



The BorderSpace

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



Issue 66 | February 2026

Yacht season recap

It's been another busy season for officers clearing arrivals of international yachts and other recreational vessels.

- ▶ The season ran from **1 September to 31 December** and saw **549 arrivals**.
- ▶ **Opuā** continued to be the busiest port, welcoming **274 vessels** – nearly half of all arrivals.
- ▶ **Marsden Cove** followed with **168**.

Pre-arrival biofouling checks

This season, Biosecurity New Zealand requested clean hull evidence prior to arrival for yachts. This meant recreational vessels had the option to send in photos or videos of their hulls before they entered New Zealand.

About a third of the vessels got the all-clear before arrival. Another third sent evidence that didn't quite meet the mark, giving us an opportunity to work with skippers and share tips for next time. The rest were unable to provide pre-arrival evidence so were assessed on arrival.

Overall, the new process went well, and we were impressed with how engaged the yachting community was. There were a few teething issues, but we'll use what we've learned to make things smoother next season – focusing on clearer guidance and faster feedback.

... continued overleaf

Standouts

This season, officers carried out 549 yacht and recreational vessel clearances to protect New Zealand from biosecurity threats. Here are some standouts:

- > A yacht arrived in Northland with 18 rubbish bags of food, including about \$5,000 worth of Wagyu steaks, along with coral, queen conch shells, and giant clam shells. These items were either disposed of or referred to the Department of Conservation to check they complied with international rules for trading endangered species.
- > Another Northland arrival, a 50-metre superyacht, brought in an incredible 20 bags of quarantine waste, including fresh fruit, vegetables, honey, and meat. It also failed long-stay biofouling requirements and was directed to leave New Zealand waters for a hull clean. Live ants were found onboard, requiring extensive pest management.
- > Our Northland team cleared two traditional canoes that arrived from Hawaii in December as part of the Moananuiākea Voyage. The double-hulled canoes – Hōkūle'a and Hikianalia – are undertaking a four-year journey across the Pacific. Organised by the Polynesian Voyaging Society, the voyage will cover some 43,000 nautical miles, visiting 36 countries and archipelagos, nearly 100 indigenous territories and more than 345 ports.



The BorderSpace contents In this issue

Yacht season recap

BMSB season passes halfway mark

Sniffing out biosecurity threats

- > Flying start for new detector dog teams
- > Detector dog boost
- > Christmas beagle litter
- > Planking challenge
- > Making a splash

New ship cleaning technology cleared for use

Strengthening Pacific biosecurity

Grapes checked offshore

Response ready

From the frontline

Interesting interceptions and other border activity

Border activity for November and December 2025

BMSB season passes halfway mark

We're past the halfway point of the 2025/26 brown marmorated stink bug (BMSB) season.

So far (at 15 January), there's been a small increase in the number of live BMSB detected at both border and post-border locations – 52 compared with 32 in 2024/25. However, the total number of detections (which can include any number of bugs, live or dead) is well down – 65 compared with 105 last season.

It's encouraging to see strong awareness of biosecurity requirements among importers.

Internationally, we've started monitoring goods from Argentina and Chile, where small BMSB populations have been detected. If the situation escalates, we're ready to introduce additional import requirements for goods from these countries.

The high-risk season for BMSB runs from 1 September to 30 April.

Some of the BMSB detections

- > A live BMSB was found on a window inside the office of an Auckland transitional facility (TF). No further bugs were found. TF staff were given information about BMSB and asked to report any finds.
- > A live male BMSB was discovered in another Auckland TF on a pallet in water drainage supplies from the US during devanning. Laboratory staff confirmed the specimen as BMSB. Site inspection found no further bugs.
- > A tour group found a live male BMSB on a dormitory floor at a Raglan backpacker's hostel. An officer inspected the premises and applied insecticide.
- > Staff at a Dunedin hotel handed in a live BMSB found in a vacated room of an international traveller. An officer spoke to the staff, advised them to stay vigilant for other BMSB. No further bugs were detected.
- > Several BMSB (three males, two females) were found at a Wellington TF under plastic wrapping in an airfreight consignment of steel weights from India via Canada. The consignment was treated.

BUSINESS

The Biosecurity Business Pledge is a partnership helping all New Zealand businesses take a proactive approach to biosecurity practice.

Biosecurity protects your business, the environment and the economy.

bbpledge.nz

Sniffing out biosecurity threats

Our detector dog teams are an important biosecurity tool for protecting New Zealand from pests and diseases. They're also a crowd favourite, so let's start the new year with some canine news...



Neon's first visit to Wellington's CentrePort to screen cruise ship passengers.

Flying start for new detector dog teams

Our latest dog teams have gotten off to a flying start in their new roles, with recent detections on the job at both Auckland and Wellington airports.

The five new detector dog teams graduated late last year.

In their first few weeks at Auckland International Airport, Starsky, with handler Chloe, detected six cups of instant noodles containing pork and chicken. Rubix and handler Hayley uncovered nine pieces of fruit, including apples, pears, and mandarins. Stevie and handler Sophie found some Turkish flatbread. And Sage, with handler Hannah, discovered a banana, sliced apple, and duck gizzards.

Meanwhile in Wellington, Neon and handler Maria, detected a fresh flower corsage in an air passenger's trolley case. They scored again the following week with a find of apple, tomato and a potato inside a backpack.

A huge shoutout to our detector dog teams for their valued mahi to protect New Zealand from unwanted pests and diseases.



Neon sniffed out an apple, tomato and a potato in a passenger's backpack at Wellington, resulting in a \$400 infringement notice.

Detector dog boost

Biosecurity New Zealand currently has 43 detector dog teams:

- > **31 in Auckland**
- > **six in Christchurch**
- > **three in Queenstown**
- > **three in Wellington**

We have recruited three new handlers to meet growing operational demands – one each for Wellington, Christchurch, and Queenstown.

They are due to start training in February.

Christmas beagle litter

Our third beagle litter for 2025, X-litter, was born on December 2 – just in time for Christmas.

Beagle Spice gave birth to four puppies: three males and one female. Spice is part of our detector dog whānau. She's a first-time mum, chosen to help increase the genetic diversity of our dog team. The puppies' dad is retired detector dog Clawson.

Our tradition is to choose names for new puppies based on the letter assigned to their litter. Finding names beginning with "X" is taking a bit of head scratching. They have yet to be confirmed at the time of writing.

2025 was a very productive year for our inhouse breeding programme, with 18 new puppies.

It will be a busy end to 2026 for our team. Our V-litter is due to return to us from their puppy walking families in September and the W- and X-litters will return around November. On return, they will be assessed for their suitability to train as biosecurity detector dogs.



X-litter – our latest beagle puppy arrivals



Planking challenge

We're setting up planking stations (two cinder blocks) around the country for our detector dogs. The exercise helps improve balance and strengthen the abdomen's core muscles. It starts with 10 second planks, building up to 30 seconds. Nemo is the planking dog pictured.



Making a splash

Our Auckland dog teams have a new paddling pool at their airport worksite to cool down during the hot summer and add some fun to their day. That's Nimbus enjoying a dip.

New ship cleaning technology cleared for use

New in-water cleaning technology to help commercial vessels meet New Zealand's biofouling requirements and protect the marine environment is now being used in Auckland.

The system, co-developed by Port of Auckland and New Zealand Diving and Salvage Limited (NZDS), is designed to clean certain niche areas of a vessel's hull – such as sea chests and propeller shafts. These areas are prone to biofouling.

It is intended to help vessel operators meet their biosecurity responsibilities without disrupting passenger or cargo operations.



A biofouled sea chest grate – one of the “niche” areas the new cleaning gear can target.

While vessels are still expected to have clean hulls before arriving in New Zealand, the technology provides a practical, safe option for spot cleaning in port, reducing the need for offshore cleaning in rough conditions.

Biosecurity New Zealand received a formal application for approval of the new technology in late October and completed its evaluation in December following successful trials on domestic vessels.

The system has received provisional approval, meaning it can be used this summer for arriving vessels, including cruise ships.

Our goal is to make compliance with New Zealand's biofouling requirements as simple and practical as possible, while ensuring strong biosecurity.

Biosecurity New Zealand will continue working with NZDS to refine and optimise the technology.

Biofouling – marine growth on vessel hulls – poses a serious threat to New Zealand's marine environment.



Strengthening Pacific biosecurity

The Enhanced Pacific Biosecurity Partnership (EPBP) is helping Pacific Island nations protect their borders from biosecurity threats.

Funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) and delivered by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), the programme has evolved over several years and is now working with the Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu.

Our focus is on identifying biosecurity challenges, understanding local needs and priorities, assessing capabilities, and determining where MPI can provide the most effective support.

A recent initiative in the Cook Islands involved introducing x-ray screening for biosecurity risk goods – a first for their team. Until recently, local officers did not have access to an x-ray machine dedicated to biosecurity screening. One of our

technical advisers delivered training that combined theory with hands-on practice for a group of border officers. This training will significantly improve biosecurity for the Cook Islands.

We're also supporting the development of a tailored learning programme for Cook Islands officers. After completing a learning needs analysis, our team has begun designing online modules to strengthen skills and knowledge.

Similar work is underway in Niue, where x-ray training has helped staff identify biosecurity risks. We have used practical assessments to confirm proficiency, ensuring the team is ready to detect threats.

By working together, the programme is helping Pacific nations strengthen biosecurity, safeguard trade, and support community well-being.

X-ray training in the Cook Islands



Grapes checked offshore

A team of seven quarantine officers recently returned from the United States after spending several months conducting pre-clearance inspections for table grapes.

At the time of writing in January, a second team has just departed for Australia to carry out similar grape inspections.

Biosecurity New Zealand undertakes pre-shipment verification of table grapes destined for import into New Zealand in both countries each year.

Seven United States packhouses participated in the 2025 pre-verification process, which involves officers visiting packhouses to ensure the produce meets New Zealand's import health standard rules.

The programme supports our importers by reducing the risk of perishable produce being rejected on arrival. It also involves communicating with packhouses and regulatory agencies to ensure they understand New Zealand's requirements.

US inspections occur between July and November. Compliance was high in 2025, with few finds. One hitchhiker spider was found post-treatment, and thanks to the US and New Zealand teams working together, the intruder was dealt with quickly and the shipment was able to be processed.

The offshore inspections programme is fully cost-recovered, highly valued by grape producers, and well supported by our US colleagues. It also provides a development opportunity for our quarantine officers to work in another jurisdiction and is an important engagement opportunity with New Zealand's overseas suppliers.

The team will be carrying out pre-clearance inspections in Australia until May.

Response ready

Our quarantine officers are getting the opportunity to grow their skills beyond the frontline. This comes as Biosecurity New Zealand and other parts of the Ministry for Primary Industries look to increase capacity to respond to high-profile incursions and other events.

Response exercise

A new response training exercise is part of the move to increase the number of people who can step in during responses, while giving our border teams the opportunity to extend their skills beyond their usual roles.



Delivering information to communities in south Auckland following the detection of Oriental fruit fly in a surveillance trap in January 2025.

In 2024, the exercise was piloted with a cohort of officers in Auckland to give them exposure to the response environment.

Participants were guided through a four-hour scenario, based on flooding in Southland, to deepen their understanding of the Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS).

They were able to put their existing knowledge into practice as they experienced what happens during a major response.

Following the successful pilot, the response exercise has been rolled out to more than 90 border staff across Auckland, Christchurch, Wellington and Queenstown over the past year.

New staff are also completing the response simulation exercise, giving them the opportunity to experience a response in a safe environment before being called in to a real one.

We have also introduced a new programme for developing response leadership skills. Several border officers and managers have completed the six-day programme, ensuring we have a pool of staff that can step into regional response leadership roles.



Border staff broaden their “response” skills during Exercise Fast Fiord.

Vital role for officers

Our work on the 2025 Oriental fruit fly response, and our current efforts to eradicate Queensland fruit fly and yellow legged hornets in Auckland, show the vital role border staff play in responses.

For example, the yellow-legged hornet response has involved border staff working in intelligence, operational, logistics and other important roles at our regional control coordination centre in Auckland.

Moreover, our uniformed officers have been the face of biosecurity in the community, visiting local businesses, attending markets, and engaging directly with residents. Their role has been to provide clear information about the hornet, explain what to look for, and encourage public reporting, which remains the most effective surveillance tool.

From the frontline

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

Back on the beat

Pippa, the mother of the V-litter (*see December issue of The Border Space*) is back in action at Auckland Airport

Her skills were on full display in January when she detected an issue with a passenger's suitcase in the arrivals area. Inside, the handler found seeds for sowing that had been hidden inside a plastic glove.

The passenger, an environmental scientist from the United States, claimed he didn't think he needed to declare the seeds because he intended to grow them himself. He was wrong, landing himself a \$400 fine.



Sharp-eyed apprentice detects stink bug

Thanks to his biosecurity training, a sharp-eyed transitional facility (TF) employee spotted a stink bug nestled near the motor of a refrigerated shipping container.

Arriving at Timaru's PrimePort from China in November, the container was undergoing repairs at Qube Logistics, an approved TF, when the detection was made.

The young apprentice hadn't been trained as an "accredited person". However, he had completed Qube's own biosecurity training programme, which is undertaken by all staff, including office-based employees.

His training kicked in immediately – he alerted his team leader and secured the insect. The specimen was handed to one of our regional officers and later identified as a live yellow spotted stink bug (*Erthesina fullo*) – a serious threat to New Zealand's environment and economy.

Resurrection denied

An air passenger arriving in Auckland from Doha in November declared an unusual plant – the Rose of Jericho, also known as the resurrection plant.

This dry ancient herb is famous for its ability to come back to life and propagate when placed in water. Biosecurity New Zealand considers the species to be a live plant and treats it as nursery stock.

As the passenger declared the item, there was no fine. Instead, they were given an explanation about why the plant is prohibited. The item was destroyed.

Native to the United States and Mexico, Rose of Jericho is sometimes used for religious purposes. It is believed to bring peace and prosperity (except when it arrives undeclared!).



Fruit faux pas

An arriving air passenger thought he didn't need to declare fruit if it was food.

He was sadly mistaken. Detector dog Nimbus's sniffing prowess saw the passenger stopped at Auckland Airport in December. A search of his suitcase revealed an apple, a nectarine, two mangos, three avocados, and three bananas.

The passenger admitted knowing fruit wasn't allowed but believed food was acceptable.

The items were seized, and the passenger received an infringement notice for failing to declare the risk items.



Bats in the Post



X-ray screening at the Auckland Processing Centre picked up 10 preserved tropical bats in a mail package from the United Kingdom.

Sent by an online supplier in November, the bats were undeclared. They were later released after being found to comply with biosecurity requirements and the rules for importing endangered species.

The importer was alerted to New Zealand's strict biosecurity rules – particularly the need to declare all potential risk items.

Italian stink bug captured

An officer at Christchurch Airport helped apprehend a brown marmorated stink bug (BMSB) that tried to sneak into New Zealand with an air passenger returning from Italy.

Arriving in early December, the passenger declared gardening gear and boots – popular hiding places for BMSB hitchhikers from countries like Italy, which have established populations of the unwanted pest.

When the officer opened the bag, the passenger spotted a live BMSB and quickly grabbed it. The baggage, accompanied by the passenger, was immediately taken into a secure area for inspection and treatment.



Termite infestation eradicated

A 17-metre motor yacht was fumigated with sulphuryl fluoride to eradicate West Indian drywood termites (*Cryptotermes brevis*).

It was the first time this treatment has been carried out by New Zealand-based fumigators. Biosecurity New Zealand has previously used sulphuryl fluoride twice before to treat the termite species – in 2011 and in 2013. In both cases, overseas fumigators were brought in.

The treatment, carried out at Gulf Harbour Marina near Auckland from 30 October to 1 November, required special emergency approval from the Environmental Protection Authority.

The yacht was hauled out, sealed in polyethylene sheeting, and fumigated for 48 hours before the gas was safely vented.

West Indian drywood termite is a highly invasive species capable of living undetected in timber for years, silently causing extensive damage. If established in New Zealand, it could seriously damage buildings, furniture and other wooden items. It would also threaten the timber and forestry industry.

There was no sign of termites when the yacht was inspected six weeks after the fumigation, clearly indicating the success of the treatment.



Fumigation of the motor yacht underway at Gulf Harbour Marina.

Canine clearance for ferry

When the *Connemara*, one of Bluebridge's Cook Strait ferries, recently returned to Wellington after dry dock maintenance in Singapore, it required a full biosecurity clearance.

In the past, we have used officers to manually search entire vessels, including crew cabins and baggage – a time-consuming task. To speed things up, we've started using detector dogs to check cabins and bags. Due in part to background odours, dogs can't search areas like the galley. However, they are highly effective in confined spaces such as cabins.

Detector dog Ripley had the chance to gain her sea legs on *Connemara*. This was only her second ship in her short career. She performed exceptionally well – detecting fresh produce in four of the 22 cabins.

Ripley aboard the ferry

2026 QO recruitment starts

We have started recruiting for our first cohort of trainee quarantine officers, which will begin training in Auckland in March.

In 2025, we recruited 49 trainees across the country – 40 in Auckland, six in Wellington and three in Queenstown.

Numbers are yet to be confirmed for 2026, but we expect to have smaller cohorts in training this year, as team numbers have stabilised following a recruitment drive post-Covid. At this stage, we are looking to recruit around 10 officers for Auckland and two or three in Christchurch.

Our recruitment for this year will be mainly focused on filling vacancies.

More screening



As with other recent incursion responses, we've increased detector dog screening at Auckland Airport following the discovery of a single male Queensland fruit fly in Mt Roskill on 7 January.

The temporary measure targets flights arriving from Australia and includes positioning dogs behind x-ray machines as a final check for fruit fly host items before passengers leave the biosecurity area. Other measures will be introduced if required.

Meanwhile, legal controls remain in place on the movement of fruits and vegetables around the detection site in Mt Roskill.

We're confident the incursion response will be successful. There have been 14 previous fruit fly incursions, all of which were stamped out.

Conviction sends warning to TFs

Menzies Aviation Limited will have pay a \$150,000 fine for breaches of the Biosecurity Act following a recent judgment released by the Auckland High Court.

Menzies operates two approved transitional facilities (TFs) at Auckland Airport for handling imported airfreight, containers, and packaging. The penalty was imposed after the company failed to comply with a biosecurity compliance order.

The order required Menzies to ensure all goods were securely wrapped in plastic, with no gaps or holes, to prevent any unwanted pests from escaping. However,

follow-up inspections by officers found six consignments of uncleared risk goods improperly wrapped.

Officers also discovered that the inspection room and facilities did not meet required hygiene standards and were not fit for purpose. There was no biosecurity equipment available to manage risks, and no records documenting cleaning schedules or staff training.

Safety Notice

No inspections under suspended loads

Quarantine officers (QOs) will no longer inspect cargo while it is suspended by lifting equipment such as cranes, forklifts, reach stackers and other equipment that does not rest on a solid base.

Introduced in December for safety reasons, the move means:

- > Suspended loads must be lowered to the ground or placed on a certified platform before inspection.
- > Lifting devices must be removed and powered down.
- > QOs will work with cargo operators to confirm the area is safe and the item is stable before inspection

The new rule does not apply to vehicle hoists or structures such as ramps or stands specifically designed to lift cargo for inspection.

Border activity for November and December 2025

	November 2024	November 2025	December 2024	December 2025
Passenger				
Total arrivals	560,682	602,139	664,356	714,881
NZ/Australia	316,721	338,918	361,788	391,399
Rest of world	243,961	263,221	302,568	323,482
Risk items seized	9,766	8,951	10,533	10,452
Risk items treated or destroyed*	6,802	8,319	6,775	9,925
Infringement notices	939	803	1,021	974
Mail				
Mail items screened	1,044,724	1,041,218	1,639,097	1,672,486
Mail items requiring further inspection	2,084	3,964	1,972	3,614
Risk mail items treated or destroyed	251	234	252	93**
Sea Containers				
Sea containers arrivals	61,897	58,131	56,696	63,615
Sea containers inspected	3,192	2,644	3,164	3,487
Cargo***				
Cargo lines of interest to MPI	35,958	37,865	34,034	44,178
Cargo lines inspected	5,635	5,603	5,434	5,767
Cargo lines treated, reshipped or destroyed	1,194	930	1,179	1,297

*From August 2025, this figure includes items collected from amnesty bins.

** This figure is provisional and will likely be adjusted upwards. Importers are given 28 days to decide whether to treat, reship or destroy mail.

*** This figure now includes new, pre-cleared and used vehicles



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

Sign up to

New Zealand's most
popular border
biosecurity publication.