The Manatu Ahu Matua Ministry for Primary Industries Manatu Ahu Matua Manatu Ahu Matua Ministry for Primary Industries Manatu Ahu Matua

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



Issue 63 | August 2025



iosecurity New Zealand

Robust results for airport and mail biosecurity

New Zealand's biosecurity defences for international passengers and mail remain robust, according to our latest compliance monitoring.

Airport screening check

Our 2024/25 survey showed **98.94%** of arriving air passengers met biosecurity requirements after passing through airport checks.

The positive result is an increase from last year (98.77%) and again exceeds our target of 98.5%.

The survey, conducted between July 2024 and June 2025, involved checking 13,316 passengers and their baggage after they passed through biosecurity screening at Auckland, Christchurch, Wellington, and Queenstown airports.

Highlights

Auckland Airport, New Zealand's busiest international gateway, achieved a compliance rate of **99.15%.**

Express lane exits performed strongly, with **98.98%** compliance – again demonstrating that streamlined processing for low-risk passengers does not compromise biosecurity.

Compliance for high-risk items – such as those linked to footand-mouth disease and fruit fly host material – was consistent with last year, coming in at **99.71%**.

Air passenger compliance rates

Year	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Compliance rate	98.84%	98.77%	98.94%

...continued overleaf

Mail biosecurity delivers



Biosecurity checks on international mail also continues to perform at a high level

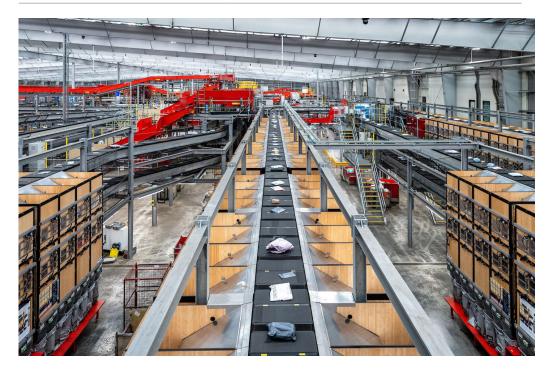
Our recently completed 2024/25 survey showed a 99.82% compliance rate for packages going through our biosecurity controls at Auckland's International Mail Centre higher than last year and well above our 99% target.

Of the 4037 surveyed packages, only 10 were found to contain risk goods – animal products, seeds for sowing, and freshwater fish items.

Surveying for the current financial year will take place at the new Auckland Processing Centre and, for the first time, will involve automatic sampling using NZ Post's electronic mail handling system. Previous surveys were sampled manually.

Mail compliance over the years

Year	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Compliance rate	99.70%	99.49%	99.73%	99.82%





International flights return to Hamilton and Dunedin

After months of anticipation, Hamilton and Dunedin reopened to regular international air services in June.

Hamilton touchdown

The touchdown of Jetstar flight JQ165 from Sydney on 16 June marked the start of Hamilton Airport's first scheduled international service in 13 years.

Among those welcoming them were hobbits, kapa haka performers, media, tourism and aviation representatives, political dignitaries (including Minister for Biosecurity Andrew Hoggard) and, of course, border officials.

The reopening was the result of months of planning and collaboration between the airport and border agencies, who now operate from a refurbished international terminal.

Our local team report that things went very smoothly during the first few days of operation. For the inaugural flight, biosecurity detector dog Pilot helped clear nearly 100 passengers in just 30 minutes. The airport's new express lane, adorned with imagery of Hobbiton and the Hamilton Gardens, added a local flair to the biosecurity processing experience.

So far, passengers have shown good awareness of their biosecurity responsibilities. During the first week, only one infringement notice was issued for failure to declare risk goods.

Our officers are now clearing daily flights to Hamilton bringing passengers from Sydney (four per week) and the Gold Coast (three per week).



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The Biosecurity New Zealand team at Hamilton Airport, with Minister Hoggard, on the first day of operation.



Checking out the new express lane at Hamilton Airport.



Celebrations at Hamilton Airport.

Welcome back to Dunedin

Just over a week later, on 24 June, Dunedin Airport celebrated the return of regular international flights for the first time since the pandemic, following many long hours of preparation.

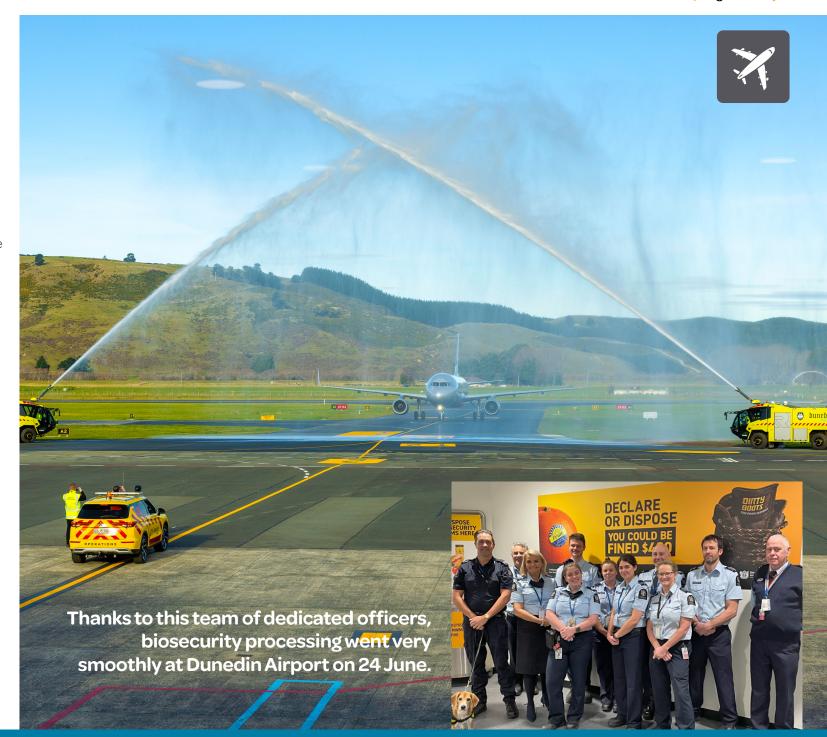
Like Hamilton, a Jetstar flight (JQ189) from the Gold Coast landed to a warm welcome, complete with kapa haka performances, gift bags, and media attention. Ministers Louise Upston and James Meager were among the guests marking the big moment.

The clearance went well for all border agencies, with 122 passengers cleared within 30 minutes. All passengers complied with biosecurity requirements, with no infringements issued or risk good seizures made.

With three weekly return flights, the new service is expected to boost local tourism.

To help manage the additional workload, three quarantine officers recently relocated to Dunedin to join the five existing staff working at the airport.

The first scheduled flight since the Covid-19 pandemic lands at Dunedin Airport on 24 June. Photo credit: Reframed Media



Expanded arrivals area at Auckland Airport

The hoarding recently came down to reveal Auckland Airport's revamped international arrivals area, including new space for biosecurity processing.

Underway since May 2022, this completes Phase One of a much larger construction project that will reshape how border agencies process passengers at New Zealand's largest international airport.

More space

The new area provides 1300m2 of additional arrivals space.

Given that biosecurity detector dogs screen nearly 80% of arriving passengers, it's fitting they are set to benefit the most from the changes. The new space includes a purposebuilt dog rest room replacing the temporary crates used in the middle of the processing area while construction was underway. This makes it easier to swap out dogs as required. And dogs can rest properly between shifts, helping them stay sharp and reducing stress.

The construction has also seen our western inspection facility reinstated and upgraded, providing additional capacity for officers to treat and store intercepted items onsite.

And the airport's new express lanes are wider than their predecessors, making it easier to manage passenger flow and dog operations.

Improved efficiency

Most of our biosecurity processes remain the same for now. However, there are a few tweaks to improve efficiency.

For one, there is a new Low-Risk Control Point (LRCP) at the top of the express lane exit, along with an officer who can carry out x-ray screening and baggage inspections. This will allow speedy processing of passengers who have inadvertently reached this point without undergoing prior risk assessment. In the past, such passengers would have been redirected to our main assessment area to essentially begin the clearance process from scratch.

Further down the track, we are looking to increase the number of LRCPs, which will improve processing efficiency for low-risk passengers who have completed a digital declaration and have nothing to declare (see previous issue of **The Border Space**). At this stage, six looks like a good number.

Work in progress

With Phase Two underway, construction is far from over. It will roll out over 17 stages across the next 70 weeks and include extensions to our main laboratory and an upgrade to our infringement office. This means working closely with the airport company and other border agencies to make sure it all happens smoothly.

We're confident the work to date - and still to come - will help boost New Zealand's protections against unwanted pests and diseases and provide a better border experience for arriving air passengers.

Flying high



Congratulations to Auckland Airport for making it into the top 10 of New Zealand's most trusted companies in the 2025 Kantar Corporate **Reputation Index.**

The recognition reflects the airport's efforts to improve the traveller experience. These include working with our team to streamline biosecurity processing through initiatives like express risk assessment for passengers identified as low risk.

The average biosecurity processing time for international passengers arriving at Auckland Airport is currently around five minutes, down from a peak of 13.16 minutes in February 2023.



Celebrating the completion of the new arrivals area in June.

Passenger-friendly layout changes at Wellington Airport

It's not just Auckland where our biosecurity footprint has increased a few sizes - there have also been layout changes at Wellington Airport that will improve biosecurity processing and enhance the arrival experience for passengers.

The changes follow recent trials in Wellington, Christchurch, and Queenstown that showed conducting biosecurity risk assessments of passengers before baggage collection was more efficient than the traditional post-baggage approach.

At Wellington, initial trials were carried out within the duty-free area. Despite the limited space, the results were promising. To build on this success, we relocated our risk assessment podiums to the edge of the duty-free zone and worked with NZ Customs to shift their eGate passport control kiosks back a few metres. This created nearly 40% more space for biosecurity processing.

Within the expanded area, we have increased the number of risk assessment podiums from four to six, allowing for faster and more efficient passenger screening.

Looking ahead, further development will see the duty-free area move slightly back, creating room for a seating area where tired passengers can rest before going on to collect their checked baggage.

We are also in discussions with Wellington Airport about expanding the space used for secondary processing, which will further enhance our operations.

Over the next 12–18 months, planned upgrades include:

- Increasing the number of search benches from four to six.
- A purpose-built operations and infringement office.
- A new canine quiet room where our detector dogs can rest between flights.
- Potential installation of a third x-ray machine to boost processing capacity.

The airport's express lane was widened before Christmas 2024, improving passenger flow and creating a more effective working space for our detector dogs.



Risk assessment trials took place within the duty-free area.



Congestion buster - the new layout provides more queuing space for risk assessment.

Search bench rollout



New search benches for baggage inspections will standardise our equipment across New Zealand and deliver health and safety benefits for officers.

The rollout kicked off in late April and will see the installation of 54 new airport search benches.

Some of the existing benches are 30 to 40-years-old and are well overdue for replacement. But this isn't just about replacing like with like. The new ergonomically designed benches can be raised or lowered like a standing desk at the push of a button, helping reduce strain for officers during inspections.

The stainless-steel benches are designed to house a keyboard and monitor for data entry, removing the need for a secondary podium and helping to declutter the search area.

Further increasing processing efficiency, they come with a wide drawer and shelf unit that can be positioned on either side of the bench, depending on the layout of the room. The extra width provides storage and easy access to gloves and other inspection tools.

The benches also feature bevelled edges to prevent items from sliding off.



New baggage search benches at Hamilton Airport's inspection area.

Smarter cruise processing

The introduction of digital declarations and changes to the way we target our resources has boosted cruise ship biosecurity and reduced the need for gangway scrutiny of passengers.



The figures for the 2024/25 cruise season are very positive.

Gangway hours for our officers dropped by 40% compared to pre-Covid levels. In Auckland, the impact was even greater - a 50% reduction in processing effort and the removal of biosecurity gueues altogether. With less time spent on cruise ship processing, our officers have been able to focus more on higher-risk areas.

At the same time, biosecurity has improved. Our recent 2024/25 cruise passenger assurance survey showed a 99.78% compliance rate – the highest ever recorded.

arrival. This means officers only need to engage with those who have something to declare or are flagged as higher risk. For quicker disembarkation, low-risk passengers can be directed straight to our cruise equivalent of an airport express lane where they face less intensive checks such as detector dog screening.

Secondly, our Recognised Cruise Line Programme (RCLP) is delivering. This programme encourages cruise lines to take ownership of their biosecurity processes above the water (biofouling isn't covered by the RCLP). We audit their efforts and reward good performers with fewer gangway interventions.

The RCLP has now been running for several years, giving us a strong base of compliance data. As a result, we've adjusted the audit schedule to better reflect overall fleet performance. This has helped us fine-tune other interventions and reduce the need to check every vessel in detail.

With strong support from the cruise industry, we've seen real improvements in managing onboard risks like food stores, waste, and passenger biosecurity awareness. These efforts have helped create a smoother border experience, allowing passengers to come ashore more quickly and with fewer delays. It's also reduced the likelihood of vessels arriving with non-compliant stores and provisions, helping avoid disruption for cruise lines.

These efforts show that smart processes and everyone doing their part goes hand-in-hand with strong

What's behind the improvements?



Containing the threat

It's a good time to check in on transitional facilities (TFs), which remain a vital part of our cargo biosecurity system — providing secure locations for the storage, inspection, and treatment of sea containers and imported goods.

PBV in action

Two years on from the introduction of performance-based verification (PBV) for TFs, we're starting to see some very real biosecurity benefits.

PBV is designed to empower private TF operators to take responsibility for managing biosecurity risks at their sites, and hold them accountable if they don't. It rewards strong performers with fewer verifications, allowing our officers to focus their efforts where they're needed most.

The results suggest the approach is working well:

- Improved compliance: Facility compliance has increased from 79% to 92% (at June 2025). This is thanks in part to greater involvement with underperforming sites to lift standards, closing the performance gap across the network.
- Resource to risk: We're now auditing compliant facilities half as often, enabling us to audit non-compliant facilities twice as frequently.
- **Efficiency gains:** The overall audit workload for 2025 has been reduced by 8%, freeing up more resource to target higher-risk activity.

It's great to see PBV proving itself as an effective tool for managing TF performance through recognising excellence. supporting improvement, and making the best use of our people's time and expertise.

Operating manual verification trial

A trial is underway to improve verification for organisations involved in importing that use a single operating manual to cover multiple TF sites.

This practice is becoming increasingly common. It is supported by us, as it promotes the development of consistent biosecurity procedures.

The trial involves assigning a single lead auditor to oversee verification of national manuals. This ensures consistency across regions, reduces the risk of conflicting audit outcomes, and helps create a complete view of an organisation's approach to managing biosecurity risk.

The lead auditor coordinates with regional teams, confirms when the overarching manual has been verified, and supports site-specific verifications nationwide.

All TFs must maintain a comprehensive operating manual that details procedures for handling uncleared risk goods.

The national manual outlines biosecurity procedures that apply across all locations, including hygiene management, record keeping, and staff training. Each site then adds a site-specific section detailing how local procedures are implemented.



TF COMPLIANCE HAS INCREASED

from

79% to 92%



Puppy walker shoutout

It was awesome to acknowledge the hard work of our puppy walking families in June during Te Wiki Tūao ā-Motu — National Volunteer Week.

The families, all volunteers, help prepare our biosecurity puppies for frontline biosecurity roles.

They care for and socialise the puppies, exposing them to a variety of people and environments before they return to Biosecurity New Zealand for formal training.

Our puppies stay with their foster families - based in either Auckland or Hamilton until they're around one-year old. At that point, they're assessed for entry into our pre-training programme, where they begin learning basic odour recognition and other detection techniques.

Recently, we celebrated the graduation of five puppies from the puppy walking programme. Tilly and Tito, offspring of our own detector dogs Neon and Iko, and three Labrador puppies purchased last year period – Ash, Mulan, and Kermit – returned to Biosecurity New Zealand in April to begin their training.

It takes a special kind of person to take on the responsibility of caring for our puppies for such a long period – and to commit to giving them up when they're ready for the next stage in their biosecurity journey.









Biosecurity puppy Ash and her foster family on graduation day in April.

Foster a biosecurity puppy

Live in Auckland or Hamilton and fancy being a puppy walker, or know someone who might?

Head over to our website to sniff out the details.

Any questions? Email us at detector.dog@mpi.govt.nz

Sniffing power

- Biosecurity New Zealand has 36 detector dog teams – 25 in Auckland, six in Christchurch, three in Queenstown and two in Wellington.
- Five new dog teams (handler and dog) are due to complete training in August - four will be based in Auckland and one in Wellington.
- Three more dog teams are expected to begin training in October.
- Our in-house breeding programme continues to produce future generations of detector dogs. This year, we plan to breed two or th ree new beagle litters.



Q&A with Amy Mua, detector dog handler

The following article featured in the Autumn 2025 issue of the AA Directions Magazine. The AA has given us kind permission to share it as a way of showcasing our hardworking biosecurity detector dog teams.

Amy Mua started as a detector dog handler last year. She works with her canine partner, Ally, a six-year-old labrador-springer spaniel cross to protect New Zealand from biosecurity threats.

How did you end up working at Biosecurity New Zealand?

When I was thinking about going back to work after I had my children, I wanted to do something where I could give back, for them and for the future. I chose biosecurity because I think it's hugely important work, and I really wanted the time that I spend away from my kids to mean something.

Plus, ever since I was a small child I'd had a dream of being a dog handler. It wasn't something that I thought would ever actually happen, so when the opportunity came up, I jumped at it!

What does dog handler training involve?

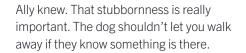
It's an intensive process that takes three months. We start in the training room and then move to on-site training. We do exams on animal welfare; we learn about target odour and animal behaviour. The dogs are normally learning while the handlers are learning. For them, pre-training is six weeks before the handler course starts, so the dogs are already picking up the basics.

We also have to learn how to move, which is weirdly the hardest part. We use very different muscles! We do things like "pivoting in", which is almost unnatural. At the beginning there's a lot of falling over — I'm not the most graceful person! But once you get it right, it becomes this fluid dance.

If we're just walking up and down, it's not engaging for the dogs. We move our bodies to encourage them to go and sniff the right places. We want to keep it interesting and direct them but without being prescriptive. Those movements also help us work around all the obstacles – the passengers, the trolleys – so they all get coverage.

What makes a good detector dog?

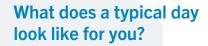
Food drive – they really want to get that biscuit. And they have to be very stubborn. For example, one day at the airport we had a gentleman who told me that he'd had some jerky several hours earlier. He was adamant that was all he'd had. When I said to Ally "let's go," she just went "nope" and dug in. So, I had his bag searched and they found a mandarin.





When they're training, they progress through different types of boxes and bags. We start with them open and then close them to make it harder and harder for the dog to find things.

We're always introducing different odours and gradually increasing the difficulty of tasks. Even a dog that's been working for five years will still be learning. They might know an odour already, but it's up to us as handlers to make sure we're keeping them on their toes. If we see that they're finding more of one thing and less of another, we'll work on developing those other areas.



We pick up our dogs from the kennels and bring them to the airport where we start processing people. Later in the day we might be deployed to different sites. We go to the port to make sure no one is bringing any food off cruise ships. We can be on mail, checking the letters and parcels at NZ Post. We normally finish the day at the airport again, then bring the dog back to the kennels, give them dinner and put them to bed.



What do you enjoy most about your role?

Biosecurity New Zealand has many layers of defence, but detector dogs are really layer number one. Being that first layer is a huge responsibility. It's amazing being able to protect our land and our environment that we all care so deeply about.

Not many people are lucky enough to get to do this and every one of us handlers keep that perspective. We work really hard and the days can be very long; you have to be so, so resilient. But when I walk through the airport and hear people saying, "you've got the best job in the world!" I bank those comments, and I think, "yeah, I do."



From the frontline

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

"Dead" moss seized

A passenger who declared "dead Icelandic moss" at Christchurch Airport in June wantedto see our officer act like "they do it on TV".



Hopefully, she got what she wanted when the plant (which looked very much alive) was duly seized.

Arriving from Europe, the passenger had been given the plant by a friend. Unfortunately, she had no paperwork to provide formal identification of the moss or evidence of treatment.

The passenger had two choices for the moss — destruction or treatment. Realistically, destruction was the only option. Heat treatment would've ruined the moss's appeal, including its bright green colour and soft texture.

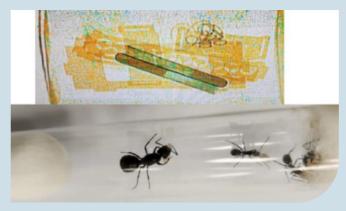


Mouldy bananas

X-ray screening at Auckland Processing Centre picked up five bananas in a box arriving from the UK in June.

Not only did the fresh produce pose biosecurity risk to New Zealand growers, it didn't arrive particularly fresh - the bananas were covered in mould.

Our team sent them straight to the quarantine bin - no postage required.



More than test tubes

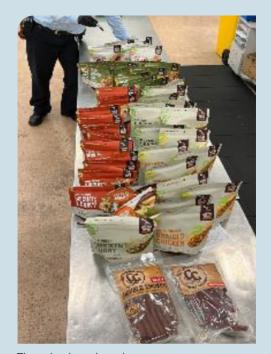
The parcel from Australia was declared as test tubes - not quite!

Inside was an ant colony starter kit, complete with live ants, larvae and food for them to munch on during the trip to New Zealand.

Intercepted at the Auckland Processing Centre in June, the items did not meet biosecurity requirements. The importer was notified, and the parcel was destroyed.



From the frontline....continued



The seized meals and sausages.

Feast denied

A hunting party from the United States won't be feasting on 44 dehydrated meals and two packets of pork sausages.

The meals contained pork and chicken. They were among the 72 pre-packaged meals declared by the air passengers, arriving at Auckland in June.

The declaration avoided a fine. The passengers also declared hunting gear and four tents, which were given the okay to enter New Zealand following inspection.

Soiled hobby kits ordered online

Joint action by border and post-border teams in June quickly addressed the biosecurity threat posed by hobby kits ordered online.

It followed a call from a Matamata-based importer who reported the discovery of dried plant material and seeds in miniature house-building kits from China.

An officer collected the kits from the property for destruction. Behind the scenes, an alert was put in place to target any further parcels addressed to the importer from China.

The importer was helpful throughout the investigation, including providing screenshots of the product on the e-commerce site.

The site was also very responsive. After being notified about the non-compliant product, it immediately delisted the item and launched an investigation.

It also reached out to the seller to stress the importance of complying with New Zealand's biosecurity rules.



Hobby kits from China found contaminated with plant material.

Aussie pest spotted on container

Well done to the eagle-eyed Lyttelton Port straddle driver who recently spotted this caterpillar on a shipping container from Australia and reported it our local team.



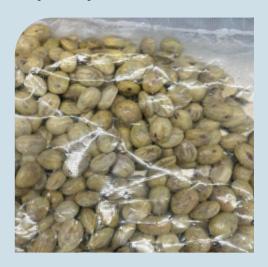
Identified as a white cedar moth (Leptocneria reducta), the pest is widespread in Australia but is not found in New Zealand

As its name suggests, the moth is a major pest of white cedar trees. It is also a health hazard to humans – its hairs can cause an allergic reaction if they come into contact with skin.

From the frontline....continued

Stinky seeds

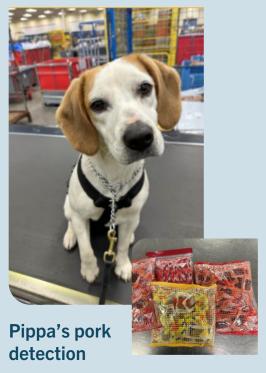
They were declared as dried fruit, but were actually seeds very smelly ones!



They gave off such a strong odour our officers in the inspection room had to wear facemasks until the stink dissipated.

Arriving at the Auckland Processing Centre from Thailand in early June, the unidentified seeds were likely durian, which is notorious for its pungent smell – often compared to leaking gas.

As the seeds were prohibited from entering New Zealand, the importer was given the option of reshipment or destruction. They also received a letter reminding them of their biosecurity responsibilities.



A Singaporean passenger found out the hard way that vacuum-sealed meat isn't allowed into New Zealand.

Arriving at Auckland Airport in June, they failed to declare 3.5kg of dried pork, believing it was permitted.

Detector dog Pippa, working the express lane, wasn't going to let it pass unnoticed. She indicated on the bag, prompting a search that uncovered the individually packaged, vacuum-sealed meat.

The passenger was issued an \$400 infringement notice.



Iko's double whammy

An air passenger from Australia copped fines from both Biosecurity New Zealand and NZ Customs after experiencing detector dog Iko's sharp sniffing skills.

Arriving at Queenstown in June, the passenger failed to declare food items, including courgette, sausage, lime, garlic, ginger, sweet potato, and red onion.

The passenger faced a full baggage search after Iko enthusiastically indicated there was food inside a metal suitcase. A second indication on the passenger's carry-on bag revealed a chicken sandwich – so that was two strikes in under a minute for Iko.

Along with the food, the officer carrying out the search discovered excess tobacco. prompting a referral to Customs.



Cardboard companion

Trainee detector dog Milo sizes up a cut-out companion at the 2025 National Fieldays in June. Four of our dog teams helped promote biosecurity at this year's Fieldays, which was one of the most successful ever.

Border activity for May and June 2025

	May 2024	May 2025	June 2024	June 2025
Passenger				
Total arrivals	413,140	436,990	430,514	447,086
NZ/Australia	268,802	283,877	291,842	305,468
Rest of world	144,338	153,113	138,672	141,618
Risk items seized	6,702	7,463	7,544	7,616
Risk items treated or destroyed	4,452	4,925	5,014	5,060
Infringement notices	573	600	598	572
Mail				
Mail items screened	1,015,662	910,597	873,197	854,126
Mail items requiring further inspection	1,720	1,791	1,346	1,614
Risk mail items treated or destroyed	197	235	184	63*
Sea Containers				
Sea containers arrivals	64,228	69,225	59,258	59,345
Sea containers inspected	3,234	2,970	3,520	3,003
Cargo				
Cargo lines of interest to MPI	19,799	18,581	16,930	18,582
Cargo lines inspected	4,966	5,117	4,803	5,341
Cargo lines treated, reshipped or destroyed	781	714	833	755

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

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

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