Fisheries Minister Kon Vatskalis said today an infestation of Asian Green mussels and Black-striped mussels on two illegal foreign fishing vessels should have been detected by Federal authorities before they were brought in to Darwin Harbour.

Instead, Territory Fisheries officers discovered the mussels after the vessels had been towed into the harbour by the Navy on Tuesday.

Mr Vatskalis has called on the Federal Government to immediately put in place measures that ensure all illegal foreign fishing vessels are free of high-risk marine pests well before they are brought to Darwin.

“It is bad enough that seven iceboats managed to get as far into the Australian Fishing Zone as they did, but it is even worse that they made it in to our harbour with a serious marine pest onboard!

“It is totally unacceptable that an infestation of this kind was not initially detected by Customs or Navy officers before the vessels were escorted in to Darwin Harbour.

“The presence of this serious marine pest is a perfect example of the serious bio-security threat posed by illegal foreign fishing activity.

“Our harbour has been put at risk due to another Black-striped mussel outbreak because protocols are not in place to ensure our waters are protected.

“I have repeatedly raised concerns about the threats of illegal foreign fishing – I am just glad there were no dogs or chickens onboard that could have been infected with rabies or other serious diseases.

“When illegal foreign fishing vessels are apprehended in Territory waters, it is reasonable that they be towed into Darwin Harbour and dealt with.

“However, I will be speaking with Federal Fisheries Minister Eric Abetz to discuss my concerns and I will be asking him to introduce new inspection protocols as a matter of urgency to avoid an incident like this ever happening again.

“I would like to congratulate Fisheries officers from my Department for their tremendous work in detecting this pest and moving quickly to reduce further threats to the harbour,” said Mr Vatskalis.

Contact: Gemma Buxton 0401 110 064