



23 JUN 2017

OIA17-0309

John Hill
Care of FYI website

Dear John Hill

OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT REQUEST

I refer to your official information request on 25 May 2017 relating to a series of questions on myrtle species and myrtle rust. Under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) I shall quote and provide responses to your questions below.

1. *Has the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) allowed the importation of Myrtle species from overseas?*

Yes. There are three pathways for the importation of myrtle (Myrtaceae) plant material; nursery stock, seeds, and cut flowers/foilage.

2. *If the answer to question 1 is yes, please specify which countries the import have been allowed from and the years from 2000 since they have been imported, and the quantity and type from each country.*

A summary of imports of myrtle nursery stock, seed, and cut flowers/foilage is included in Attachment 1. A description of the approved exporting countries for each pathway is included below.

Nursery stock: Most myrtle nursery stock (whole plants, cuttings, and tissue culture) can be imported into New Zealand from all countries. However, for the myrtle species of *Eugenia*, *Myrciaria*, and *Syzygium*, imports can only occur from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. These restrictions are in place to prevent the entry of a bacterial pathogen from countries not listed.

Seeds: Myrtle seed for sowing can be imported into New Zealand from all countries.

Cut flowers/foilage: Myrtle cut flowers/foilage have previously only been approved for import from Australia. Following the detection of myrtle rust in Australia in 2010, MPI progressively suspended import from individual states and territories, the details of which are noted below. All imports of myrtle cut flowers and foliage from Australia have been totally prohibited since July 2015.

Dates of suspension:

2010 – New South Wales

2011 – Queensland

2012 – Victoria

2015 – Tasmania, Northern Territory, Australian Capital Territory, South Australia, Western Australia

3. *If Myrtle species have been imported from overseas, then has there been a specific check by Biosecurity at the border for myrtle rust as a part of the inspection process?*

There are general requirements in place for all imported plant material; requiring it to be free from visually detectable signs and symptoms of pests and disease (including myrtle rust and myrtle rust spores), as well as contamination with soil and extraneous plant material. Compliance with this requirement is verified with inspection, by the MPI inspector, when plant material arrives in New Zealand.

Some myrtle nursery stock must also be imported into post entry quarantine (PEQ) when it arrives in New Zealand. While in PEQ, the nursery stock must be grown and inspected specifically for symptoms of *Puccinia psidii* (myrtle rust), by the operator of the PEQ facility, and the MPI inspector.

4. *Have all myrtle species imported been subject to fungicide treatment on their importation?*

Prior to August 2011, some myrtle nursery stock was subject to a prophylactic fungicide treatment. The strengthened requirements, adopted in August 2011, specify that myrtle whole plants and cuttings must either be:

- sourced from a country where *Puccinia psidii* is not known to occur, and imported into a post entry quarantine (PEQ) greenhouse where the plants will be grown and inspected for symptoms of infection; or,
- imported into the highest level of PEQ greenhouse (Level 3) which is suitable to contain spores of *Puccinia psidii*, where the plants will be grown and inspected for symptoms of infection

In the period, between myrtle rust being detected in Australia, and the import requirements being updated in August 2011, imports of myrtle whole plants and cuttings from Australia were not approved, unless they would be imported into Level 3 PEQ. There were no myrtle whole plants or cuttings imported from Australia during this period.

Tissue cultures are seen as a lower risk pathway compared to whole plants and cuttings. Specific measures for myrtle nursery stock imported as tissue culture were also adopted in August 2011. Myrtle tissue cultures must be:

- sourced from a country where *Puccinia psidii* is not known to occur;
- or the tissue cultures must be held in the culture container for a minimum of 4 weeks, under suitable temperature conditions (15-23°C) to allow for symptoms of infection to become visible. This may occur either prior to export, or in a PEQ tissue culture laboratory in New Zealand.

5. *If the myrtle species have been allowed as an import does MPI know where the plants were destined for?*

MPI holds records related to the import of goods, such as the importer details. Once goods have been given biosecurity clearance, no further information is collected about the destination.

6. *If MPI knows the destination of the plants, are these the same locations that MPI has been targeting in their recent campaign to eradicate the problem?*

MPI does not collect information about the destination of imported consignments. MPI has targeted surveillance activities to plant nurseries because growing conditions in nurseries are ideal for the fungus with many vulnerable young plants in sheltered, warm and damp environments. A lot of information has been given to the nursery industry and growers have been particularly vigilant in checking their plants.

7. *Has MPI [established] that there is a link between the importation of myrtle species and the appearance of myrtle rust in New Zealand?*

MPI has not established a link between the importation of myrtle species and the locations where myrtle rust has appeared in New Zealand. The most likely explanation for the appearance in Northland and Taranaki is from wind-blown rust spores.

Myrtle rust spores are microscopic and can easily spread across large distances by wind. The spores are considered capable of crossing the Tasman Sea from Australia to New Zealand on wind currents. Myrtle rust was recently detected on Raoul Island. There have been no imports of plants or seed onto this island. There is ongoing and significant collaboration between MPI and science providers internationally on wind modelling.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Peter Thomson
Director Plants, Food, and Environment

Attachment 1: Details of myrtle species imports since 2000

Disclaimer: The following limitations apply to this data:

- MPI databases include details of commercial consignments; however not all personal consignments are recorded in databases.
- For nursery stock, the given quantities are based on the following definitions for 'units':
 - Each whole plant or cutting is one unit; each tissue culture container is one unit (there may be multiple plantlets within the container). The quantity given may be the number of containers, or the number of plantlets.
- For cut flowers/foilage, our databases record consignments as the number of stems or the number of cartons; therefore the number of consignments has been given.
- For seeds, it is not possible to identify quantities, as our databases record consignments by weight, volume, or the number of seeds in the consignment; therefore the number of consignments has been given. In 2000, the exporting country was not recorded for all consignments.

Country	Nursery stock	Seed	Cut flowers/foilage	
Australia	28442	387	228	
Brazil	591	1	<i>Not approved countries</i>	
Canada	0	2		
Denmark	0	1		
Germany	0	16		
Greece	0	2		
Honduras	0	2		
India	1600	1		
Israel	0	2		
Italy	0	2		
Malaysia	0	1		
The Netherlands	0	3		
South Africa	0	4		
South Korea	0	1		
Thailand	0	1		
United Kingdom	61	4		
United States of America	2430	22		
Not recorded (imported 2000)	0	20		
Total:	33124	472		228