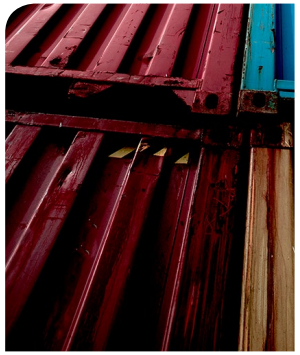
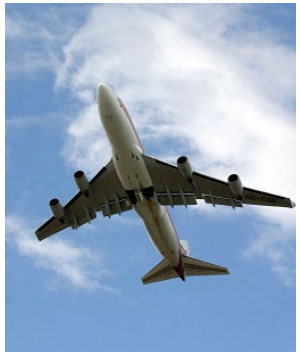
March 2018

The BORDER SPACE

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

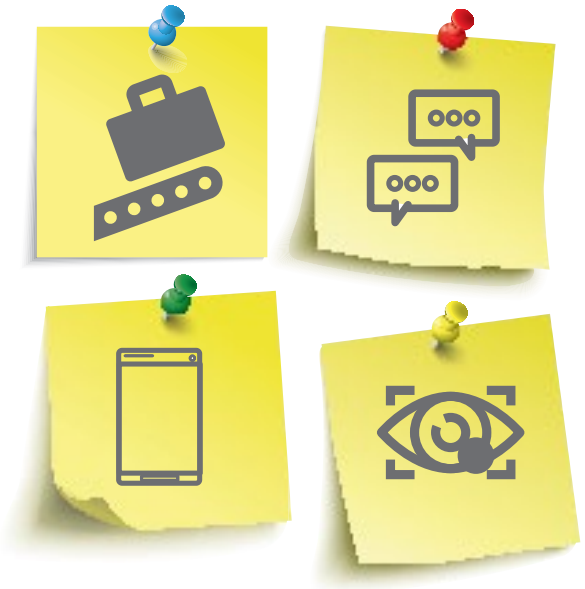




We've been thinking

Last November, the main players in the airport space got together with some technology people to pull together some ideas to improve border processes.

The initial meeting involved lots of sticky notes on a wall – not my normal way of doing things, but it definitely produced the results.

We're now looking at bringing four initiatives to life. MPI is leading on the first one – identifying and testing new baggage screening equipment for arriving travellers. This is essentially the work I have mentioned before about using x-ray machines to screen baggage before passengers collect it from the airport carousels. This would allow us to make biosecurity assessments before travellers approach our queuing area.



The concept is based on adapting existing x-ray technology used for security screening in many countries. We are going to be looking closer at how this technology is used in places like London, Paris and Dubai to see if it can be used for biosecurity. The plan is to have a trial up and running in the next six months or so.

The second initiative sees Immigration NZ looking at how we improve our communications to travellers from India. The aim is ensure travellers know what is expected and are prepared when they arrive in New Zealand. This initiative will build on the considerable work MPI has already done to target high-risk travellers.

Customs is leading the final two initiatives – creating a prototype digital arrival card as an alternative to the paper version, and getting agreement on how biometrics (for example, iris scanning) could be used at airports.

Expect to read more about this work in future issues of *The Border Space*.

Greater scrutiny for air containers

Air containers will now face strict hygiene requirements similar to those that arrive in New Zealand by sea.

The *Import Health Standard: Air Containers from All Countries* will come into force on 5 April. This means all arriving

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Food ban considered

Regular readers of *The Border Space* will know that I am keen to restrict the amount of food air passengers bring into New Zealand.

I'm talking more than just items that pose a biosecurity risk. My officers spend hours every shift identifying and clearing a mountain of compliant products. With ever-increasing numbers of international passengers, I do not believe it is sustainable to continue our existing approach.

I just want to say I am continuing to push this issue, and recently raised it with airlines through their representative organisation. The feedback I have is there is opposition to a complete food ban, but there is keenness to work with MPI to make things work better.

There are a range of options we could adopt. As always, I will keep you informed of any developments.

containers with freight or baggage will need to be clean of biosecurity contaminants. In addition, the new standard makes it compulsory for a trained accredited person to carry out or supervise the unloading.

Please note that many goods that arrive in air containers must already meet strict biosecurity rules. Such goods include cut flowers from India and fresh produce from the Pacific Islands. Under the new requirements, all air containers must be checked for biosecurity contaminants, not just those carrying high-risk items.

This will be a big change for international airports, as freight and baggage handlers will have to be approved as accredited persons, or at least be supervised by one during the course of their duties. We're asking airports to review their biosecurity processes in light of the change and to get in touch with us if they need any assistance.

New training courses are available for people who work with air containers.

Under the new standard, there is also a requirement for accredited persons to record any detected contaminants. We will be shortly trialling a new reporting tool that piggybacks on what we already use for sea containers.

Unauthorised TF staff face the chop

As part of a wider move to improve the management of transitional facilities, we've started revoking approval for "accredited persons" (APs) that haven't sent us a new appointment application.

The application process allows us to get updated contact details for accredited staff and ensures we know who's working in a biosecurity role at what facility. Any facility using unauthorised personnel to check goods for biosecurity risk faces the prospect of enforcement action.

We started revoking approvals on 19 March, a move that could impact on some 2000 APs we've yet to hear from. We introduced the requirement for APs to submit an application for appointment nearly 16 months ago, so there's been plenty of time for transitional facility staff to take action.

Anyone that has their approval revoked will need to complete an MPI-approved training course and submit the required application if they want to work as an AP.

New biosecurity blood

Our latest recruitment drive for new quarantine officers has attracted some 1600 applications.

With radio ads helping pique the interest of wannabe border staff, the high number suggests just how keen New Zealanders (young and old) are to do their bit for biosecurity.

We are looking at whittling down the list to 35 trainees.

The new recruits are due to start with MPI on 6 May with the aim of having them trained up well before the start of summer.

At this stage, my intention is to have only one recruitment round this year. We had three rounds in 2017, employing around 20 officers each time.

Heightened fruit fly risk

Stink bug has dominated the news this month, but fruit fly risk is still very much top of mind for MPI border staff.

We recently made two interceptions of Queensland fruit fly – one on a pear in an airport disposal bin, the other on a peach. That makes 10 probable fruit fly interceptions for the summer season (three have yet to confirmed by our lab at the time of writing).

MPI officers are on particularly high alert for fruit fly due to recent detections in Tasmania and Adelaide.

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Season of the bug

The biggest issue of year so far for MPI border staff has been stink bugs arriving in bulk carriers from Japan.

What's been happening?

We ramped up our border controls earlier this year for carriers transporting vehicles and machinery from Japan following a spike in stink bug detections.

The controls include fogging high-risk vessels with insecticide. If there is no evidence of live bugs during inspection we allow a controlled discharge with verification checks, including screening with a specially trained detector dog and heat treatment of a sample of the vehicles.

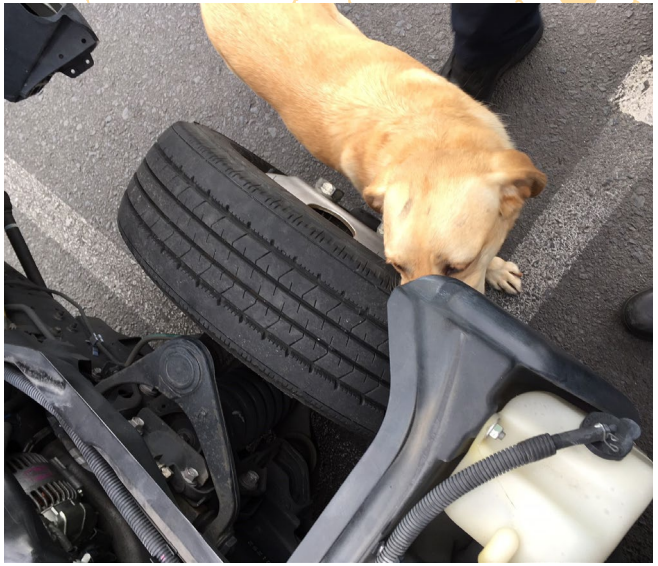
The explosion in stink bugs from Japan is a new development. In the past, vehicles and machinery from Japan have been viewed as low risk compared with the United States and Italy. This is partly attributable to the cleaning and inspection for most imported used vehicles that takes place at MPI-approved facilities in Japan. What's behind the increased bug numbers is a bit of mystery, but I have heard it is the result of hot weather around the world during the last year.

Things came to a head on Waitangi day when *The Courageous Ace* (pictured below) failed its biosecurity checks at the Auckland port, with MPI officers detecting both brown marmorated and yellow stink bugs. After assessing the risk, the decision was made to direct the carrier to leave New Zealand.

As an aside, it was actually the first time we had used Georgie, our new stink bug detection dog, to assist with inspections. She was able to screen an enormous amount of vehicles in quick time, and those that she indicated on were all found to have stinks bugs after heat treatment. So the results very much validated the investment we have made in this programme.

We have since directed three other carriers from Japan to leave New Zealand due to stink bug infestation. With nearly 30 carriers expected to arrive in New Zealand from Japan by the end of the stink bug season, there is a strong possibility that more will have to go. But I don't want to be alarmist. We are still clearing carriers, so not all are being turned away. Any decision to direct a vessel to leave New Zealand is made on a case-by-case basis.

***The Courageous Ace* failed biosecurity checks at Auckland port.**



Georgie, the new stink bug detection dog, at work.

Moreover, we are receiving reports of carriers undergoing fogging before leaving Japan or en route to New Zealand. So that should reduce the number of stink bug detections we are making at the border.

Any carrier that is turned away has to meet strict conditions to return to New Zealand and discharge its cargo. Again, these conditions are decided on a case-by-case basis. They involve further treatment and verification checks. Our approach includes only allowing one returning vessel to berth at a time, so it is taking a long time to get through the backlog.

Our actions have attracted considered media interest over the last few weeks. One of the benefits of that has been the increased profile of brown marmorated stink bug as a destructive pest. The

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Why is **brown marmorated stink bug** a threat?

- It is a voracious eater of horticultural produce.
- A wide range of crops would be unmarketable if damaged by the bug. In the US some growers have reported crop losses of up to 95 percent.
- It is resistant to many insecticides, making it difficult and expensive to control.
- When it gets cold, it bunches up in dark spaces in homes making it a major public nuisance.
- A recent study by the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research showed the economic impact of the bug establishing in New Zealand could see GDP fall between $1.8 million and $3.6 million by 2038, and horticulture export value fall between $2 billion and $4.2 billion.

MPI hot line has been at melting point with calls about possible sightings, which so far (thankfully) have mostly been cases of mistaken identity.

Another positive has been the support of the vessel operators and importers, despite the delays and costs they have incurred. There is clearly a shared belief that protecting New Zealand is the highest priority.

Treatment options

The arrival of stink bugs in vehicles from Japan has created something of a headache for my regulatory colleagues who make the call about treatment options.

One of the problems is sulfuryl floride is not permitted for use in New Zealand or Japan. This gas is currently used to fumigate vehicles and machinery leaving from the United States and Italy. Methyl bromide is available in New Zealand as a treatment option, but the problem with this one is that it can damage vehicle upholstery, rubber and electronics.

We can clear vehicles that have undergone heat treatment, but there is limited capacity for this in New Zealand.

Because of these issues, we have recently introduced fogging with insecticide as an emergency measure, but only if it is combined with intensive inspection and other checks at the border.

The insecticide used in the fogging is permethrin, which is used in many domestic insect spray cans found on supermarket shelves. It is used in urban areas of countries to control mosquitoes to reduce the risk of dengue fever and zika virus. It is also widely deployed to control pests of concern to agricultural or stored products such as timber.

The spray has a knockdown and residual action that stimulates the bugs, getting them to crawl out of their nooks and crannies, allowing our inspectors to spot them.

MPI is working with industry on further measures to reduce the risk. For example, we are talking with the Environmental Protection Authority about getting approval for sulfuryl floride. Another option is freezing, as stink bugs are sensitive to the cold. We plan to announce new measures by the start of the next season.

Keeping the stink bug risk off shore

Changes to our imports rules for vehicles and machinery from Japan will help eliminate the biosecurity risk before bulk carriers arrive in New Zealand waters.

Last month, we made it compulsory for all imported used vehicles (cars and trucks) to undergo inspection and cleaning at an MPI-approved facility in Japan prior to leaving port.

What we're finding

It's not just brown marmorated stink bugs that have been arriving in carriers from Japan. MPI officers have also detected:

- **Yellow spotted stink bugs** – another regulated pest that is known to have an impact on timber trees and horticulture.
- **Menida violacea** – closely related to the brown and yellow stink bugs, this is a pest in Japan, but there are no reports of it being a threat to horticulture.
- **Assassin bugs** *(Isyndus obscurus)* – not currently listed as a regulated pest in New Zealand.

The assassin bug up close.

In addition, any used machinery from Japan will require certification proving it has undergone cleaning by an appropriate provider.

The changes will significantly reduce the chance of transporting dirty vehicles and machinery that could contaminate other cargo.

We are looking at additional requirements for new vehicle imports shortly. We are also considering new storage and loading rules,

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as well as requiring vessel operators to use traps when they are travelling to New Zealand.

Another anti-stink bug move has been to extend our existing alert on full container loads of new and used vehicles, tyres and parts of machinery from Japan. The alert will now last until 21 April. This means enhanced inspections by MPI officers will continue into late May, as shipments that leave Japan during April will take a while to arrive in New Zealand.

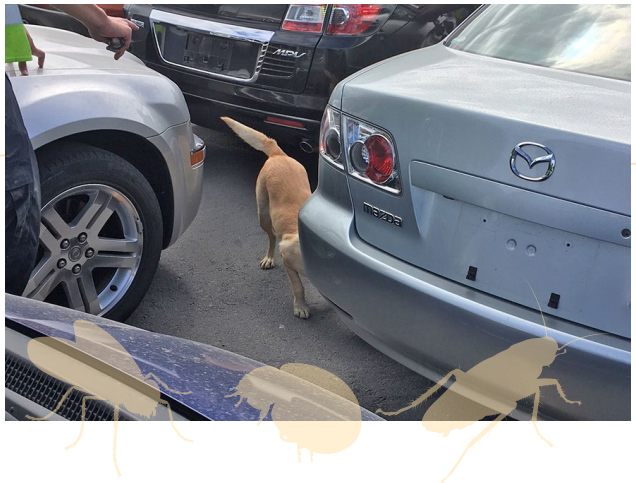
Mandatory stink bug treatment extended

It's not just stink bugs from Japan that have been on our radar. Our standards people recently extended a mandatory treatment requirement for goods arriving in sea containers from Italy.

The treatment requirement was initially going to stop on 28 February, but has now been extended to 30 April.

Border staff are continuing to detect low levels of stink bug from Italy as the season draws to close, and the move is in response to this threat.

The changes also align with what we recognise as the risk period for arriving vehicles and machinery from Italy and the United States. Mandatory treatment is also required for these goods.



Showing off

It was a pleasure to show off MPI's border operations in Auckland to more than 50 industry groups as part of the GIA (Government Industry Agreement) Forum on 19 March.

The attendees got to see what we do at Auckland Airport, how we find risk goods in international mail and how transitional facilities operate.

The event was an opportunity to bring together stakeholders from both sides of the fence – those who want border clearance to be as speedy as possible and those who want the strongest possible biosecurity controls.

It was a chance to understand each other's perspective about the challenges of protecting New Zealand.

That's me (second from the right) with industry guests at Auckland Airport.

Vai turning heads

Our new digital assistant at Auckland Airport has been attracting interest from air passengers.

We started trialling "Vai" on 15 February. She is intended to support MPI by answering basic questions from travellers, allowing quarantine officers to concentrate on their biosecurity duties. She is not designed to replace staff.

From what we have seen so far, the public are intrigued to interact with Vai and appear pleased with their responses.

MPI is working on this project in collaboration with Westpac and FaceMe, a design company that specialises in artificial intelligence.

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From the frontline

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

Iguana permitted to stay

A stowaway iguana was recently permitted to enter New Zealand subject to strict biosecurity conditions.

The iguana arrived on a commercial vessel from Panama. It could have come aboard by climbing up the mooring ropes to the vessel, as the rat guards would not be a deterrent to the large reptile.

An MPI vet inspected the iguana on arrival. It was directed to the Auckland Zoo, then quarantined at the Wellington Zoo, where it will hopefully find a new home once it has completed all testing and treatments indicated by the strict zoo lizard risk assessment that forms the basis of our import health standard.

Iguanas are listed as an endangered species under CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species).

Nautilus ban

Speaking of CITES, nautilus molluscs are now listed on the endangered species register, which means their popular shells will now be seized by MPI officers on behalf of the Department of Conservation.

The pictured shell is a highly polished example from Fiji that we seized from a cruise ship passenger last month.

Travellers refused entry

We've had a couple of recent cases where travellers have been denied entry into New Zealand.

The most recent involved a cruise ship worker who declared noodles and chips at Auckland Airport upon arrival (by plane, not ship) from India.

What she deliberately failed to mention was the food spread throughout her baggage, including chicken pieces inside a laundry powder container and other meat stuffed into her toiletry bag. The MPI officer doing the search also found fresh

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Meat found among toiletries of arriving cruise ship worker.

Cruising cockatoo

You may have seen the headlines about the stowaway galah from Brisbane enjoying a luxury cruise around New Zealand.

The *Sea Princess* alerted us about the stowaway as it approached Milford Sound on 25 January.

Thankfully for the galah, it was able to be captured and secured in an unoccupied cabin where it was subject to strict conditions. The crew needed to provide photographic evidence of its containment and the name of an officer responsible for looking after the bird. There was also a requirement for MPI officers to check on the bird and its containment facilities at every new port visit in New Zealand.

The story had a happy ending when the cruise ship returned to Brisbane. One of my officers had been able to determine the bird had a microchip that matched the number of a missing bird called Harri(et) from Brisbane.

After being cleared by Aussie biosecurity officials, Harri arrived in Brisbane for an emotional reunion with the Cozzi family (her owners) that attracted a scrum of TV reporters and other media representatives.

We have since heard from the family. They were very grateful for MPI's actions, which both mitigated the biosecurity risk and allowed Harri to return home.

From the frontline continued

leaves, ginseng, dried fish and betel nuts. The betel nuts were referred to Customs.

She was supposed to be joining a cruise ship as a staff member in Auckland two days later. She never made it. Immigration officials decided the evidence compiled by MPI was sufficient to deny her entry to New Zealand.

The other incident involved a Swiss couple who didn't declare their dirty boots.

They arrived in Christchurch in February on a direct flight from Sydney.

When asked if they had any items used for outdoor activities, including hiking boots, they said "no".

A baggage searched revealed hiking footwear, which was very soiled. In response, the couple said they knew their boots were dirty but didn't declare them because they didn't want them taken away.

They were forced to return to Sydney the next day after being denied entry to New Zealand.

Long pod

A stevedore recently handed this very long bean pod to MPI officers at the Auckland Port.

The pod was nearly 60cm long and later identified as *Cassia fistula,* known as the golden rain tree. It is native to the Indian subcontinent and nearby regions of Southeast Asia.

My staff tell me it is a popular ornamental plant and is also used in herbal medicine.

Black-grass detected

We recently detected black-grass in two consignments of grass seed arriving in Christchurch from France.

The import documents suggested issues. Sampling by MPI officers confirmed there was contamination.

The consignments were directed to be reshipped or destroyed. We sometimes allow dirty seed consignments to enter New Zealand after dressing, a process that removes unwanted seeds. In this case, the black-grass would have been too hard to separate from the rest of the consignment. So we had no choice but to bar entry.

Black-grass is a serious invasive weed of crops in the United Kingdom, where it has caused major losses for farmers.

Smugglers fined

It's good to see the courts are running out of patience with air passengers who deliberately try to smuggle risk goods into New Zealand.

There have has been four convictions so far this year in Auckland, with the fines ranging from $1100 to $6000. The offences included hiding plant products in tea bags and attempting to bring in seeds and an orchid. Another defendant was facing charges relating to falsely declaring some pork. He didn't show up at the Manukau Court last month and a warrant was issued for his arrest.

MPI has no tolerance towards travellers who make false declarations.

Dirty fire engine

This old fire vehicle arrived at the Auckland port from California last month.

It's looking spotless in the photo, but that was taken after we ordered soil and dried leaves to be vacuumed from the cab. We also found fungus growing on the wooden tray. This required treatment with a spray.

Looks like a rhinoceros beetle

We think this is a rhinoceros beetle. It was recently detected in an empty sea container from Tonga by an MPI officer at the Auckland port.

The beetle is infamous for damaging palm tree fronds in tropical Asia and the Pacific Islands.

From the frontline continued

Size doesn't matter

A British air passenger tried to convince a Wellington officer that this cactus could come into New Zealand because it was so small and therefore wouldn't have any biosecurity risk.

The officer didn't budge, saying the plant couldn't come into New Zealand unless it meet the requirements of the import health standard for nursery stock.

She advised the passenger that diseases and pests could travel on any sort of plant, big or small.

The cactus ended up in a disposal bin.

Tiny pineapple

This tiny pineapple was another plant item that ended up in a Wellington Airport disposal bin last month.

A passenger from Malaysia was going through a bag search when he pulled out what looked like a small potted cactus in a shot glass.

The "cactus" turned to be the top of a tiny pineapple.

The passenger was advised that fresh fruit and vegetable have very specific importing requirements and, as the pineapple didn't meet these, it would have to be destroyed.

No to Aussie honey and boomerangs

One of my Auckland officers had to have adult conversations with a cruise ship shop selling risk items last month.

The officer had travelled to Australia to undertake an off-shore clearance before the vessel arrived in New Zealand.

The store was selling Australian honey to passengers. It also stocked boomerangs and didgeridoos. Upon closer inspection, they were found to be riddled with insect damage.

Needless to say, the store was told to remove the items and that passengers would not be allowed to bring the risk goods ashore in New Zealand.

Tiger cub in Mexican mail

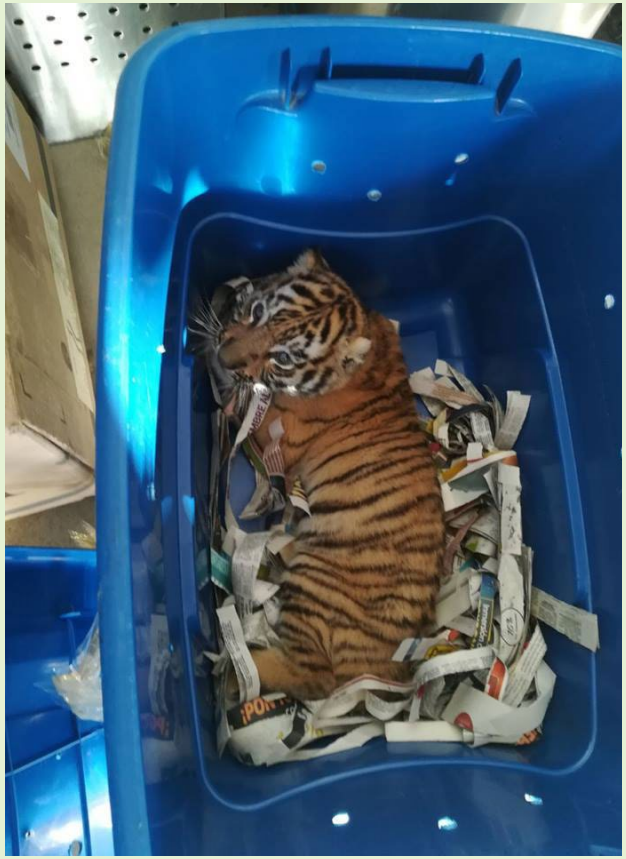
Last year we made the news by intercepting a smuggled cat in an air passenger's hand baggage.

It seems small fry compared with the tiger cub inspectors in Mexico recently found in the mail.

The cub was apparently found sedated and packed into a plastic container after a sniffer dog looking for contraband detected it.

It was dehydrated but otherwise well, and was handed over to an animal management center.

The case is under investigation.



Steve Gilbert
Director Border Clearance

Summer rush 2018

The stats below capture MPI's border activity from December to February, comparing the results with last year. As you can see, it's been another busy summer.

PASSENGERS

2 million passenger arrivals
5% increase

4930 undeclared seizures
5% increase

3983 infringements issued
12% increase
2% increase in warning letters

7m 39s average processing time
(Feb only)
Consistent with 2017

3111 undeclared fresh produce seizures
Consistent with last year

- Significant passenger growth at Queenstown (11%) and Auckland (9%) airports.
- Significant passenger growth by passport holder type: Philippines (17%), China (15%), India (14%), Canada (13%), Hong Kong (12%).
- Fresh produce is the most common undeclared seizure.
- There were 10 fruit fly interceptions during the summer, six of them involving live insects.
- There were 187 border finds of brown marmorated stink bug – an 80% increase.

1.1 Seizure Rate per 1000 passengers on accredited cruise vessels compared with 1.5 for non-accredited vessels.
The accredited vessel rate was 0.9 last season

CARGO

132,377 full container load imports
13% increase

67,488 empty container imports
7% decrease

92% of empty containers found clean
Consistent with last summer

17,414 lines inspected
14% decrease

3746 non-compliant lines
14% decrease

- Imports of lines of interest to MPI decreased by 1%.
- There were significant increases in imports of stored food products (16%), timber/wood (9%), biologicals (4%), fresh produce (2%), new equipment (39%), dairy products (3%) and non-food plant products (35%).
- 1429 full container loads were contaminated, a 21% increase. Empty container inspections have increased by 3%.

1821 consignments targeted for BMSB inspection
103% increase

267 Transitional facilities audits completed
51% decrease

108 TF Approvals
62% decrease

91 TF suspensions
21% decrease

VESSELS

765 direct international vessel arrivals
1% increase

17 bulk car carriers
(Feb only)
Four denied entry due to presence of live BMSB

35 fouled vessels
(year to Jan)
- These were assessed as high risk for biofouling prior to arrival
- Four were directed to leave after dive inspection

102 yacht arrivals
26 yachts detected with undeclared seizures

MAIL

3596 total mail seizures
12% increase

2021 undeclared mail seizures
3% decrease