

The BORDER SPACE

Working together to secure New Zealand's borders from biosecurity threats



Two more mobile x-rays

Two new mobile biosecurity x-ray machines will help keep fruit fly and other destructive pests out of New Zealand this summer.

The purchase follows our introduction of a new mobile x-ray last year to screen the bags of cruise ship passengers arriving at North Island ports.

This year use of the mobile units won't be restricted to cruise ship passengers. They'll go to where the action is, including providing backup for our fixed biosecurity x-ray units at airports and Auckland's International Mail Centre.

We've already used a new mobile unit to scan international mail items while an existing machine was undergoing repairs.

I also expect to see them used for screening express freight items and if for any reason MPI needs to set up a special biosecurity clearance area.

One of the mobile units will be based in Tauranga. The other two machines will be based in Auckland and Dunedin.



MPI's new mobile x-ray machines with their trailers.

High hopes for super biosecurity breed

We have high hopes for a new breed of detector dog that will soon be sniffing for biosecurity risk goods at the border.

MPI detector beagle Clara gave birth to three male and three female puppies on 24 November. The sire was Morley, a harrier hound sourced from the New Zealand Hunts Association last year. Both are working biosecurity detector dogs.

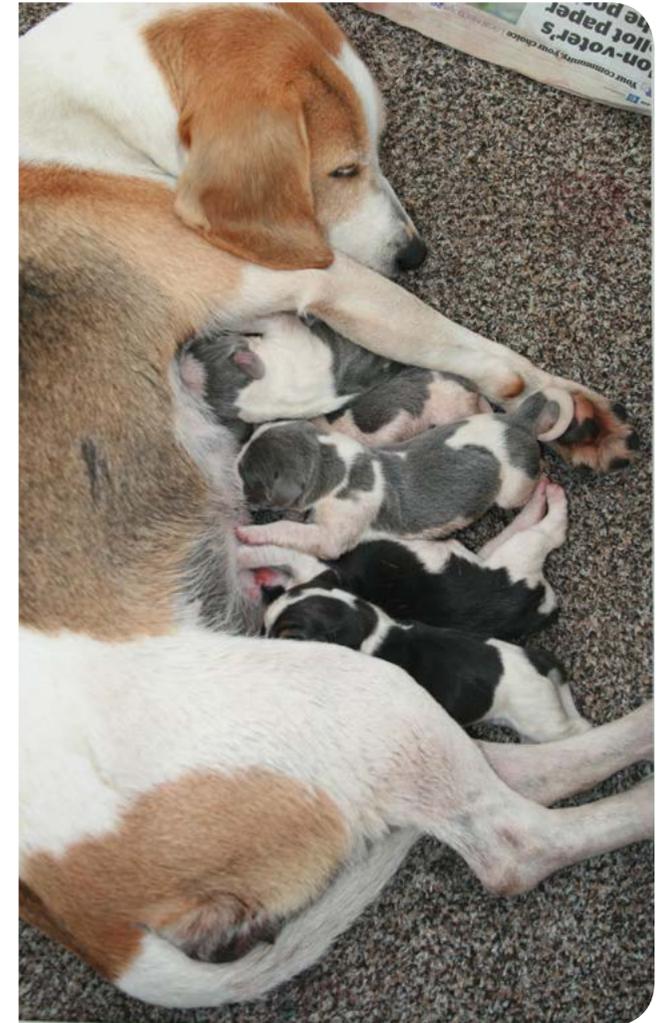
This is the first time anyone in the world has crossed a beagle and a harrier for detection work.

The idea is to combine the height of the harrier with the proven biosecurity qualities of the beagles we have been breeding for nearly 20 years.

The new dogs will be about the size of a labrador. Their extra height will make it easier for them to sniff backpacks carried by travellers or airport baggage stacked on trolleys.

We are looking at teaming up with Auckland's Starship Hospital to choose names for the new puppies. The plan is for Starship children to vote on names suggested by the public through our **detector dog facebook page**.

Regular readers of **The Border Space** may recognise the name Clara. She was named personally by Minister Guy in 2003 and is probably our most famous graduate from the MPI detector dog breeding programme.



Detector dog Clara with her new biosecurity puppies.

Transmission Gully equipment to be pre-cleared

The heavy machinery used to build the new Wellington highway through Transmission Gully will arrive in New Zealand free from biosecurity contamination.

That's because we have sent one of our Christchurch quarantine officers to Melbourne and Brisbane to pre-clear the equipment, most of which has been sourced from Australian mining sites.

The 14 items, including giant motor scrapers, bulldozers and compacters, are due to arrive in late December.

There are often clearance problems with used machinery due to contamination from soil, plant material and insects. The pre-clearance work will mitigate the biosecurity risk and help avoid clearance delays upon landing in New Zealand.

The heavy gear will be used for the first stage of serious earthmoving as the new highway starts to take shape in the Wellington region.

We expect to clear more equipment as the project progresses.

Pinpointing border risk

I'm expecting to see more biosecurity pests kept offshore as the result of a new joint border agency team of data analysts that will use our latest intelligence tools.

Developed under the Joint Border Management System, the new tools are tipped to boost risk assessment through the use of analytics software and data sharing.

Both MPI and Customs have already used the analytic tools to build predictive models to address risk. MPI's focus to date has been the biosecurity risk of pest infestation in cut flowers and fresh produce. Customs is analysing air cargo data from China to identify methamphetamine smuggling.

It is very early days, but the system has already helped us pinpoint traders that are likely to be non-compliant and some commodities that have a high risk of containing pests. This information may see changes to some of our import standards and will influence the work MPI staff do at the border coalface.

Yachts flock to Northland

It's turning out to be another busy yacht season for my Northland staff.

For the week of 12-18 November, they carried out 67 inspections of small craft landing in Opuia and seven in Marsden Cove. The yachts have been mostly arriving from the Pacific Islands. At the time of writing, arrivals were expected to increase due to good weather.

Most of the vessels have been compliant so far. One vessel operator, however, allegedly concealed food items on board behind some cushions. The goods included salami, goose liver, butter, cheese and kava roots (which contained live insects).

The matter has been referred to our investigations team.

As has become our usual practice, we have extra quarantine officers working in Opuia over the summer to ensure all arriving vessels receive a thorough inspection.



Detector dog Ayla kitted up for yacht duty at Opuia.

Speedier biosecurity for Auckland passengers

A new biosecurity lane at Auckland Airport will speed up processing time for Kiwi and Aussie passport holders, helping my staff manage the huge number of travellers expected to arrive in New Zealand this summer.

The new lane caters for Australian and New Zealand passport holders who don't have any food or other biosecurity risk items to declare.

In the past, such travellers could be held up waiting for biosecurity staff to check goods declared by passengers ahead in the queue.

We have worked very closely with the airport company on this project. The airport has funded the layout changes and is providing staff to help facilitate passengers. By that I mean, ensuring the right people get in the right queue and, once they are there, they keep moving.

As part of the changes, the airport's biosecurity area has been enlarged. This has allowed MPI to introduce an additional baggage x-ray machine, bringing the total up to seven machines at the airport.

The extra space will also allow MPI to have two detector dog teams on duty at the same time – one for travellers eligible to exit via MPI's Green Lane, the other for those undergoing x-ray screening of their baggage.

The Green Lane system, which MPI has had in place for nearly five years, allows low-risk New Zealand and Australian travellers to bypass baggage x-ray screening.

The extra dog team will allow us to maximise the use of Green Lane. When our dog team has been called away from the Green Lane in the past, we have had to redirect eligible passengers to x-ray, adding to the processing time.

It is critical to stress that there is no change to our border clearance functions. Passengers will be risk assessed, x-rayed, searched and inspected by detector dogs exactly as they are now.

Pressure relief?

Work is progressing on an accredited traveller programme, but there's a lot to happen before I can announce what will ultimately go ahead.

The idea of the programme is to identify a group of low-risk passengers and accredit them in a way that means they do not need to be risk assessed by a quarantine officer when arriving in New Zealand. This has the potential to relieve some of the pressure on the border arising from record numbers of arriving passengers.

Obviously we need to ensure that our high-level of biosecurity compliance is maintained. I can assure you that nothing will go ahead that threatens to compromise biosecurity.

Since the budget announcement in May, we have been looking at a number of options, including planning a trial scheme involving business travellers.

There has been a lot of discussion and it is clear that a whole range of interested parties have very developed views. I can say quite firmly that MPI has not agreed to anything at this stage and we will not be making any changes to our operations this summer.

I plan to put a presentation together for industry partners under the Government Industry Agreement programme in 2017. The presentation will outline our current thinking and provide the opportunity to discuss alternatives and clarify a few things.

Of course, I will also use **The Border Space** to keep you updated.

E-seller programme for mail

We are keenly watching New Zealand Post's efforts to introduce an e-seller programme.

The programme will see the introduction of electronic barcodes for all mail items from Australia except letters and postcards. The codes will give information about the sender and product, allowing us to assess biosecurity risk in a similar manner to what we already do with express freight.

At the moment, we receive very little information about mail items arriving at Auckland's International Mail Centre. This means that every item has to be screened by x-ray and detector dog.

The information on the barcodes will mean we can reduce our interventions for items we know are low-risk.

This will help us manage burgeoning mail volumes, which are rising 12 percent a year.

I understand the barcode trials are due to start early next year.

Wellington shake-up

We're looking for alternative accommodation for Wellington staff following building damage from the Kaikoura earthquake.

The Customhouse, which is home to 30 frontline border staff on the waterfront, is unlikely to open until next year.

To date, these staff have been based at the airport since the quake, but that area is not fit for purpose. Options include shifting staff to Petone or even Scots College, which is handy to the airport.

Meanwhile, Centreport has had its container operations disrupted by the quake. That's affected our workload. But any slack has been taken up by cruise ship clearances, transitional facility checks and other cargo arrivals.

MPI is working closely with the port company to ensure biosecurity is top of mind as it considers operational changes as a result of the quake.



Dog centre plans revealed

We have firmed up our plans for the fit-for-purpose kennel facility that will be housed at MPI's new operations hub in Auckland.

The hub will replace the existing Auckland Biosecurity Centre in Tom Pearce Drive, which is due to return to the airport company when the lease expires next year.

The new kennels will accommodate up to 80 dogs. The site will have a simulated passenger arrival area and a mail centre for training purposes.

It will also contain a training pool for exercising and rehabilitation of dogs. Apparently, five minutes of swimming equates to a 45 minute walk for a dog. So the pool is a cost-effective way to ensure the dogs are fit and ready for action on the frontline.

The pool also allows the dogs to exercise with existing kennel assistants, avoiding the need to employ extra staff to walk the dogs.

I take pride in saying that the new National Detector Dog Centre will be one of the best in Australasia in terms of space and facilities to accommodate, breed and train the specialised dogs we rely on every day to protect New Zealand from biosecurity risk.

MPI detector dogs currently work 11.5 hours a day for four consequence days, walking and sniffing 12-20km a day.



Summer rush

December marks the beginning of summer. As I have alluded to in past issues of **The Border Space**, we are expecting a very challenging few months. What we will face in terms of volume and risk, particularly with passengers, will be greater than any other year.

To give a clearer picture of what we are facing, here are some predictions of what's coming via the main pathways in December and January.

Passenger

- **1.3 million passenger arrivals** – an annual increase of **14%**
- Increased flights from China, USA and Argentina will see up to **16 100 additional passengers**, many of whom will have no experience with biosecurity requirements.
- **391 000 cruise vessel passenger arrivals**.
- MPI will clear more than **18 500 passengers** on its busiest day at Auckland Airport this summer. The busiest day last year was around **17 000 passengers**.



Vessels

MPI is predicted to clear **1166 vessels** in December and January. Of these, **17** will be cruise vessels, **10** of them accredited under our new “verification” approach to cruise ship clearances (see previous issue of **The Border Space**).

- Southern Ocean vessel activity may see an increase of unscheduled vessel cargos into Bluff, Dunedin and Christchurch.



Cargo

- MPI will clear **41 487 consignments**. This number is similar to previous years.
- **3700** consignments of used equipment will be cleared.
- **1400** live animal consignments will arrive – **980** of these are likely to be domestic pets.
- **300** consignments of nursery stock will arrive – more than **10%** will likely be noncompliant.

Mail

- Some **1500 to 16 000** seizures will be made at the International Mail Centre in Auckland. Many of these will be seeds imported for sowing from Asia.

TF training providers sought

MPI will be looking for training providers in the new year to ensure transitional facilities meet new requirements that will come into force on 16 December.

Under the changes, facility operators and accredited persons will have to undergo training every two years, rather than four.

They will have the option of doing refresher training in the classroom or onsite.

The onsite training option is new and should provide cost savings for transitional facility operators.



Border prosecutions

A couple of biosecurity news items from the courts....

Landscaper caught smuggling Cobra lilies in pants pockets

A Taranaki landscaper was fined \$6000 in November after trying to smuggle 16 Cobra lily bulbs from the Himalayas into New Zealand.

Earlier this year, Shashil Ramesh Dayal packed his pockets and the lining of his suitcase with bulbs he'd picked up while tramping in the Himalayas.

When quarantine officers inspected Dayal's luggage at Auckland Airport they discovered a plastic bag containing fresh plant bulbs in the suitcase lining.

A second bag of bulbs was then found in the pocket of a rolled-up pair of shorts.

Two more bags of bulbs were found in his trouser pockets and one more in a jacket pocket.

The bulbs, identified as Cobra Lilies, are only allowed to be brought into New Zealand if they come with an export certificate, go through post-delivery quarantine and have an import permit.

Container importer ordered to pay \$4000

An Auckland man has been ordered to pay \$4000 after taking four containers directly from the port to his warehouse without getting biosecurity clearance at a transitional facility.

An MPI quarantine officer spotted the defendant (Iain French) unloading imported chamois cloths from a container at his Panmure warehouse in October 2014. The container had not been cleared and enquiries revealed further breaches.

French was discharged without conviction. However, to recognise the severity of his offending, the judge ordered him to pay \$4000 (\$1000 per container) to MPI within 28 days.

Food flood

I'd like to raise an issue around the amount of food we are seeing air passengers bring into New Zealand.

Most of what passengers carry is compliant and does not pose any biosecurity risk. The problem is the excessive time it is taking for quarantine officers to inspect, identify and clear what is often suitcases completely full of food products.

With increasing numbers of arriving passengers, I do not see it as sustainable in the long-term to carry on with our existing approach to clearing these huge hauls. We are currently considering how best to manage this issue. Changes could include introducing restrictions on the amount of food allowed as accompanied baggage.

I want to discuss various options further with many of you once we get through the busy summer period. To illustrate the extent of the problem, I have included some examples of recent clearances of items carried by travellers arriving at Auckland Airport. These type of clearances are pretty much becoming business-as-usual for my staff.

23 November

A passenger from Tonga declared 23kg of taro leaves.

A quarantine officer detected egg and scale on the leaves and informed the passenger that the taro would have to be treated at their own cost. The passenger never showed up to pay for the treatment or collect the leaves. It took two hours for the officer to carry out the clearance.



22 November

A family of four from Tonga declared 40kg of mats, 21kg of coconuts, 28kg of fresh fish, 20kg of fish and clams and one box of cooked bananas. It took one hour for a quarantine officer to clear this haul. The items were all found to be compliant and released.



19 November

A family of four travelling on Vietnamese passports declared fish, ganoderma mushrooms and dried plant products. It took 1.5 hours for a quarantine officer to process the goods. The fish and mushrooms were seized. Everything else was released.



17 November

Four passengers travelling on Chinese passports declared eight boxes of food. The contents took up an entire search bench. The clearance took 1.5 hours. Everything was legal and released.



Border activity for October/November

	Oct 15	Nov 15	Oct 16	Nov 16
Aircraft and Aircraft Passengers				
Passengers	512 868	504 480	567 093	551 924
Infringement Notices	551	626	784	1,013
Aircraft	2 920	2 818	3 276	3,145
Sea Containers				
Loaded Containers	41,288	38,815	46 875	42 559
-Inspected	705	707	753	876
-% Contaminated	21%	20%	15%	16%
Empty Containers	21 180	19 053	19 990	18 151
-Inspected	3 333	2 471	2 268	2 195
-% Contaminated	6%	5%	12%	15%
Personal Effects				
Clearances	2,134	2,515	2 441	2,590
Inspections	674	801	720	787
% requiring decontamination	11%	9%	7%	5%
Direct Vessel Arrivals	307	496	331	488
Mail				
Mail Items Arriving	2 486 987	2 565 009	2 599 519	2 776 037
Mail Items Opened	2 989	4 327	3 049	3 450
% requiring biosecurity action	22%	25%	30%	28%

Super sub

To finish, I'd like to introduce the smallest member of the border clearance team. Based at our detector dog kennels in Auckland, Tequila is a blue tongue lizard. She is used to train our dogs on reptile scents, as we can't keep live snakes in New Zealand. As the photo shows, she also likes to help out with the office paperwork.



Steve Gilbert
Director Border Clearance

