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Quarantine checkpoints keep pests and diseases out of WA

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Border quarantine checkpoints are an integral part of the Agriculture Protection Program aimed at minimising introductions of unwanted pests, diseases and weeds into Western Australia.

Checkpoint staff have the difficult task of seizing fruit and vegetables from travellers, while at the same time portraying a welcome face for visitors to Western Australia. A recently completed upgrade of the Eucla checkpoint on the Western Australian and South Australian border has addressed this contradiction by creating an attractive and welcoming entry point for travellers. John van Schagen reports on the recent upgrade, and the role of quarantine checkpoints in protecting Western Australian agriculture.

Protection through quarantine vigilance saves expensive eradication campaigns and costs associated with control of pests and lost production. In addition, protection measures can benefit exports, with Western Australia being able to offer pest-free produce without the need to undergo disinfestation treatments.

Interstate quarantine road checkpoints are located at Kununurra on the Northern Territory border, and at Eucla on the South Australian border. A mobile checkpoint also operates at certain times of the year on outback roads.

The Kununurra and Eucla checkpoints operate 24 hours per day, seven days a week. All vehicles entering the State are required to stop and are subject to inspection. Drivers are asked whether they are carrying any items of quarantine concern such as fruit, vegetables, seeds, honey or plants.

Other items subject to quarantine are livestock and agricultural machinery.

Checkpoint success

Around 70,000 vehicles are stopped at the Eucla checkpoint each year, which leads to more than 30,000 seizures, including about 18,000 kilograms of produce and 1,700 kilograms of honey. In Kununurra, 33,000 vehicles enter Western Australia, with some...
11,000 kilograms of fruit and vegetables being confiscated.

Significant interceptions have included honey infected with chalkbrood disease, apples infested with apple scab and Codling moth larvae, a skeleton weed plant destined for a school display and grapevine cuttings.

Recent fruit fly outbreaks in South Australia and Victoria have highlighted the need for quarantine checkpoints. These outbreaks usually result in expensive eradication campaigns that could cost several million dollars.

The recent Queensland fruit fly outbreak in Victoria cost an estimated $5 million to eradicate. The outbreak in the Perth metropolitan area in the early 1990s cost $7 million to eradicate.

**New facelift for Eucla**

Quarantine inspectors are the first point of contact in Western Australia for travellers, who have had a long drive through the Nullarbor, or in the case of Kununurra, a long drive from Katherine. It is therefore important that tourists are made to feel welcome, while at the same time maintaining quarantine vigilance.

The joint effort by Agriculture Western Australia and the Western Australian Tourism Commission to spend $350,000 on upgrading the Eucla checkpoint demonstrated the need to present a welcoming and professional face for Western Australia.

The inspection site upgrade has included new signage displaying the Western Australian Tourism Commission brand logo, landscaping, building alterations and a utilities upgrade. The checkpoint also has information for tourists about accommodation in and around the Esperance area.

**Mobile checkpoints**

As outback roads have become more popular among tourists, as well as commercial drivers, a mobile checkpoint has commenced operating on outback roads between Halls Creek and Laverton.

Several of these roads have now been upgraded and are in good condition for trucks and four-wheel-drive vehicles. Many tourist buses and outback tours also make use of these roads.

To supplement the mobile checkpoint, an amnesty bin has been installed on the Laverton-Warburton Road for people to dump their produce before travelling further into Western Australia.

All of these efforts combined have contributed to the quarantine vigilance in Western Australia that has prevented the incursion of serious pests and diseases.