THE HOTU MATUA

The new supply ship, formerly belonging to the Chilean Navy, has been re-dubbed “Hotu Matua” and will begin regular voyages from Valparaíso to the Juan Fernández Islands, and then to Easter Island. The Valparaíso Maritime Transport Miramar has made regular supply voyages to Easter Island since last August with a subsidy from the V Region. The contract provides US$56,000 for each voyage if the company maintains a fixed price of US$135 per cubic meter. The other supply ship, Araki, was scheduled for a September trip, but financial problems have arisen. The crew is unpaid, the company evicted from its offices, and the ship’s certificate of navigability expired. When attempts were made to have it renewed, the Araki failed to qualify.

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TOROMIRO WILL BE REPLANTED

SPECIALISTS AT THE NATIONAL BOTANICAL GARDEN of Viña del Mar and Easter Island are working on a project to replant toromiro trees on the island. The last island toromiro disappeared around 1960. The five-year project will be presented next November at a competition for funds of the European Union for US$600,000, and it will be presented in the Fifth World Congress of Conservation of Botanic Gardens to refine details. Last year twelve toromiro were brought to the island, and so far all are in good condition. In the coming years, CONAF hopes to plant at least three hectares (six acres) of this legendary tree on the island.

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PALM TREE CONTROVERSY

A CHILEAN AIR FORCE PLANE brought 400 Chilean wine palm trees (Jubaea chilensis) to the island, and the four largest (16 feet) were planted at a new botanic garden at Vaitéa. The smaller shoots will be distributed around the island. The Chilean wine palm is the closest relative to the now-extinct palm that used to be prevalent on the island. Many islanders—including the Mayor—were outraged, claiming that no one was informed about the project, and the land where the “ethnic botanic garden” is being created has the best soil on the island and should be used instead for agriculture. The Mayor added, “We have cattle grazing among the ahu and archaeological sites because there is no other land for grazing . . . and now they made this botanical project.”

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BAD NEWS

AS WE GO TO PRESS, word has been received from the island that discarded oil and petrol from SASIPA’s diesel generators is being dumped in a basin, close to the water well used for the town of Hanga Roa.