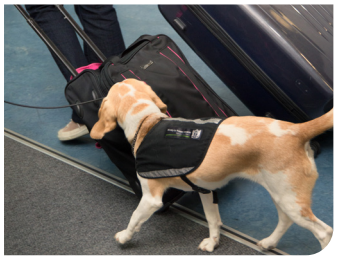
Biosecurity New Zealand
Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua

The BorderSpace





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

Issue 34 | August 2020

Transitional facility shakeup

There are going to be some big changes ahead for transitional facilities (TFs).

TFs, as many of you will be aware, are an essential part of New Zealand's approach for managing the biosecurity risk of arriving sea cargo. It is simply impractical for all uncleared cargo to be stored and cleared at the nation's ports. TFs provide a secure location to hold, process, inspect or treat risk goods.

The number of TFs in New Zealand has mushroomed since the decision to classify sea containers as risk goods in 1999. The move required containers to be directed to a TF for clearance. We quickly realised we did not have the resources to manage all the new facilities. As a result, we started training accredited persons to open containers and look for pests. This allowed our officers to focus on cargo with the highest risk.

So that's a short history. There's been a lot of thinking about TFs in recent months and we've now decided on a work programme. In a nutshell, we're looking to make it really clear to TF operators what they should be doing. We also want to ensure that TFs get checked according to the risk they pose. And, of course, we want to improve voluntary compliance by providing suitable processes, training and technology.

The work programme includes:

- An education programme on the role of TFs for both Biosecurity NZ and TF staff.
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities under existing regulations.
- Reviewing existing risk ratings for TFs, including exploring the possibility of allowing low-risk goods to be cleared in locations that are not registered TFs.
- Introducing more verification checks based on compliance history. This will see additional checks for TFs that have a poor compliance record.
- Enhanced profiling for new TF operators to help determine if they are "fit and proper".
- Ensuring we have the right systems to manage third-party providers before they start operating as TFs.
- Introducing 100% container reporting for TFs, instead of the current "exception-based" reporting when a risk item is detected. This will provide us with a full picture of container movements.
- Introducing a nationally consistent training programme (both online and classroom-based).
- Making greater use of technology such as our new risk and intelligence tool to manage container movements (see page 5).
- Adopting stricter auditing requirements.

We expect the work programme will take some 18 months to deliver. There will be updates in future issues of *The Border Space*.

GHOST TERMINAL? The empty floor space at Auckland Airport's international terminal in early August shows how travel restrictions have affected passenger arrivals and the work of our quarantine officers at the border. The COVID-19 pandemic has seen close to a 95% reduction in international passenger arrivals.

Protecting our officers

Protecting our officers as they work to keep pests and diseases out of New Zealand is a huge priority for us, more so than ever in this COVID-19 era. Here are just some of the things that are happening on the health and safety front.

Container safety

We're working with ports, transitional facilities and stevedoring companies to make it safer for our officers to inspect sea containers. Some recent incidents involving container lifts and exposure to fumigants have reinforced the need to rethink some of these processes.

We have since made it clear staff should not enter laden containers in normal circumstances. Containers must undergo supervised unloading before any officers can enter for inspection.

Transitional facility staff are required to securely store any undeclared or non-compliant risk goods that are unloaded to allow inspection. Facilities should also be aware that our officers will undertake a health and safety assessment of every site they visit. We require sites to have a safe area for conducting inspections that is free from moving machines and other potential threats.

We are putting a lot of effort into communicating these requirements to our staff, transitional facility operators and training providers.

Fumigation focus

Safe practice with fumigants has been another big focus. Officers who deal with container imports run the risk of contact with methyl bromide and other fumigants intended to eliminate pests.

We are assessing our supply, use and maintenance of breathing equipment. We had already decided to increase the number of gas detectors available at worksites. At the same time, we are providing bump test equipment. This technology allows staff to test whether gas sensors are reading accurately between scheduled calibrations.

The bump testing equipment will roll out with a new training package later this year focusing on fumigant risk awareness. The package will provide officers with initial training and regular revalidation of their competencies.

We have also started a third-party review of our inspection approach for goods after fumigation. This work will be completed shortly and will help us finalise best-practice procedures for dealing with fumigants.

These examples give you a flavour of the work underway to protect officers involved with container inspections. This work is ongoing. There will be more discussions with industry to firm up responsibilities for overlapping duties. Our bottom line is we are not prepared to ask our officers to inspect any container unless it is safe.

Combatting COVID-19

Our frontline officers risk exposure to COVID-19. This is especially so at Auckland Airport, which has essentially become the sole entry point for international air passengers since the border lockdown.

To address this risk, we have maintained regular contact with the Ministry of Health (MoH) and worked closely with unions to ensure we have adopted best practice hygiene and other measures. We have also worked with other border agencies to ensure that practices and procedures are closely aligned. Some specific initiatives include:

- The introduction of sneeze guard screens for our risk assessment areas to provide a physical barrier for officers interacting with travellers. (We're currently looking at introducing a speaker system to aid communication between risk assessors and passengers).
- The use of floor markings to guide social distancing requirements.

Risk assessment desk with trial intercom.

- Strict requirements for the use of masks and gloves by officers when processing passengers. (Personal protection equipment [PPE] must be worn when searching baggage while the passenger is present).
- Regularly disinfecting work areas and equipment such as trays and benches.
- Modifying clearance processes to reduce interaction between officers and arriving passengers (see "Keeping our distance" page 3).
- Working with health officials to provide testing of officers for COVID-19, including those who do not have any symptoms. Testing is available on-site and at community assessment centres and private clinics.
- Tracing officer contact with arriving passengers who are found to be positive for COVID-19. Security camera footage is reviewed to determine if any staff have had close contact with possible cases. Under MoH requirements, staff identified as having close contact with positive cases must self-isolate and undergo testing.

Our approach has so far worked well. To date, there have been no COVID-19 cases among our frontline staff as a result of their biosecurity role.

Keeping our distance

We are constantly finetuning our airport processes to minimise contact between officers and passengers potentially infected with COVID-19.

As mentioned in a previous issue of *The Border Space*, we recently established a separate area for clearing passengers with symptoms of COVID-19. The area has its own x-ray screening machine. Passengers are expected to wear masks during processing. Their COVID-19 status is indicated by a new health section on the New Zealand arrival card.

We have also set up a dedicated processing area for passengers heading to quarantine outside Auckland or transferring to other international flights. This follows concerns about such passengers milling in our biosecurity area before moving to their next flight.

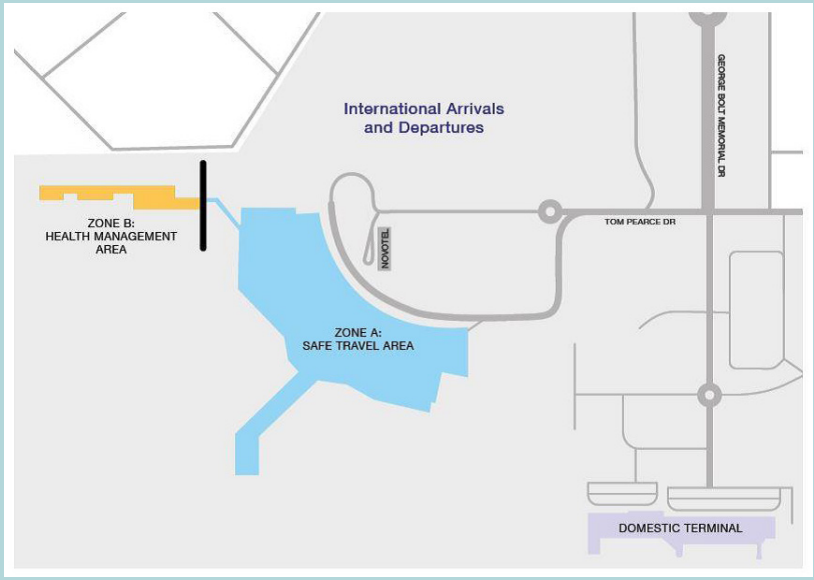
The process is evolving, but we currently have three risk assessment desks at Gate 4E at the far end of the terminal. After assessment, transferring passengers have their hand baggage screened by a mobile x-ray unit. They then move into an adjacent lounge to wait for their checked-in baggage to be x-rayed. Bags requiring further inspection are put to the side, then matched with owners from the waiting area to complete the clearance.

We have also been working with Auckland Airport and other border agencies to establish a separate processing area for repatriation flights involving passengers who are heading to isolation facilities. The area will be in Pier B of the terminal building, which hasn't been used since before the start of the lockdown. The move will allow the current processing area to operate as a safe zone for arriving passengers that don't require quarantine. The separate zones will become operational when and if international travel opens to countries that don't have community transmission of COVID-19.

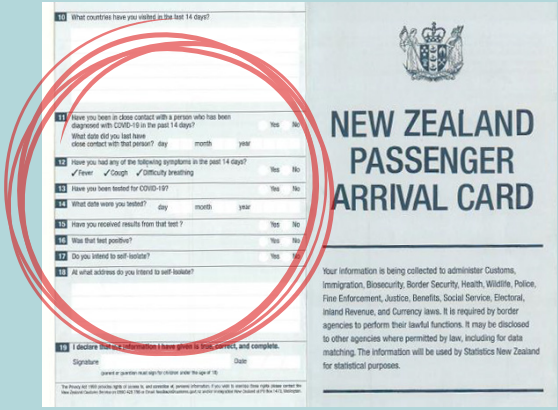
Mobile x-ray at Gate 4E.

The safe zone for arriving and departing passengers will be known as International Terminal Zone A. It will provide a similar border experience to what was in place before COVID-19. The Pier B area where health measures will apply will be called International Terminal Zone B: Health Management.

International airports at Wellington, Christchurch and Queenstown have similar plans to separate passengers that arrive in New Zealand under a travel bubble arrangement.



The safe zone (Zone A) will allow New Zealand to establish a travel bubble with countries free from COVID-19.



The New Zealand passenger arrival card now has a health section.

Robot testing to rev up

Avid readers of *The Border Space* will be aware of our trials using a skateboard-like robot to inspect the underside of arriving vehicles at the Auckland port.

Using a borrowed robot from the supplier, the initial testing showed great promise, especially after a few tweaks to the design. These included adding lower-profile wheels to allow the robot to slide more easily under vehicles and providing a thermo imaging camera to detect pests.

We've now decided to buy our own unit to undergo more trials, working closely with the Ports of Auckland, stevedoring companies and shipping lines. The trials will include hiding insects under vehicles to put the thermo imaging gear through its paces.

In addition to its biosecurity potential, the car-checking robot avoids the need to use a ramp to inspect vehicles. This has health and safety benefits and reduces the chance of vehicle damage.

All going well, the robot will arrive shortly.

The remote-controlled vehicle checker (the small yellow thing with wheels) at our Auckland HQ.

O-litter arrival

We welcomed the arrival of a new litter of detector pups (O-litter) in July.

Gina, one of our working beagles, gave birth to seven pups (five boys, two girls) on 6 July. The dad, Morley, is a harrier hound.

It is the second time we have produced a harrier/beagle cross under our breeding programme. The six puppies from the original litter (H-litter) in 2016 have all passed their training to become successful biosecurity sniffers.

The harrier genes produce a taller dog with the proven detection skills of the beagles from our breeding programme. The extra height makes it easier for the dog to screen backpacks or airport baggage on trolleys.

Biosecurity NZ has used beagles since 1996 to sniff out food and plant materials that pose biosecurity risk to New Zealand.

Biofouling survey for cargo vessels

A random selection of arriving cargo ships will face compulsory hull checks for biofouling.

Ships that take part in the survey will be required to undergo a dive inspection and answer questions about vessel maintenance and movement history.

The aim is to build a better profile of vessels that are most likely to be contaminated with foreign marine species, allowing more accurate targeting of those that require further investigation.

Biofouling poses a grave biosecurity risk to New Zealand's marine environment. Some 90% of marine pests arrive in this country as biofouling on the submerged surfaces of international vessels.

Our regulatory team has contracted Cawthron Institute to undertake the field surveys at a range of ports, starting in August. The project is expected to take up to two years and involve surveying up to 40 vessels.

The survey sample needs to be as representative of the industry as possible. For this reason, the survey will be compulsory for selected vessels. Biosecurity NZ will use powers under the Biosecurity Act to allow this.

With the introduction of the Craft Risk Management Risk Standard for Biofouling in May 2018, New Zealand became the first country in the world to introduce nationwide rules to combat the dangers of biofouling.

R&I tool goes live

Biosecurity NZ's new risk and intelligence (R&I) tool is now live and automatically assessing cargo.

If you are involved with importing cargo, you should get clearance certificates a little quicker than in the past. The system also simplifies clearance of food imports, aligning this process with biosecurity.

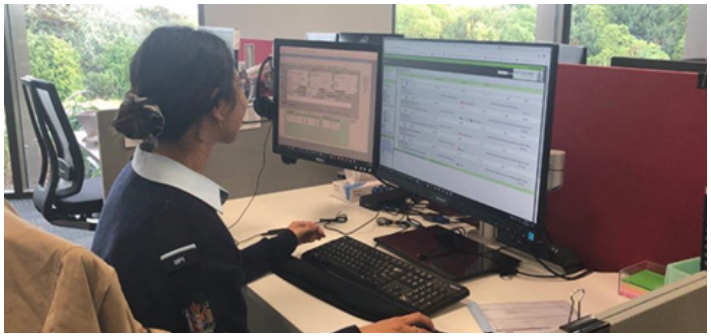
Operating behind the Trade Single Window portal (shared with Customs and MoH), the R&I tool gives Biosecurity NZ the capability to create and modify its own targeting profiles (for example, stink bug) as needed. In the past, we have relied on shared profiles with Customs. Profiles will now be easily updated based on the latest science and intelligence, allowing more accurate targeting of risky imports.

The tool also allows us to modify how much inspection we do for particular consignments, sending clear instructions to officers in the field.

For those of you familiar with our clearance processes, the tool replaces Biosecurity NZ's eBACCa system and will eventually operate separately from our Quancargo database.

There's still a lot of work to be done behind the scenes. For one, we want the tool to quickly identify any clearance delays – allowing us to rectify the problem by dedicating more resource as required. There will also be further modifications to allow better reporting, more automation and forecasting.

R&I started life as part of the Joint Border Management System programme with NZ Customs. It split off in 2016 to become a separate tool to assess all cargo entering New Zealand for biosecurity risk.



An Auckland-based target evaluator using the new biosecurity and food safety risk system.

Container movements under scrutiny

Transport companies should expect to see a tougher stance from us on unauthorised movement of uncleared sea containers.

Movement to locations that are not approved transitional facilities (TFs) is our immediate priority.

An investigation carried out in the Christchurch area last year discovered containers were being moved to and stored at unapproved sites. This is clearly a concern to us. We can't be confident the biosecurity risk of an uncleared container is mitigated if it is taken to a site with unapproved systems and processes. Offenders can expect to face enforcement action.

The other side of this issue is unauthorised movements to storage (hubbing) sites that are approved TFs but are not the nominated site on the Biosecurity Authority Clearance Certificate (BACC). This situation is less straight forward, as storage at such sites does not pose the same level of biosecurity risk. The practice, however, is illegal under existing regulation.

We have been working closely with industry partners to gain a full understanding of why hubbing happens. From these discussions it appears there are many contributing factors: traffic congestion has resulted in containers being picked up from ports outside the normal operating hours of the receiving TF; differing truck types are needed to pick up a container from a port and drop it off at a TF; increased import volumes (currently around 800,000 containers a year) has created pressure to move containers from ports as quickly as possible.

Biosecurity NZ is listening to industry concerns that any requirement to gain official authorisation for every container to move to hubbing sites would be impractical under current logistical pressures. We are considering a range of options that are not only practical, so the supply chain is not interrupted, but fully meet legal requirements. **Watch this space.**

From the frontline

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

Bear treatment

Not surprisingly, there's been a drop in interesting interceptions from passengers since the travel shutdown. But we're still getting a few surprises – like this black bear from Canada!

Arriving at Auckland Airport last month, the passenger had all the correct CITES (Convention for the Trade in Endangered Species) paperwork. Officers, however, seized the item for treatment.

Under the import health standard, treatment is required for such items if they have not been professionally cleaned or lack a manufacturer's declaration stating the item has been boiled for a minimum of 30 minutes.

Seed warning

A recent warning from the United States Department of Agriculture created an international media frenzy (a small one) about unsolicited packages of seeds arriving in the post.

The packages appeared to be coming from China. According to the USDA, they were most likely to be part of a "brushing scam" where online sellers send cheap items like seeds, paper clips and hair ties to unsolicited mailing addresses. This allows the seller to boost future sales by writing fake customer reviews from those who receive the parcels.

Brushing is on the rise due to increased e-commerce spending and subsidised shipping available to some large selling platforms.

The seed trafficking side of this shady business clearly poses a biosecurity risk. From a New Zealand perspective, we have intercepted unsolicited seeds at the border for a number of years and have been working with e-commerce platforms to stop this practice. There has been a small spike in packages from China in recent weeks.

The good thing is unsolicited seeds are often easily detected at the border. They are usually incorrectly declared or clearly don't meet other biosecurity requirements. In such cases, our officers seize and destroy them.

We ask anyone who receives an unsolicited seed packet in the post to destroy it or contact our Exotic Disease & Pest Emergency Hotline on **0800 80 99 66**.

Sausage seizure

One of our novice detector dogs made his first meat find at the International Mail Centre earlier this month.

Arriving from the Czech Republic, the package contained what looked to be home-made pork sausages. Considering the danger to our pork industry from African swine fever, it was a great start to what will hopefully be a long career protecting New Zealand for detector dog Koda.

Koda is the offspring of reality TV star Watchman. He has been working with his handler since June.

The importer was given the options of having sausages reshipped or destroyed.

From the frontline...

Hitchhikers from Samoa

An air cargo facility in Auckland recently contacted us about some unwanted critters from Samoa.

A facility staff member had detected a giant African snail, an ant, two millipedes and other insects in an air container. As "air cans" cannot be fumigated directly, one of our officers supervised the unloading of two other containers. Nothing else of interest was detected.

The containers had been sitting in storage in Samoa for some time following flight cancellations (due to COVID-19). This may have created opportunity for wannabe hitchhikers.

Bat interest

We recently had some media interest in bat interceptions at the border. It's not hard to guess why – the flying mammal is associated with COVID-19 and other zoonotic diseases.

For the record, officers intercepted bats and related products nine times last year. The interceptions were mainly taxidermy or mounted specimens. They all arrived dead.

The largest of the interceptions involved 40 specimens in a single postal consignment. They were treated and cleared for release.

There is evidence to suggest the corona virus pandemic originated in bats, passing to humans from pangolins.

Biosecurity school

Twenty-five quarantine officers recently started their first paper towards a diploma in border and biosecurity at Massey University.

They joined another four officers who began their study at the start of year as a pilot group to test out the enrolment process.

The students will complete the course as a cohort. From there, they will have the choices of continuing their study over the summer or enrolling for other papers next year.

The training allows officers to gain a nationally recognised qualification in biosecurity. It is part of a move to develop border protection as a professional career.

We're keen for as many of our officers as possible to undergo the diploma training. There will be another intake for the first semester next year. The training will also be open to people outside of Biosecurity NZ. We understand Massey University will have information about the qualification (which includes a certificate option) on their website in September.

From the frontline...

Vehicle verification put to the test

Biosecurity NZ's verification processes for used vehicles from Japan were put to the test in July when officers detected contamination in a large consignment.

Our Auckland port team directed the entire consignment of some 2200 vehicles from the *Beluga Ace* for further checking (and cleaning when required) after soil, plant material and insects were picked up during inspection.

The resulting clearance delays saw the vessel spend nearly four days dockside in Auckland before departing to Lyttelton.

Before arrival in Auckland, the ship had departed Yokkaichi in Japan, with stops at Yokohama, Kisarazu and Kobe.

As required, the vehicles had all gone through an approved biosecurity system in Japan before export. As a result of detections, we have increased the inspection sample size for consignments from this system provider.

The verification checks provide a further safeguard for ensuring imported vehicles meet our strict biosecurity requirements. Prior to March, these checks were undertaken by Biosecurity NZ officers based in Japan. As part of our response to COVID-19, the checks were relocated onshore to Auckland.

For those of you keen to learn more, we've plotted a brief history of our offshore vehicle clearance programme (see below).

The *Beluga Ace.*

The offshore used vehicle programme – a brief history

The beginning

The original idea to have officers carrying out inspections in Japan dates back to the late 1990s. At the time, there was a regular backlog of vehicles awaiting inspection and clearing on arrival in New Zealand. Many of the vehicles were failing inspection, due to soil and plant material contamination.

To reduce delays for importers and avoid the biosecurity risk of dirty vehicles awaiting onshore inspection, Biosecurity NZ (MAF at the time) worked with Kiwi Car Carriers to establish an inspection programme in Tokyo. The programme essentially replicated onshore clearance in New Zealand, requiring all vehicles to undergo inspection.

Moving to a verification role

We had 19 inspectors based in Japan at the programme's peak in the early 2000's to undertake pre-shipment inspections. Following the global financial recession, the number of officers in Japan dropped as the result of the introduction of approved biosecurity systems that subjected vehicle exports to cleaning, inspection and treatment. Vehicle companies trained their own inspectors for these systems. Our role became one of verifying compliance by checking samples from vehicle consignments that had gone through the systems. This required fewer officers on the ground. Up until recently, we usually had one chief quarantine officer and three senior officers based in Yokohama, Nagoya and Kobe to cover the workload. There are now five approved systems operating in Japan.

New Zealand imports around 150,000 used cars from Japan each year. All of these must go through an approved system before shipping. The number of vehicles requiring physical checks by Biosecurity NZ depends on the past performance of the importer. Those that have a clean track record require less verification. In addition to verification inspections, the

continued over page....

Vehicles queued for verification inspection in Osaka.

From the frontline...

The offshore used vehicle programme – a brief history *continued*

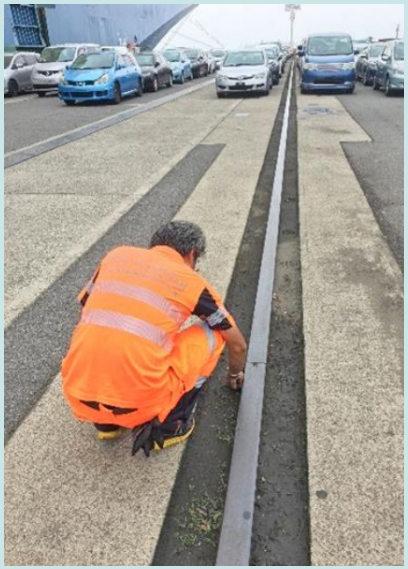
role of Japan-based officers includes surveillance checks of yards to ensure they are free of pests, weeds, pooled water and other biosecurity issues. They also check that containerised imports met requirements and that appropriate pre-loading checks have been carried out, including making sure each vehicle has a sticker indicating it has been through a system.

The COVID era

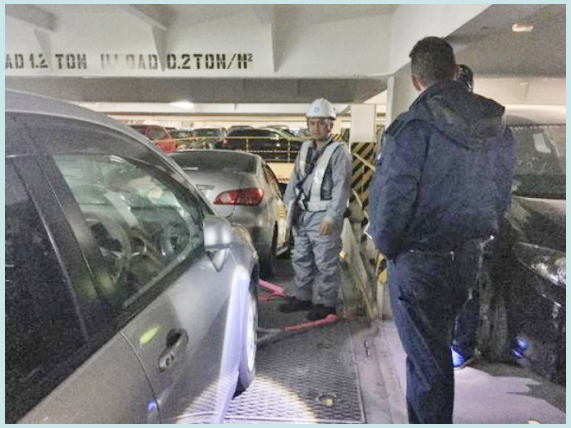
The COVID-19 pandemic prompted us to bring our Japan-based officers back to New Zealand in March. As a result, verification checks of uncontainerised vehicle imports currently take place in Auckland. The shift was a huge move for everyone involved. We are grateful for the support of industry in getting the new processes in place so quickly.

Officers review the manifests provided by system operators in Japan to calculate sample sizes for inspection. If there is any contamination detected in the samples, officers can direct the entire consignment to undergo further inspection.

We continue to keep a close eye on the compliance of system operators in Japan, who must supply vehicle inspection and treatment records each week. Given the circumstances, our recent reviews have used Skype rather than physical visits. In the past, our chief officers travelled up to four hours each way on the bullet train to meet with representatives.



Checking a Japanese yard for weeds.



Sampling cars for verification inspection from a vehicle carrier.

Border activity for June and July

	Jun-20	Jun-19	July-20	July-19
Passenger				
Total arrivals	**5,896**	478,607	**9,147**	606,588
NZ/Australia	**5,896**	317,286	**6,586**	409,654
Rest of world	**3,390**	161,321	**2,561**	196,934
Risk items seized	**185**	7,098	**160**	8,700
Risk items treated or destroyed	**182**	7,009	**160**	8,801
Infringement notices	**11**	765	**10**	858
Mail				
Mail items screened	**2,606,540**	2,524,976	**2,201,888**	3,216,392
Mail items requiring further inspection	**3,489**	2,186	**4,236**	2,879
Risk mail items treated or destroyed	**1,066**	553	**1,452**	944
Sea Containers				
Sea container arrivals	**66,031**	60,231	**63,610**	62,669
Sea containers inspected	**3,423**	2,082	**2,916**	2,192
Cargo				
Cargo lines of interest to MPI	**17,514**	15,808	**20,140**	17,788
Cargo lines inspected	**5,526**	6,298	**6,665**	6,874
Cargo lines treated, reshipped or destroyed	**1,311**	1,214	**1,654**	1,713

Steve Gilbert
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Mike Inglis
Northern Regional Commissioner
Biosecurity New Zealand