

## **Advocacy on the Delisting of Cebu in the AQIS list of GAS risk areas**

Since the discovery of Giant African Snails (GAS) in one of the container vans from Cebu by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) in 2003, Cebu was included in their list of Giant African Snail risk areas. As a consequence, all container vans originating from Cebu had to go through a rigid inspection, penalizing exporters with additional costs notwithstanding the delays in their shipments. In effect, Cebu exporters opted to route shipments via the Manila ports (South Harbor and MICT) to avoid heavy scrutiny and rigorous inspections that cause unnecessary delays. Due to the decreased volume of shipments from Cebu to Australia, international shipping lines stopped making direct port calls to Australia from Cebu.

### **Philexport Cebu's Advocacy Efforts:**

May 28, 1997	The Australian government informed the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) of the fumigation requirements and procedures of AQIS.
June 04, 1997	The BAI informed the Department of Agriculture Region VII (DA-7) of the Australian government's requirements.
September 05, 2003	Philexport was informed by a member that shipments from Cebu to Australia have been stopped because of GAS.
October 15, 2004	Philexport wrote AQIS asking for exemption of Cebu as a GAS-risk area.
October 29, 2004	AQIS, in response to the request of Philexport for the exemption of Cebu as a risk area, wrote the Bureau of Plant Industry, asking for evidence of GAS in Cebu, nature of port loading facilities, general storage conditions for containers and proximity of vegetation to port.
November 09, 2004	A brief discussion was held with Dir. Lecciones of DA, Plant Quarantine Reg. 7 Chief Max Cortes, Mr. Pete Borja and Philexport, on the GAS issue.
November 10, 2004	Plant Quarantine OIC Max Cortes submitted scientific information and photos of GAS to OIC Clarito Barron, BPI Reg. IV.
November 26, 2004	DA Reg. 7 Dir. Lecciones called a meeting in Cebu to form the Task Force for the GAS issue. A group of 12 government agencies and NGOs joined to form the Giant African Snail Control Task Force.
December 07, 2004	AQIS' Wayne Riley emailed OIC Barron informing him that the photos were not attached to the latter's letter.
January 28, 2005	OIC Barron of BPI Reg. IV forwarded the information and photo to AQIS via the Australian Embassy in Manila.

January 31, 2005 Philexport requested copies of OIC Barron's communication with Australia and volunteered to follow up the matter directly with AQIS.

February 10, 2005 OIC Barron acknowledged receipt of copies of communication between Wayne Riley of AQIS and Philexport's Jun Abines.

March 01, 2005 Philexport resends the photos via email.

April 04, 2005 Seaweed Industries Association of Philippines' (SIAP) Pete Borja communicates with Mr. Larry Lacson of the DA re the GAS issue.

April 11, 2005 DA's Larry Lacson emailed Pete Borja that they are still awaiting word from AQIS and will inform SIAP of any progress.

April 18, 2005 AQIS' Wayne Riley emailed DA's Larry Lacson informing the latter that internally at AQIS there is a proposal to remove the Philippines (including Cebu) from the GAS-risk list. However, Riley added that it will not come into place until notification and any appeals have been considered and WTO notification process has been completed. Meantime Cebu will remain as a GAS risk location as per the list currently in use.

April 26, 2005 Pete Borja of SIAP consults DA's Larry Lacson regarding the filing of an appeal with the SPS committee and the WTO.

May 13, 2005 Pete Borja contacts Philexport asking that a meeting by the TF be scheduled ASAP.

May 16, 2005 Philexport sends out invitations to the members of the Task Force to a meeting on May 19, 2005.

May 19, 2005 The GAS Control Task Force was informed by DA's Larry Lacson that Cebu is no longer part of the new draft of AQIS' GAS risk area. The new list was set to be released 60 days after the WTO has signed it. The group agreed to deliver best efforts in maintaining their areas of responsibility free from GAS.

August 06, 2005 In a local newspaper, Australian Ambassador to the Philippines Tony Hely confirmed that the Philippines, including Cebu has been cleared by AQIS regarding the GAS issue. However, the official list from AQIS has not yet been released.

August 19, 2005 The GAS Control Task Force came up with a short term and long term plan to avoid contamination of containers with GAS.

Short term plan:

To request the City of Mandaue and City of Cebu, for the promulgation of ordinances that will force container yard owners/operators to maintain clean and pest-free yards for containers to avoid contamination and infestation by pests.

To ask the BPI to fast-track the accreditation of additional fumigation companies to meet the big demand for their services (ISPM 15 was implemented on June 1, 2005).

Long Term Plan:

To advocate, through the help of the Regional Development Council, the Export Development Council, and the LGUs, for the drafting of a bill that will ensure all Philippine ports are maintained in a sanitary and pest-free condition.

- August 04-05, 2005 Philexport brought up the GAS issue to the Regional Development Council
- September 14, 2005 The Regional Development Council endorsed recommendations to the Development Administration Committee in order to implement the ISPM15 and other WTO agreements and protect the interest of Cebu as a major export dollar earner by eradicating GAS and other pests listed in the ISPM 15. The recommendations are:
1. for concerned local government (cities of Mandaue and Cebu) to regularly monitor the sanitation and cleanliness of container yards and port areas.
  2. for the Cebu Port Authority (CPA) to consider installation/operation of fumigation facilities in the Cebu International Port (CIP).
  3. for Philexport, DTI and DA and other concern institutions to review the various WTO agreements that have implications on exports in the region.
- December 2005 P&O Nedlloyd, an international shipping line announced the return of their direct port calls from Cebu to Australia.
- January 20, 2006 Wayne Riley of AQIS advised Philexport that Cebu cannot as yet ship directly to Australia until the revised GAS country list is posted in ICON. He expects the new list be posted by February 2006.
- January 23, 2006 P&O Nedlloyd (Cebu Branch) retracted their announcement that direct port calls from Cebu to Australia are already possible. All

shipments from the Philippines, except the port of Manila are still subject to inspections until the AQIS list is officially released.

February 22, 2006 AQIS, through their website announced that the new version of the list will be published by the end of June 2006. Please click on the following link for further information:

<http://www.daff.gov.au/content/output.cfm?ObjectID=AD39E9FC-A96B-4ABC-B4CC77AD63E7D3B5>

July 1, 2006 Louise Willmington, Supervisor Of Gas National Coordination Center for AQIS Import Clearance confirmed through an email that the Philippine **HAS BEEN REMOVED FROM THE AQIS GAS COUNTRY LIST**. Cargos from the Philippines will not be subjected to GAS inspection.

August 11, 2006 Philexport, together with the Partnership for Advocacy and Competitiveness in Trade (PACT), Oriental Port and Allied Services Corporation (OPASCOR) and Shemberg Corporation organized a conference to rally support and commitment from government agencies, business support organizations (BSO), and other stakeholders of the ports of Cebu to keep the ports clean and pest-free.  
A “declaration of Support” was signed by the stakeholders and was presented to Ambassador Tony Hely of Australia who was the special guest speaker of the occasion.

If you like to know the proceedings of the conference, access:  
<http://www.philexportcebu.org/features.php>

