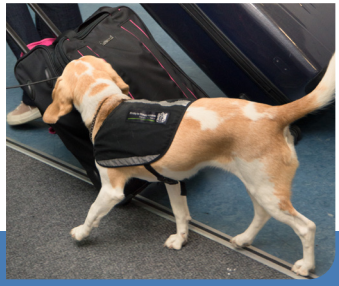
Biosecurity New Zealand
Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua

The BorderSpace

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

Issue 56 | June 2024



# T-litter named

**In March, we welcomed the newest members to our biosecurity detector dog programme with the arrival of two beagle puppies, a boy and a girl from working dog Neon.**

The puppies are T-litter – the 42nd litter of our inhouse breeding programme. They have been named Tilly and Tito.

Their dad is Iko, who was a detector dog in Auckland before moving to Queenstown to work with our team there. Neon has taken a well-deserved couple of months off and will return to biosecurity duties soon.

The cute canines spent the first eight weeks of their life at our kennel facility before meeting their foster families in late May.

Tito and Tilly will spend the next 12 months with their families under our Puppy Walker Programme. They will be assessed in six months to see how they are progressing.

All going well, they will leave their families when they reach one year old and start training to be biosecurity detector dogs.

The pair are the product of our inhouse breeding programme. In 2024, we hope to see two more litters.

We also recruit puppies and recently selected four new canine candidates from a North Island breeder – three labradors and a German shepherd-labrador cross.

The new recruits range in age from 10 to 16 weeks. They began their time with us at our kennels training for crate use, toileting, going on lead and basic commands. They will have their first introductions to people and work site environments over several weeks.

From there, the puppies join their foster families for 12 months. They will then undergo assessment and, upon passing the tests required, will begin detector dog training.

Tito (left) and Tilly – the latest biosecurity puppies from our inhouse breeding programme.

# New biosecurity frontier for international mail

**We are counting down to the big shift that will see our international mail operations based at NZ Post's new Auckland Processing Centre (APC).**

The move will see quarantine officers based at the new site in the South Auckland suburb of Wiri. The shift from the existing International Mail Centre (IMC), located on the Auckland Airport campus, is due to start in September. It will take about eight weeks to complete.

The new centre opened for domestic parcel processing in April.

For Biosecurity New Zealand, the move is far more than a relocation. We have been working closely with New Zealand Post and our colleagues at NZ Customs to introduce new technology and processes that will put us in a strong position to respond to rising volumes of international mail and parcels, and changing biosecurity threats in the future.

## State-of-the-art biosecurity scanning

The processes will incorporate new, state-of-the-art mail scanning machines. Initially there will be one 3D RTT scanner – the same model that has been installed at Auckland Airport for baggage screening tests. There will also be two 6040 2D dual-view machines for screening smaller items. Both these models provide enhanced detection capability, compared with our existing 2D x-ray machines. The 2D dual-view machines will be changed out in a few years' time for brand new 3D machines that have a narrower tunnel better suited for the smaller mail items.

We have been collaborating with Rapiscan (scanner manufacturer) and our biosecurity counterparts in Australia to develop software to enable 3D screening technology to automatically detect biosecurity threats. A new algorithm for our 3D scanner at the APC will be fully operational when the centre starts processing international mail in September. The algorithm will be a helpful tool for detecting biosecurity threats, although it won't replace the need for manual screening of images produced by the scanner.

*...continued overleaf*

The recently installed RTT scanner will screen mail with the help of detection software developed by Biosecurity New Zealand and Australian officials.

A small section of the 4 kilometres of conveyor belt at the APC.

The 6040 2D dual-view scanning machines.

The new centre will also allow remote screening of mail from a control room, as opposed to having officers working alongside x-ray machines next to the belts. The control room will provide a clean, safe, and distraction-free environment for officers monitoring the screening.

## New data and intelligence tools

Another innovation will be the use of electronic declaration information provided in advance by overseas postal services. The Data For Mail system (DFM) will help us to identify low-risk items that don't need screening, such as mail that has already been cleared before arriving in New Zealand. In the future, we plan to use DFM to automatically identify items of interest and hold them. DFM will connect with automatic sorting processes at the centre, allowing parcels and packets that we want to check further to be set aside without having to manually find them and pull them off the conveyor belt.

The use of the new data and intelligence tools will allow us to reduce the amount of screening we need to do, allowing us to focus on items that pose the greatest biosecurity threat. This means items that don't have a biosecurity risk will be cleared a lot quicker.

## Secure transport

We have also worked closely with NZ Post to ensure mail is securely transported from the airport to the new centre. To this end, NZ Post has commissioned purpose-built trucks that, along with strict operational procedures, will mitigate any biosecurity risk. NZ Post will also ensure all truck drivers are trained and certified as "accredited persons". This will ensure they have a good understanding of our biosecurity rules.

First staff induction at the APC.

Detector dogs will continue to be an important mail screening tool.

## The APC and international mail pathway

- The new Auckland Processing Centre (APC) will replace the International Mail Centre (IMC) as the gateway for international mail entering New Zealand.
- The APC features a 4km conveyor belt and is much more automated than the current facilities at the IMC.
- Advanced electronic data systems at the APC will use declaration information to allow Biosecurity New Zealand to target risk items and to enable speedier processing for items that don't pose a threat.
- The APC will also use advanced 3D and 2D scanning machines to improve detection of biosecurity threats.
- The opening of the APC has involved collaboration between multiple agencies, including Biosecurity New Zealand, NZ Customs, and NZ Post. We have been working together to ensure the building design meets strict biosecurity requirements.
- There has been careful consideration of how mail can be transported securely from the airport to the new centre.
- Our border officers screen mail using risk profiling, x-ray machines, and detector dogs.
- Common biosecurity threats in international mail are seeds for sowing and meat products.

# Cruise lines meet the mark

**Cruise lines visiting New Zealand ports last summer achieved high compliance with New Zealand's biosecurity rules, with low seizure rates of risk goods and more vessels meeting biofouling requirements.**

Last cruise season saw 54 cruise ships visit New Zealand, a 25 percent increase in cruise ship arrivals. The arrivals included two large cruise lines that had not visited New Zealand before.

Biosecurity New Zealand focused much effort in the 2023–24 season on working with cruise companies to highlight the importance of complying with our biofouling regulations.

Biosecurity compliance above the waterline is primarily managed through the approved Recognised Cruise Line Programme (RCLP). The programme is designed to ensure that cruise lines are meeting our biosecurity standards.

Those that gain RCLP approval experience fewer gangway interventions, which means a faster and smoother experience for their passengers.

There were low rates of seizures of risk goods this season, highlighting the effectiveness of biosecurity management processes and high levels of engagement by cruise lines. Seizures included fresh produce and honey.

The RCLP continues for the 2024–2025 cruise season, with new cruise companies expected to join the programme. We will be working with those lines before the next season to ensure they are informed about New Zealand's biosecurity requirements.

Regarding below-the-waterline biosecurity, as reported in the last issue of **The Border Space**, 49 vessels achieved full approval on initial screening prior to arriving in New Zealand. Of the other five that showed biofouling issues, four were able to take measures to ensure compliance and enter New Zealand ports.

It was pleasing to see a positive response from companies in support of our efforts to keep unwanted pests and diseases out of New Zealand and protect our marine environments.

We look forward to continuing this work in the coming season, which starts in October.

# Underwater camera upgrade

**We are working towards rolling out a second new underwater camera to support our biosecurity checks for visiting yachts to Auckland next season.**

Last summer, Biosecurity New Zealand used a new and improved underwater camera system at New Zealand's busiest marina for visiting yachts, Opua in Northland.

We are developing a second new camera in collaboration with NZ Customs, with the aim of developing a more reliable system.

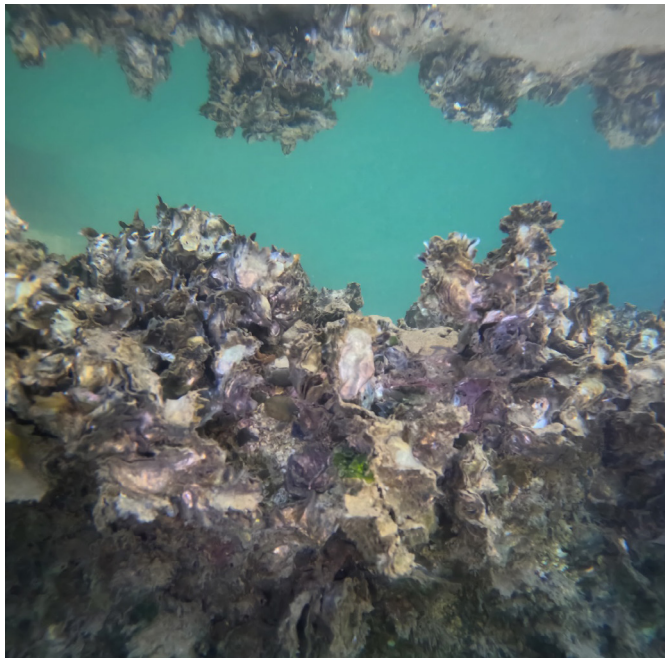
Underwater cameras are prone to technical issues and, because wi-fi does not transmit under water, a cable is needed to carry the signal from the camera to a smart phone to give live viewing. The new system involves new components, including a lighter hollow pole that the cable can run through.

Working with NZ Customs, we undertook a successful wharf trial of the new equipment in April.

Biosecurity New Zealand clears all visiting yachts for entry into New Zealand. Underwater cameras give us the ability to view niche areas of yacht hulls for any biofouling that may not be visible from the waterline.

Images from the camera inform our officers on the best way to deal with biofouling issues. Excessively fouled yachts are given the option to undergo cleaning at a nearby dry dock or to leave New Zealand waters.


The new underwater camera.



The camera used at Opua last summer.

# Passenger happenings

**There's been quite a bit happening in the passenger space over the last few weeks...**

## School holidays

**The April school holidays (15–28 April) saw 171,318 passengers pass through our biosecurity controls at Auckland Airport – New Zealand's busiest international airport. This was nearly a 10% increase from the period leading up to the holidays.**

Passenger volumes reached their peak on 28 April with more than 14,500 travellers arriving at Auckland.

During the first week of the holidays, our average passenger processing time at Auckland Airport was just over five minutes. There was a slight increase in biosecurity processing time to around five and a half minutes during the second week.

The positive result continues a downtrend that has seen our processing time drop from a high of 13.16 minutes early last year. It is testimony to the dedication of our officers and recent operational changes to improve passenger flow.

The changes include the positioning of our risk assessment officers prior to baggage collection. This gives low-risk passengers speedy access to an express lane for biosecurity clearance. The approach has been in place in Auckland since September. It has also been introduced at other international airports.

## Biosecurity hosts

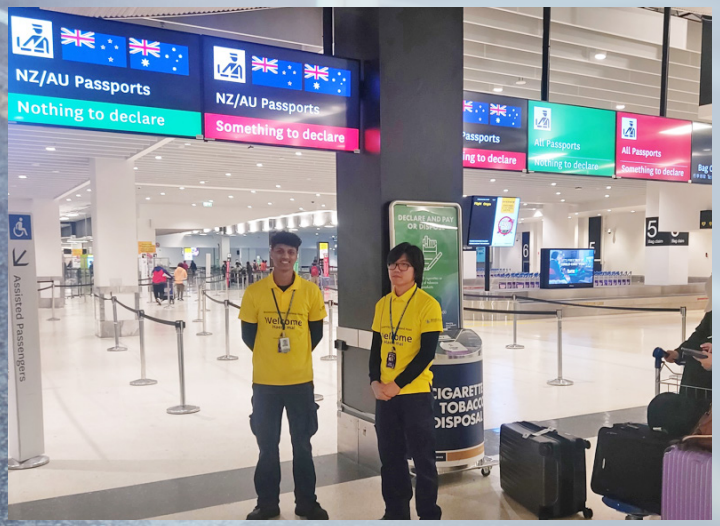
**With their distinctive yellow shirts, biosecurity hosts have been a friendly and welcoming addition to our airport border teams since November.**

Their role has been to provide guidance to travellers about biosecurity requirements, ultimately reducing the number of unwanted or undeclared goods coming into New Zealand. They also help improve passenger flows by directing travellers to the correct lane.

After starting with 19 hosts for a six-month trial on fixed-term contracts, we have decided to extend the initiative until at least the end of June. The hosts have helped improve the customer experience for many arriving travellers, particularly those with limited English. It is pleasing to see at least two of them have used the experience as a launchpad to become quarantine officers.

28 APRIL **>14,500** PASSENGERS ARRIVED AT AUCKLAND AIRPORT

AVERAGE BIOSECURITY PROCESSING TIME **5** MINS




With their distinctive yellow shirts, biosecurity hosts have been a welcoming addition to airport border teams since November.

# Passenger happenings continued

## Direct flights from Bali

**Daily direct flights from Bali to Auckland Airport restarted on 1 April and will run until 26 October.**

Due to the presence of foot-and-mouth disease in Indonesia, we have again introduced enhanced border measures for passengers arriving on these flights. They include additional risk assessment questioning and disinfectant footbaths.

One of the roles of our new biosecurity hosts is to provide friendly assistance to affected travellers and help keep the queues flowing.

So far, passengers arriving from Bali have been very compliant with biosecurity rules. During the first week of operation, 816 passengers went through the footbaths at Auckland Airport. Only one was found with undeclared goods (an apple) and was duly fined.


## Digital push

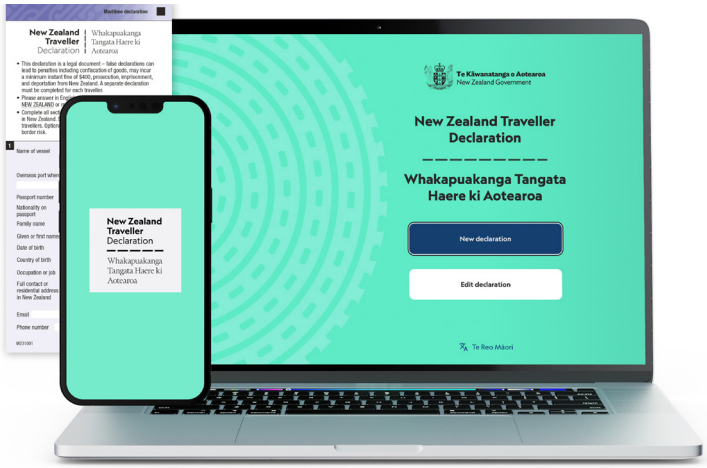
**We're working with other border agencies, airlines and airports to trial ways to increase the uptake of digital declarations by arriving air passengers.**

As it stands, around 40% of air passengers use the digital version of the New Zealand Traveller Declaration. We'd like this to be higher, as the information we get from digital declarations helps us respond to new biosecurity risks and process passengers better.

To encourage more travellers to go digital, NZ Customs is working with some airlines to remove or reduce paper declaration forms on selected flights. The paper forms will only be given during flights to passengers who require special assistance or make a direct request.

The form will still be available in airport arrival areas. Airlines will also provide forms at check-in to passengers upon request.

There is a possibility the move may see more passengers present to our officers without any form of declaration. To avoid this, airlines involved in the trial are promoting digital declarations before and during flights. On arrival, our biosecurity hosts and other officials are on hand to alert passengers to complete a declaration. We are closely monitoring the trials.



# Welcome to our latest border recruits

## Strengthening frontline biosecurity

**In May, we welcomed our first new cohort of trainee quarantine officers for the year with 31 new recruits joining us for their orientation week in Auckland.**

Twenty-seven of the group will be based in Auckland, with 14 training in the cargo pathway and 13 in the passenger pathway. Four new quarantine officers have also started training to join our Queenstown biosecurity team.

The new recruits attend technical workshops in Auckland this month (June) as part of their training and will graduate late in July after completing the three-month programme.

In total this year, we plan to recruit 55 quarantine officers in Auckland and eight in Queenstown, with the next intake scheduled for August. Recruitment for our teams at Wellington and Christchurch airports occurs as needed.

Quarantine officers play an important role in protecting New Zealand's borders from pests and diseases. We are excited to support our new recruits on their journey and wish them well in their future career.

## Detector dog teams grow

Biosecurity New Zealand continues to grow the number of detector dogs and handlers working at our international airports and Auckland's International Mail Centre.

We congratulate five new detector dog handlers who graduated in May after completing their three-month training programme. Once they have completed training, four new handler and dog teams will be based in Auckland and one in Queenstown.

Trainee handlers are paired with their dogs in the final phase of training and must achieve the required standard to qualify for the next stage, an eight-week worksite induction programme.

The latest recruits are set to complete site induction and join our border team as qualified detector dog handlers in July.

A further three new recruits began their training in May and will join our detector dog teams in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch later in the year.

## Frontline recruitment

We've been on a recruitment drive since New Zealand's border fully reopened to travellers in 2022.

### Quarantine officers recruited

| Year | Number recruited |
|---|---|
| **2022** | **63** |
| **2023** | **95**<br>70 Auckland<br>11 Wellington<br>10 Christchurch<br>4 Queenstown |
| **2024** | **63**<br>55 Auckland<br>8 Queenstown |

### Detector Dog teams

| | |
|---|---|
| **2024** | **40** including 9 new teams graduating this year |

These new recruits will bolster frontline biosecurity in Auckland.

# Stink bug tally confirmed

**The final interception figures are in for the 2023/24 brown marmorated stink bug (BMSB) season.**

Biosecurity New Zealand intercepted 111 live BMSB during the season, which ran from 1 September to 30 April. That result compares with 44 live bugs last season.

The rise is mainly due to increased international passenger traffic, particularly from Europe where BMSB breeding numbers have been high.

Most of the live interceptions involved single bugs. But there were a few events involving clusters. As mentioned in the last issue of **The Border Space**, 20 live bugs (eight males and 12 females) were detected by crew on a vehicle transport ship arriving from the United States.

Another multiple bug detection saw nine live BMSB arrive in New Zealand in an express courier parcel from Japan containing a glovebox. The notifier did the right thing. Upon opening the parcel, they immediately sealed it and contacted Biosecurity New Zealand.

The interception tally for dead bugs was 1222. Most of these were in the cargo pathway, showing our stringent treatment requirements for high-risk imported goods are continuing to do a good job of reducing the threat.

As with previous seasons, our officers carried out targeted checks on high-risk imported goods, including supervised devanning of containers, surveillance of vessels carrying breakbulk (uncontainerised) cargo, and inspections of arriving vehicles and machinery.

The BMSB season covers the northern hemisphere winter. During this season, the pest is likely to gather in enclosed spaces such as cargo, increasing the likelihood of it hitchhiking to New Zealand.

## Winter vigilance for BMSB

Our efforts to raise awareness about the brown marmorated stink bug and encourage reporting of possible sightings will continue into the winter.

People are more likely to come across BMSB in their home during the colder months, as that's when the pest seeks warm, enclosed spaces to hunker down.

Our campaign, which started on 13 May and will run to the end of June, is similar to previous years. There is a big focus on reaching online shoppers with digital ads like the one pictured right.

## BMSB season stats

| **Interceptions** | 2022/2023 | **2023/2024** |
|---|---|---|
| Live bugs | 44 | **111** |
| Dead bugs | 1703 | **1222** |
| **Total BMSB interceptions** | 1747 | **1333** |
| **Live detections by pathway** | | |
| Passenger | 16 | **52** |
| Cargo | 24 | **29** |
| Air Cargo | 3 | **7** |
| Mail | 1 | **1** |
| Vessel | 0 | **21** |
| Unknown | 0 | **1** |


# TF compliance up

**The introduction of performance-based verification (PBV) of transitional facilities (TFs) has seen a lift in biosecurity compliance, reducing the likelihood of invasive pests and diseases establishing in New Zealand from imported cargo.**

The latest stats show that overall compliance among TFs is 90%. Significantly, 19% of facilities have improved their verification results from unacceptable to acceptable after undergoing at least two PBVs.

It is encouraging to hear from TF operators that PBV helps them manage biosecurity better, particularly by providing easily understandable information that aids both day-to-day decision-making and discussions about biosecurity at the boardroom level.

We continue to focus on the 10% of TFs that are not meeting performance expectations.

At the time of writing, since August of last year, we have issued 124 letters of intention to suspend due to compliance issues. Eight facilities have been suspended for failing to respond to these letters. Additionally, officers have issued 74 infringement notices.

## TFs and performance-based verification

- New Zealand has close to 3900 transitional facilities (TFs) – approved sites to receive containers and goods that may pose a biosecurity threat.
- In late 2022, Biosecurity New Zealand introduced performance-based verification (PBV) for TFs and places of first arrival (locations where international vessels or aircraft arrive in New Zealand).
- PBV focuses on ensuring strong biosecurity management and compliance by facility operators.
- It provides verification reports that support biosecurity discussions at the boardroom level.
- PBV promotes good biosecurity practices by offering reduced verification visits for facilities that demonstrate they have strong controls in place and more frequent verification for those who don't. This encourages the industry to take greater responsibility to meet biosecurity requirements.

## Auditors recognised

**We would like to congratulate the 11 officers who are now officially recognised as specialised auditors.**

The dedicated auditing team was established last year to focus on performance-based verifications of high-risk and complex transitional facilities and places of first arrival (international ports and airports).

The 11 team members have now been assessed as having the experience, technical competence, and qualifications to be appointed as biosecurity auditors under section 105B of the Biosecurity Act.

The team will now work towards gaining ISO 17020 accreditation from International Accreditation New Zealand. This will provide the auditors with independent assurance of their competence and give them the authority to sign off verification work.

NEARLY **3900**
TRANSITIONAL FACILITIES

OVERALL COMPLIANCE **90%**

# From the frontline

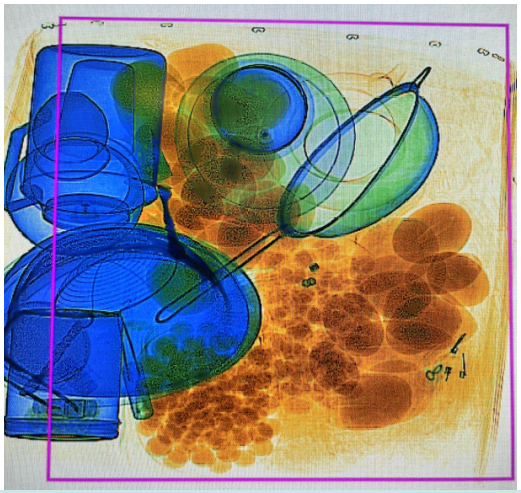
## A selection of interesting interceptions and other border activity...

### Fine for Malaysian mangoes

A passenger arriving from Malaysia found out the hard way he needed to declare the 6kg of fresh mangoes in his suitcase.

Landing at Auckland Airport in early May, he was stung with a $400 fine after one of our x-ray machine operators spotted the fruit.

The traveller believed the mangoes didn't need to be declared – contrary to our well-publicised biosecurity instructions regarding fresh produce. Thankfully, the mangoes showed no sign of fruit fly damage.



### Hunter bags infringement notice

One of our x-ray operators at Christchurch Airport intercepted these dirty boots, along with feathers and seeds.

The items were spotted in May at the bottom of a bag belonging to an American traveller arriving from Australia.

He had been hunting in multiple countries before heading to New Zealand. Unfortunately for the intrepid hunter, the items were undeclared, resulting in an infringement notice.

### Pedro's new passion

It appears detector dog Pedro has discovered a passion for taxidermy.

In March, he had three separate taxidermy finds at Auckland's International Mail Centre. The first was a fox tail imported from Canada. It was released to the importer after the Department of Conservation (DoC) confirmed it was not an endangered species.

The second involved some bird feet, declared as "fashion accessories" from the United Kingdom. They were indeed intended as earrings but had to be destroyed due to the risk of carrying pests or avian diseases.

Lastly, Pedro indicated on a package declared as "ornaments" from China, which turned out to be five small animal skulls. Like the fox tail, DoC confirmed they were not from an endangered species. They were inspected and released to the importer.

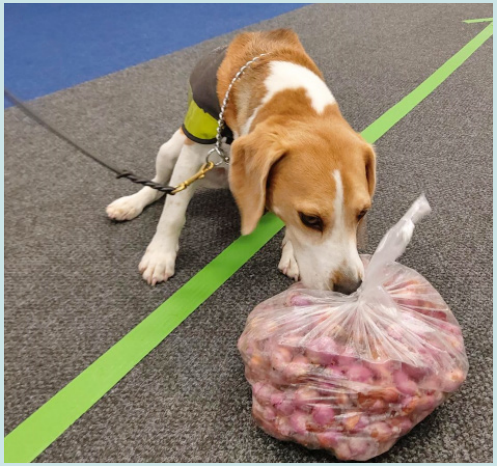
### Not a "Snack"

The contents of an express freight parcel from China were clearly not a "snack", as declared. On closer examination by our Auckland team, the parcel revealed 1.85kg of live strawberry plants packed in plastic bubble wrap. The false declaration and the fact the plants did not meet our import rules for nursery stock meant the parcel ended up in a quarantine bin.

## From the frontline... continued

### Gizmo's shallot haul

Detector dog Gizmo also showed her sniffing prowess, helping intercept a huge bag of shallots undeclared by a traveller arriving at Auckland Airport from Australia. Gizmo indicated on the passenger's suitcase straight away. Inside was a bag containing more than 100 fresh shallots, weighing nearly 3kg. The passenger said she planned to use the shallots for cooking as an excuse for failing to declare. Not surprisingly, this explanation wasn't enough to avoid a $400 fine.

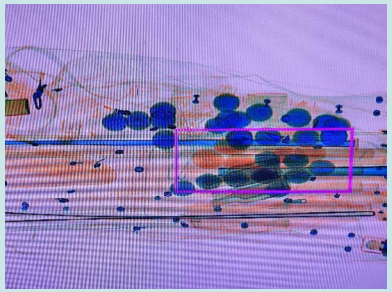


### Forgotten limes

A golfer from the United States recently scored herself a $400 fine for forgetting to declare a bag of limes.

One of our officers at Auckland Airport spotted the fruit nestled among the balls and other equipment in the traveller's golf bag during x-ray screening.

She apparently enjoyed limes out on the course mixed with alcohol and simply forgot they were in her bag.



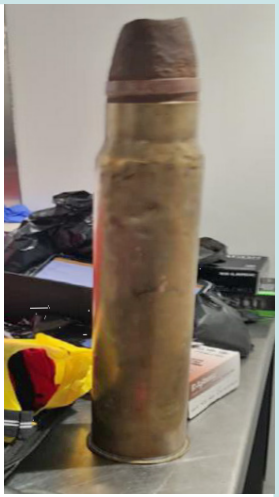
### Undeclared honey

Some German honey won't be flavouring anyone's homebrew.

Officers at the International Mail Centre recently intercepted the undeclared honey in a parcel from Germany containing a brewing kit for mead.

New Zealand has very strict rules for importing honey, as it could introduce pests and diseases harmful to local bees. The item was destroyed.


### Shell shock



A large shell recently caused alarm at Auckland Airport, and it had nothing to do with unwanted marine organisms.

Carried by a traveller from Vanuatu, the shell in question was of the military variety.

Thankfully, it wasn't live and didn't pose a safety risk. It was quickly released after checks by both Biosecurity New Zealand and NZ Customs.

Vanuatu is apparently full of old United States military supplies, some of which were dumped into shallow seas after the end of World War II.

### Necklace dumped

It's not every day our officers find valuable jewellery in biosecurity amnesty bins at international airports.

That's what happened at Queenstown Airport in April. An officer spotted a diamond necklace in its box among the discarded fruit and other biosecurity items.

Our team alerted NZ Customs to handle the discovery. The necklace was reportedly valued at more than $70,000.

### Containerised cat

An accredited person (AP) at a Dunedin transitional facility recently displayed his biosecurity nous after noticing animal faeces on the floor of a shipping container from Australia.

The experienced AP promptly closed the container doors and contacted Biosecurity New Zealand. Local officers collected the faeces and inspected the container at the door, but did not observe anything of concern.

During supervised unloading the following morning, the AP spotted a deceased kitten on top of the final pallet remaining in the container.

It is likely the kitten perished very quickly after entering the container in Perth due to hot weather. There were empty insect pupae on and around the cat, but no live larvae. As a precaution, the area was sprayed with insecticide.

The kitten was wrapped in shrink wrap, bagged, and disposed of through steam sterilisation. Not a happy ending for the unfortunate feline, but it may have carried diseases that could affect our native and domestic cat populations.

The AP can rightfully claim that his actions helped protect New Zealand.

# Border activity for April and May 2024

| | APRIL 2023 | APRIL 2024 | MAY 2023 | MAY 2024 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Passenger** | | | | |
| Total arrivals | 445,700 | 475,206 | 380,231 | 413,140 |
| NZ/Australia | 283,147 | 300,601 | 243,111 | 268,802 |
| Rest of world | 162,553 | 174,605 | 137,210 | 144,338 |
| Risk items seized | 7,830 | 7,485 | 6,817 | 6,702 |
| Risk items treated or destroyed | 7,434 | 4,933 | 6,335 | 4,452 |
| **Infringement notices** | 481 | 625 | 466 | 573 |
| **Mail** | | | | |
| Mail items screened | 1,076,254 | 1,044,846 | 1,498,072 | 1,015,662 |
| Mail items requiring further inspection | 1,502 | 1,633 | 2,001 | 1,720 |
| Risk mail items treated or destroyed | 261 | 217 | 389 | 197 |
| **Sea Containers** | | | | |
| Sea containers arrivals | 48,874 | 61,999 | 69,567 | 64,228 |
| Sea containers inspected | 2,448 | 3,259 | 3,811 | 3,234 |
| **Cargo** | | | | |
| Cargo lines of interest to MPI | 16,412 | 18,954 | 17,501 | 19,799 |
| Cargo lines inspected | 4,287 | 5,079 | 4,875 | 4,966 |
| Cargo lines treated, reshipped or destroyed | 881 | 63 | 962 | 781 |

**Mike Inglis**
Commissioner, North
Biosecurity New Zealand

**Andrew Spelman**
Commissioner, Biosecurity Intelligence
and Systems, Biosecurity New Zealand

**Diane McDermott**
Commissioner, Central/South
Biosecurity New Zealand