played a part in the spill.

No love for marine life

NEW GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES issued on Valentine's Day weaken protection of New Zealand's marine environment, says Forest & Bird.

"Experience and research in New Zealand and internationally has demonstrated that marine reserves are the best type of protection, allowing marine life to recover and flourish," said a spokesperson, Kirstie Knowles.

Extensive consultation last year found widespread support for marine reserves, and criticism of the proposed guidelines, she said. However, the final guidelines did not differ from the initial proposals. She said they ignored scientific consensus, international best practice and the views of marine experts.

FOREIGN MUSSELS FOUND IN SOUNDS

MUSSEL FARMERS IN the Marlborough Sounds were alerted on February 27 to the spread of brown mussels from Tasman Bay after an oil drilling company cleaned its rig late last year.

Biosecurity officials said that the semi-submersible drilling ship *Ocean Patriot* apparently brought the potentially invasive brown mussels from South Africa. The pest was left on the seabed by workers cleaning the *Ocean Patriot* at the order of the Victorian state government, before a tow across the Tasman Sea to Australia. Ironically, the Australians were worried about her carrying New Zealand's green-lipped mussels into their waters.

The rig's owner, Diamond Offshore Drilling Inc, is said to have claimed that rough weather meant the defouling could not be done in the open sea. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries allowed the cleaning to take place about 12 miles off Tasman Bay. The company said hiring divers and blasters to remove the New Zealand mussels had cost it US\$5 million (NZ\$6.2 million) and put the rig out of commission for 23 days.

MAF has asked oyster fishers to maintain a 2km exclusion zone around the ship until the seafloor at the site has been dredged. It has also warned mussel farmers of the possibility of the brown mussel becoming established. The company is now also largely funding the clean-up, MAF said.

"I'm reasonably confident that we will get all of them, but if they have already spawned... then we have much bigger problems," MAF's biosecurity incursion response manager, David Yard, said on February 27.

Yard said even if the defouling was done beyond 12 miles, the brown mussel spawn could have survived for weeks and could still have hit New Zealand.

A spokesman for Aquaculture New Zealand, Chris Choat, said it was not known how the brown mussel would adapt to New Zealand waters, and said mussel farmers were not blaming MAF. "They have been operating within their legislation."

Whalers hurt in battle with activists



The wanton killing of whales must stop

ANTI-WHALING PROTESTERS threw bottles containing a pungent chemical at the Japanese whaling ship *Nisshinmaru* in a skirmish near Antarctica on March 3, injuring three of the crew, said a spokesman for Japan's Fisheries Agency.

The whalers responded by spraying water from four hoses on the activists, who were on a ship operated by the hardline Sea Shepherd group.

The *Nisshinmaru* and the Sea Shepherd vessel came within 10m of each other during the exchange, which lasted over an hour

until the activists ran out of missiles, the spokesman said.

"This is an act that tries to unfairly harm the safety of a ship and crew that is acting within the law at sea," said Japan's top government spokesman, Nobutaka Machimura. "It's an unforgivable act and we protest strongly."

Sea Shepherd said the packets contained a slippery substance that was organic and non-toxic. The incident was resolved after the activists were handed over to an Australian fisheries patrol.



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