



Ken Newton,
CEO, VASA

Under the Southern Cross

Over There

Today, I'm taking you across the ditch. Don't know where that is? Turn to your atlas and look for the Tasman Sea. That's the bit of water which separates the Australian eastern seaboard from our south seas partner, New Zealand. We both call it the ditch.

The expression is supposed to point up how close these two great nations are to each other. It's about three and a half hours flight time from my place to theirs, but stupidly, it's still a foreign country so it takes another five or six hours to go through immigration, customs and ticketing at each end.

But the reason I'm taking you there is valid because New Zealand is an essential part of VASA. We have a New Zealand director on the Board and the Kiwis usually send a small army over to our Wire & Gas Conventions.

Oh, you've probably heard about the way we sling off at one another. Composing Kiwi jokes – mostly filthy and about sheep – is an almost full time occupation in Australia. Like a few years back, when the New Zealand economy was close to collapse, the Aussie's

joked about it. "You know the capital of New Zealand?" Give in? Two and sixpence. (Or "two dollars fifty," whichever you feel comfortable with.)

Not any more. New Zealand happens to be one of the most favoured destinations for Australians. Why, yours truly has holidayed in parts of New Zealand almost every year for the past six or seven years. We like it because it still has a purity which can't be found anywhere else.

Of all the countries in the world, New Zealand has the cleanest air, pristine seas full of great things to eat, a climate in which pretty well everything grows easily and probably the greatest range of food artisans in the world.

New Zealand could well be the organic food bowl of the world. It's food is so good, it's almost worthwhile suffering the agony of a flight to Auckland or Wellington or Christchurch just for a lunch of venison and fine New Zealand wines. So they have a lot to protect.

Personally, I'm a little surprised that the New Zealand government hasn't been a lot quicker off the mark to ensure that its environment is not compromised by synthetic refrigerant gas leakage.

VASA has tried to help. Back in 2007, we began negotiations with the government's environmental department with the aim of putting a 'recover, recycle or destroy' regime in place, like the world-beating one we have in Australia.

It's taken a while, but the news is that at long last, the Kiwis are taking the right steps to protect their unique environment. Right now, professional technicians in New Zealand are not obliged to save a thing. They can belch R-134a into the air with impunity. Most of our members use Australian Codes of Practice and many already follow a voluntary code of safely capturing refrigerant rather than letting it go.

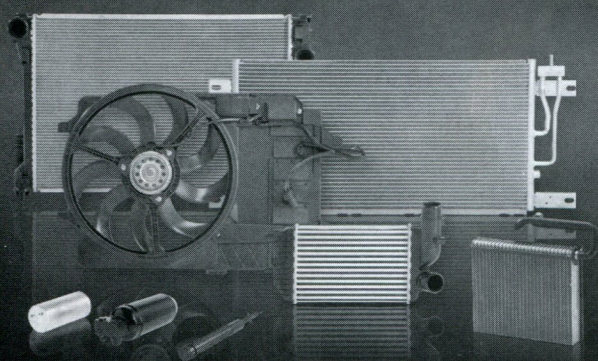
However, draft government regulations controlling synthetic refrigerants are going through the consultation process, and it is expected they will become law early in 2011. A cursory examination of the legislation seems to indicate that the NZ authorities will not go quite as far as Australia with licensing and banning accidental or deliberate release of greenhouse gases, but the emphasis seems to be on tracking every kilo of refrigerant into and out of the country.

New Zealand also plans to implement a modified emissions trading scheme, but the government website says this will not directly involve the majority of New Zealand's small and medium sized businesses and does not require most businesses to report on their emissions. Whether the issue of carbon credits will play some part in encouraging environmental awareness remains to be seen.

We will reserve judgement until we find someone to explain the legislation to us, but regardless, it is a welcome move which will be applauded by all of our members in New Zealand. ❄

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