

In brief...

Minimum duty for imported goods to increase

From October 1, the amount of duty and GST under Customs' revenue waiver provision for imported goods will increase from \$50 to \$60 (commonly referred to as the "de minimis"). The increase has been made to offset the increase in GST to 15 percent from the same date.

Customs will have the discretion to not collect import duty and GST where the total revenue payable on any one import shipment is less than \$60. The revenue waiver provision does not apply to alcohol or tobacco products.

Call 0800 428 786 or see www.customs.govt.nz

Island restoration project honoured

The Rangitoto and Motutapu Islands restoration project has won the Department of Conservation a major international environmental award.

The Excellence in Parks – Environmental Award was presented to representatives of DoC at the Parks Forum conference in Sydney on August 25.

"This project will breathe life back into Rangitoto and Motutapu. We're excited to be creating this sanctuary right on Auckland's doorstep, and it is very satisfying to see our peers overseas recognise that as well," says project manager Richard Griffiths.

DoC says the \$3.5 million programme to remove all imported pests from the islands and create a sanctuary for native birds and plants is one of the most complex it has undertaken.

"It'll be mid-2011 before the islands can be officially declared pest-free, but the results so far have been impressive," says Griffiths.

Olympian role for kiwi RHIBs

Rayglass Protector boats have been purchased to patrol the 2012 Olympic Games in London.

The chief executive officer of Rayglass, Tony Hembrow, revealed on August 18 that the organising committee had already secured "significant numbers" of the craft.

The Protectors will be based at the Weymouth and Portland National Sailing Academy and the adjoining commercial marina in Dorset, on England's southern coast, the sailing venue for the Olympics.

As well, police, security forces and those responsible for patrolling the race-courses are also believed to be considering Protectors for on-water roles.

Sea bird stomachs are full of rubbish

THE KIWI CHARITY Sustainable Coastlines launched a campaign on August 17 to raise awareness of the effects of litter on beaches and oceans. The campaign features a disturbing image of the decomposing remains of a bird, its stomach filled with pieces of plastic.

"Bottle caps, cigarette lighters, drinking straws and other disposable plastic products we drop on our streets can very quickly end up out at sea and on our beaches," says the charity's marketing manager, Camden Howitt. "Once rubbish gets into coastal and marine environments it can have devastating effects on wildlife."

Sustainable Coastlines said it had proved many tonnes of plastic rubbish continually flow out of Auckland in the prevailing sou'westerly winds. In 2008 a royal albatross found dead on Tairaroa Head in Dunedin had 272 pieces of plastic in its stomach.

A line-up of performers supported the charity at a fundraising ball on September 18 at the Hilton Auckland featuring top concert pianist Michael Houstoun, singer Hollie Smith, the

This photo is real.
If you don't pick up your rubbish, they will.

sustainable coastlines Text **TRASH** to 2447 to donate \$3
www.sustainablecoastlines.org

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Nairobi Trio and Bella Kalolo.

Supporters can make a \$3 donation by texting TRASH to 2447.

PORT OWNERSHIP QUESTIONED

LOCAL AUTHORITY OWNERSHIP of ports such as Port Otago and Lyttelton Port of Christchurch has been criticised as parochial in a report by the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research released on August 18.

The 60-page report, Port Performance and Ownership, written by Dr Brent Layton for the Local Government Forum, said port company shareholdings should be scrapped to encourage operational efficiencies and more beneficial port-to-port relationships.

It criticises existing stevedoring procedures and calls for use of offshore port managers. The analysis of 13 ports singles out Otago and Lyttelton for their ongoing investigation of a merger, which has been kept from the public eye for around two years because of commercial sensitivity.

The chairman of the forum, Charles Finny, said that contrary to some views, port problems were not mainly about inadequate return on capital, a point often raised by analysts.

"Rather, the study finds the problems of local authority ownership are reflected mainly in barriers to port rationalisation and the introduction of experienced international operators into the management of ports," he said.

The study found efficiency improvements in the industry appeared to have stalled. "Some evidence suggests New Zealand ports may rank towards the bottom end of the ports of developed countries," Finny said.

It claims local authority ownership is detrimental to port rationalisation, and has stymied the potential use of international operators to manage New Zealand ports.

One of four options from the NZIER was to require local authorities to divest their shares in port companies. "This would reduce the extent to which parochial interests inhibit the introduction of more efficient operational procedures," Dr Layton said in the report.

The report will be available on www.localgovtforum.org.nz

La Nina here for a while

A MODERATE TO strong La Niña event is presently underway, with further intensification possible, says NIWA's National Climate Centre in its climate outlook for the last three months of the year.

La Niña conditions are likely to continue through to at least next autumn.

Temperatures until the end of the year are likely to be above average in all regions. Rainfall is likely to be nearly or below normal in the east of both islands and the southwestern South Island, and nearly normal elsewhere.

Soil moisture levels and stream flows are likely to be nearly or below normal in most regions, except in the southwest of the North Island and the northern South Island, where nearly normal levels are likely, the centre says.

Mean sea level pressures are likely to be above normal as a whole, with weaker than normal westerly winds.

Temperatures are likely to be above average in the east of both islands and in the north of the South Island, and very likely to be above average in other districts. Sea surface temperatures are presently nearly normal around New Zealand, but are expected to become warmer than normal around the North Island as the season progresses.

Seasonal rainfall is likely to be nearly or below normal in the east of both islands and the southwest of the South Island, and nearly normal elsewhere.

POSSUM HUNT ON GREAT BARRIER ISLAND

EVIDENCE THAT ONE or more possums may have come ashore at Great Barrier Island on October 4 sparked an immediate response.

When droppings and fur were seen on a digger aboard a barge moored at Tryphena Wharf and on the barge ramp, staff from the Auckland Regional Council and Department of Conservation were despatched to find the possums.



"The response got underway very quickly, using supplies stored on the island for just such an event," said ARC group manager biosecurity, Jack Crow. Baits, lures, spotlights and other equipment, along with extra staff, were also flown to the Hauraki Gulf island. Control methods include trapping and night shooting.

"Great Barrier has always been possum free. The environmental and economic consequences for the island (if possums become established) would be very damaging," said Crow.

Boaties and other visitors to the Hauraki Gulf Maritime Park are reminded to be vigilant about checking boats and gear before setting out for an island that's free of some or all pests.

The droppings and fur are being analysed to determine the sex and number of possums. Any possum sightings in the park's islands should be reported to either DoC or the ARC.

IRAN LAUNCHES SUBMARINES FOR PERSIAN GULF

IRAN SAYS FOUR new submarines added to its fleet to be deployed in the Persian Gulf have sonar-evading technology and can launch torpedoes and missiles simultaneously.



A photograph released by the Iranian Defence Ministry claiming to show the new Ghadir submarines in the Persian Gulf port of Bandar Abbas

The announcement on August 8 comes amid continuing warnings by senior Iranian officials about retaliatory actions in the gulf in response to a military strike by the United States or Israel aimed at Iran's nuclear facilities.

Up to 40 percent of the world's oil supply moves through the gulf and its narrow Strait of Hormuz. The four new submarines, built in Iran, take to 11 the number of Ghadir-class submarines in the Iran Navy.

First introduced in 2007, the small, 120-tonne vessels are similar to North Korea's Yugo-class submarine. North Korea and Iran are known to have collaborated closely in other military areas, including missile development.

At a ceremony launching the four new Ghadirs, Defence Minister Ahmad Vahidi said they would help with the rapid transfer of special forces, in detecting enemy vessels and identifying targets.

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