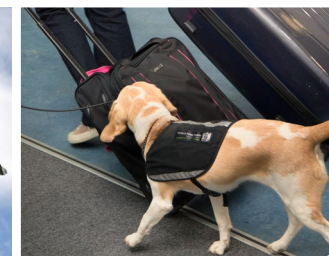


# The BorderSpace



Biosecurity New Zealand  
Ministry for Primary Industries  
Manatū Ahu Matua



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

Issue 32 | May 2020

## Stink bug measures show results

The 2019/20 brown marmorated stink bug season has come to a close with the number of live interceptions well down on last year.

The season finished on 30 April. At last count (20 April) there had been 57 live bugs found in 44 detections since the beginning of the season on 1 September. At the same time last year, there were 212 live finds from 73 separate detections.

The results show the success of the move to introduce off-shore cargo treatment requirements for more countries at the beginning of the stink bug season. Our verification checks show that 99% of containers treated in Europe have arrived clean. As with previous seasons, we have paid special attention to goods arriving from suppliers that had contamination problems in the past.

We have already started work on additional anti-stink bug measures for the season ahead. We have had talks with the



Australian Department of Agriculture to determine how we can receive assurance that cargo is stink bug-free from European treatment providers operating with reduced staff as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

We will also be working closely with our Australian counterparts to review and reapprove offshore treatment providers. We want to make sure the treatment is sufficient to stop any hitchhikers.

Work is underway to again revise import rules intended to keep stink bugs out of New Zealand. The proposed changes add three new countries (Portugal, Ukraine and Moldova) to the list of those requiring special measures to send vehicles, machinery and parts to New Zealand.

We are also looking at extending treatment requirements for sea containers from Italy to cover another two stink bug seasons. This will give us the chance to undertake further analysis. The current requirements were due to finish at the end of this season.

Our regulatory people plan to ask for public feedback on the proposed measures in May.

# 57

LIVE BUGS FOUND IN  
44 DETECTIONS SINCE THE  
BEGINNING OF THE SEASON



At 20 April 2020, there had been 57 live bugs found in 44 detections since the beginning of the season on 1 September 2019. At the same time last year, there were 212 live finds from 73 separate detections.

## Building biosecurity expertise

A group of quarantine officers will start studying with Massey University in July for a new biosecurity qualification.

They will be the first of many to study towards a nationally recognised certificate or diploma in biosecurity.

It is the first time a tertiary institution has offered a biosecurity specific qualification in New Zealand. The move will help establish biosecurity as a professional career.

We have been working closely with Massey University for some time to develop the training, which will be open to anyone. We've already had interest from industry contacts keen to have their staff do classes, which will be delivered mostly online. Students can specialise in cargo and logistics, plant and animal biosecurity or incursion response.

The training will be available next year to people outside Biosecurity NZ. Massey University will have further information on their website in July.



# Covid countdown

The Covid-19 threat has had a huge impact on our border operations over the last few weeks. Here is a brief timeline of key events.

## January – Keeping our officers safe

Based on advice from the World Health Organization and Ministry of Health, we introduce strict infection control measures for dealing with arriving passengers. They include hand washing, use of antiseptic gel, use of gloves and “social distancing”. We also introduce rules for the use of personal protective equipment. At international airports, we mark-off areas 1 metre (later increased to 2 metres) away from risk assessment desks and search benches to ensure there is sufficient distance between arriving passengers and our officers. Following staff feedback, we provide perspex screens for our risk assessment desks to act as an infection barrier between officers and international travellers.

Perspex screens protect risk assessors at Auckland Airport.



## 2 February – First travel restrictions

The government announces any foreign travellers who leave from or transit through China will be refused entry to New Zealand. The impact on air passenger traffic is immediate.

## 5 February – Operation Wuhan

Eleven volunteer officers clear New Zealand passengers returning from Wuhan on a rescue flight. The passengers had been pre-screened for Covid-19 before the government-chartered flight and arrive symptom-free. Undeclared seizures include a whole bag of salted eggs, citrus tea, and barbequed pork slices.

Operation Wuhan volunteers.



## 20 February – Cruise passengers return

Volunteer officers at Whenuapai airbase clear six New Zealanders returning home from the *Diamond Princess* cruise ship. The emergency flight follows a Covid-19 outbreak on the cruise ship. The six go into isolation for 14 days following border clearance. The passengers are cleared in a separate area away from other travellers due to the risk that they are infected with the virus.

A similar approach is adopted to clear potentially infected passengers from the *Greg Mortimer* cruise ship when they are flown back to New Zealand from Uruguay on 12 April.

JANUARY

FEBRUARY



# Covid countdown continued

## 25 March – Officers exit Japan

Health and safety concerns and the pending shut-down of international travel see us bring home the seven officers responsible for monitoring Japan-based cleaning and inspection systems for imported used vehicles.

Officers had been based in Tokyo, Nagoya and Osaka. The team was lucky enough to all get seats on one of the last commercial flights from Tokyo (for the time being) back to Auckland. Under the new clearance arrangement, imported vehicles still need to go through the existing systems in Japan to ensure biosecurity risks are managed. This includes going through existing heat treatment processes. However, the verification role provided by our officers is now temporarily based in New Zealand until the Covid-19 situation improves. Strict new clearance procedures support this move. For example, vessels are required to have an approved discharge plan that restricts the number of vehicles that can be unloaded from a car carrier at any one time.

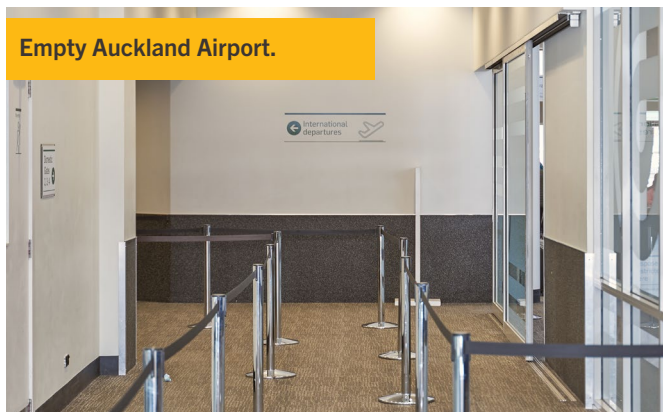
## 26 March – Lockdown starts

Border clearance staff become essential workers to protect New Zealand from biosecurity risk during the Level 4 Alert lockdown. Their work is prioritised towards food supply and production and other essential goods.

Roster changes ensure clearance activities can continue but allow as many staff as possible to work from home. The changes also allow teams to changeover completely between shifts at Auckland worksites, allowing a “bubble approach” for clearance activity.

Under the lockdown, the New Zealand border is closed to almost all travellers to help stop the spread of Covid-19. The travel ban applies to all arrivals into New Zealand whether it is by air or sea.

Empty Auckland Airport.



The drop in arriving passenger traffic sees some officers redeployed to other duties, such as verifying that essential businesses are following health and safety measures to stop the spread of Covid-19. We are also able to increase the number of dog teams operating at Auckland’s international mail centre from two to six.

During the lockdown, many of our detector dogs remain in their kennels while their handlers undertake other duties. Handlers have the opportunity to visit their dogs and help with their care.

## 27 March – Transitional facilities confirmed as an essential service

TFs can operate as long as they meet new health and safety requirements and movement restrictions on non-essential goods. The decision is intended to help keep supply chains operating by ensuring as many imported containers as possible can be quickly cleared, unloaded and made available for export. The move is expected to reduce storage costs for industry. Unlike many other businesses, TFs do not need to register to operate during the lockdown. Officers check compliance during routine biosecurity checks.

## Crucial role for TFs

It’s been a big few weeks for transitional facilities (TFs). Deemed an essential service for the movement of cargo during the lockdown, TFs provided a crucial role in keeping supply lines open.

We suspended auditing of facilities during the lockdown, but officers continued to visit sites to inspect goods and ensure operators met strict health and safety requirements intended to halt the spread of Covid-19.

The evidence suggests there has been high-compliance with these requirements, which include social distancing between staff, use of personal protective equipment and extra hygiene measures.

It is also good to acknowledge there has been high compliance with the strict new security requirements we announced late last year. Under the new rules, high-risk TFs must unload containers inside a secure building or hold the containers in an area with a fence at least 1.8m high with a lockable gate that uses a substantial padlock.

Please note the security requirements for facilities that only receive low-risk goods are not quite so onerous. However, they need to have an approved security approach in place. We encourage TFs to contact us if they are unsure of how to meet their obligations.

We take TF security very seriously and will check that facilities are following the rules during future audits.

On that note, expect to see auditing ramp up in the next weeks. With the drop-off in arriving travellers at international airports, we have extra officers in place to assist with this role.

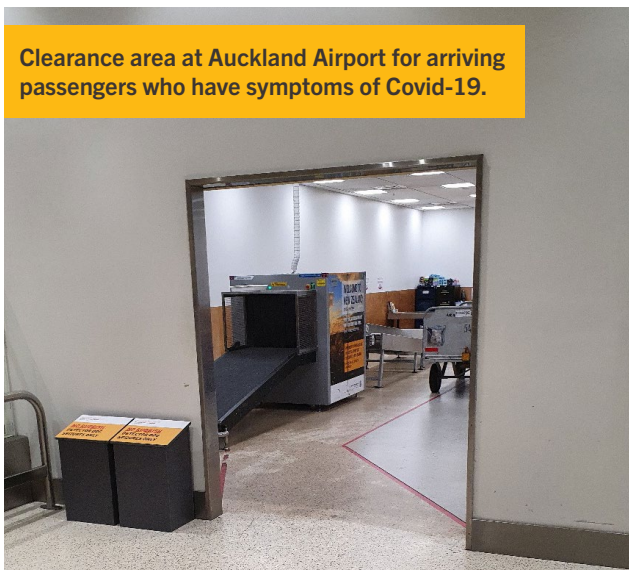
MARCH

# Covid countdown continued

## Late March – Dedicated passenger screening

A specially designed area for clearing passengers with Covid-19 symptoms at Auckland Airport opens in the baggage tracing area. The area is close to a first aid room where public health workers swab passengers on arrival. Any traveller who displays symptoms is required to be escorted by police or customs officers to the separate biosecurity area, which has dedicated baggage x-ray screening equipment. Passengers have to wear a mask. Officers avoid direct contact with passengers and their belongings. Following clearance, the passengers are escorted out of the area through a backdoor to vehicles directly outside. Any x-ray trays or other equipment touched by a passenger is wiped down.

Clearance area at Auckland Airport for arriving passengers who have symptoms of Covid-19.



## 30 March – Temporary container storage permitted

We allow some businesses to establish temporary cargo storage sites. The move is in response to a backlog of shipping containers waiting to be unloaded – the result of movement and devanning restrictions on non-essential goods and closure of some TFs. The sites must be approved as a temporary TF and are subject to the same biosecurity requirements as regular facilities. For example, they must have accredited staff and procedures for checking containers on arrival. Most of the approved temporary sites are extensions of existing facilities.

The date also sees the withdrawal of our grape inspection service in Australia. Australian grape inspections now take place onshore, similar to other fresh produce. Future table grape imports from Mexico and the United States will also occur on arrival.



MARCH

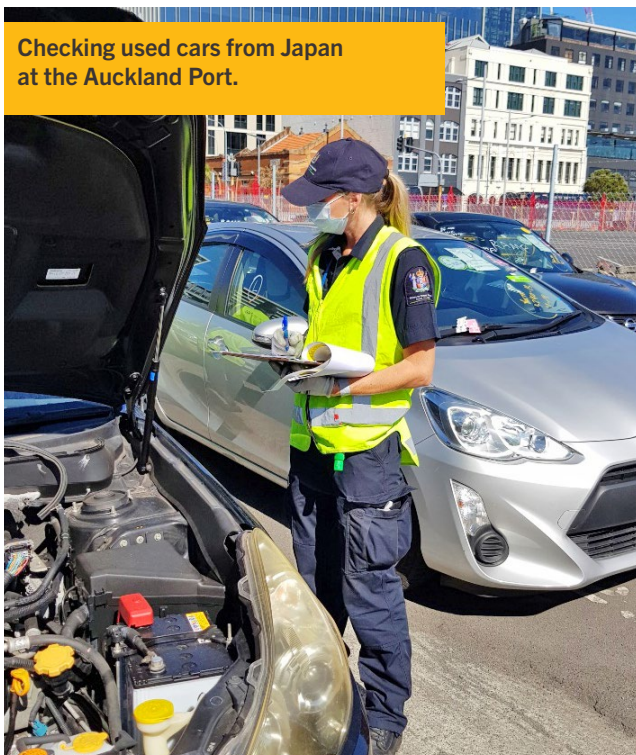


# Covid countdown continued

## 9 April – First vehicles from Japan

Officers supervise the unloading of the *Dream Angel* at Auckland Port. The vessel is carrying imported vehicles from Japan – the first to arrive since the decision to bring Japan-based verification staff home (see 25 March). There are clearance delays due to the detection of plant material in some vehicles, but the new on-shore verification process works well, albeit more slowly than having officers in Japan.

Checking used cars from Japan at the Auckland Port.



## April – International arrivals dwindle

By early April, passenger arrivals have slowed to a trickle due to the border closures. There are fewer than 100 travellers arriving at Auckland Airport on most days. There are no scheduled services landing at Wellington, Christchurch, Queenstown and Dunedin.

There are arriving flights in Christchurch and Auckland to repatriate New Zealanders, but in many cases they take more passengers out than they bring in.



## Passenger drop

Arrival numbers highlight the impact of the lockdown on travellers requiring clearance at Auckland Airport.

Date	No. of arriving passengers	Date	No. of arriving passengers
1/03/2020	13938	21/03/2020	5933
2/03/2020	12516	22/03/2020	6051
3/03/2020	11054	23/03/2020	4326
4/03/2020	11554	24/03/2020	3676
5/03/2020	11810	25/03/2020	2991
6/03/2020	12541	26/03/2020	1442
7/03/2020	12053	27/03/2020	1323
8/03/2020	12185	28/03/2020	726
9/03/2020	12063	29/03/2020	811
10/03/2020	9709	30/03/2020	379
11/03/2020	9630	31/03/2020	363
12/03/2020	9778	1/04/2020	188
13/03/2020	10407	2/04/2020	300
14/03/2020	10449	3/04/2020	168
15/03/2020	12342	4/04/2020	280
16/03/2020	7168	5/04/2020	103
17/03/2020	5815	6/04/2020	200
18/03/2020	5725	7/04/2020	98
19/03/2020	6471	8/04/2020	40
20/03/2020	5801		

APRIL



# Express freight survey shows low risk

**A recent survey shows we are doing a pretty good job of managing the biosecurity risk from express freight.**

Carried out from December to February, the survey found express freight items arriving in New Zealand were almost 100% (99.996%) compliant with biosecurity requirements.

Express freight is air cargo that has guaranteed delivery times and is often delivered directly to the door.

The survey was prompted by an independent review of our passenger and mail services last year. The review recommended we test our assumption that express freight is low risk.

We currently screen electronic import documents to identify anything we need to examine further.

The survey suggested we do further work to ensure the actual contents of the parcels match what is declared. As a result, we are looking at ways to beef up our verification approach, including ongoing surveys, screening with mobile x-ray machines and increased use of detector dogs.

The survey involved examining nearly 2500 parcels across five express freight companies with items arriving in Auckland and Christchurch.

## 99.996%

**BIOSECURITY COMPLIANCE OF EXPRESS FREIGHT ITEMS COMING TO NEW ZEALAND**

Carried out in December, the survey found express freight items arriving in New Zealand were almost 100% compliant with biosecurity requirements.

## Passenger survey shelved

**Our annual air passenger compliance survey has become a casualty of the pandemic.**

We have put in considerable effort over the last five years to design a robust survey to show whether we are meeting our compliance target for arriving international air passengers. To meet the target, we currently require at least 98.5% of travellers to meet biosecurity requirements by the time they leave the airport.

The reasons for shelving the survey are simple: This year we will be unable to get enough passengers to

survey – the result of the drop in arriving flights. If we went ahead, the requirements for a random and representative sample would be compromised.

Our officers would also have to spend extended periods of time interacting with the passenger and their baggage to carry out the survey. We are not prepared to expose our staff to unnecessary health risks.

To measure air passenger compliance, we carry out regular performance verification (PV) checks of arriving travellers during the year and run the annual compliance monitoring survey.

We are currently looking at what overall compliance measure we can provide from the ongoing PV surveys.





# From the frontline

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

## Runway snake identified

A herpetologist (reptile expert) has identified a snake intercepted at Queenstown Airport as a carpet python.

There was considerable media attention in December about the incident.

For those of you who missed the news, airport fire rescue staff found the snake on the runway. They immobilised it with a strike from a spade. Our officers contained and removed it, then followed due process to have it humanely euthanised.

All international aircraft at the airport were placed on hold until we could work out how the snake had found its way to Queenstown. Our local team concluded it had fallen from the underside of a plane arriving from Brisbane. There was blood on the landing gear of the aircraft in question.

The carpet python is widely spread throughout Australia. It could potentially establish in this country, posing a threat to native birds and reptiles. It is not venomous, but can inflict painful bites to humans.

The stowaway incident is the ninth time this species (including shed skins) has been found in New Zealand.



The runway python.



The dead possum is inside.

## Buddhist ornaments stopped

The contents of these ornaments ended up as waste after being declared by a passenger at Auckland Airport in February.

The passenger explained they were used for Buddhist rituals. Unfortunately, they contained maize seed, legumes and sliced roots.

The passenger opted for destruction. They were able to get the containers back once the risk material had been removed.

## Stinky bricks

A Tauranga officer recently arrived at a transitional facility to check out something very dead and very smelly discovered by accredited staff in a consignment of imported bricks from Brisbane.

The hitchhiker turned out to be a possum. The decaying remains were quickly bagged and disposed of as quarantine waste.



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

## Honey toothpaste

A Wellington officer working on the airport search bench intercepted some unusual toothpaste in February.

It contained honey – more than 2% of the tube. This meant it failed to meet our import rules for “medication preparations” (including toothpaste). Everything would have been fine if the passenger had an import permit. He didn’t, so the toothpaste became yet another quarantine waste item.

The passenger declared the product, explaining he was using it to clear up some ulcers in his mouth.



## Coconut surprise

Another Wellington officer was recently surprised when a family arriving from Fiji declared a coconut.

The father had brought it with him as a trophy to celebrate his successful ascent of a coconut tree.



As coconuts are fresh produce, they can't be imported unless accompanied by a phytosanitary certificate.

Closer inspection revealed the coconut was contaminated with mealy bug, a regulated pest.

The family was sad to see the coconut go, but accepted why it couldn't come in.

The daughter was quick to add the tree that dad scaled wasn't that big anyway.

## Stricken yacht poses clearance challenge

The Covid-19 situation has thrown up many border security challenges. A stricken yacht needing emergency entry into New Zealand is one example....

Travelling from Hobart in March with six people aboard, the vessel alerted border authorities that its rigging had suffered damage and it was running low on fuel.

On 19 March the vessel contacted maritime rescue. It had lost all steering gear and needed assistance to get into port. A call was made to the Nelson coastguard to tow the vessel to Port Nelson. Due to the risk of Covid-19, the coastguard crew were forbidden to have any contact with the yacht, other than accepting a tow rope.

Meanwhile, our officers were liaising closely with NZ Customs and Ministry of Health staff to determine the clearance process. The government had just introduced a requirement for all overseas travellers to isolate for 14 days upon arrival.

Fortunately for the crew, it was quickly determined that the 10 days of the passage could be counted as part of the 14 days. They were lucky. If they had arrived any later, the non-New Zealand residents aboard the vessel would not have been permitted to land.

It was soon agreed that health officers would join biosecurity and customs officers to undertake the clearance. Once health officials were happy no one was suffering any kind of sickness, the clearance process was allowed to continue. All crew members except the master had to remain on deck while our officers carried out a full inspection, which involved internal and external checks, and removal of any risk items.

The next difficulty was finding a location for the crew to complete their quarantine. They needed to spend a further four days aboard the vessel. Finding a place to tie up was a problem as marinas in Picton and Nelson had stopped allowing international vessels to use their facilities for Covid-19 quarantine. The vessel ended up in the Nelson superyacht berth, an area separate to the marina and operated by the local port.

Normally, once clearance is completed, we instruct the master the yellow quarantine flag can be lowered. In this case, the vessel was required to fly the flag until health officers advised the period of self-isolation was over.

## Bear bile alert

We're watching out for illegal bear bile products coming into New Zealand.

The Department of Conservation has issued a border alert following a surge of interest in traditional Chinese medicines to treat Covid-19. One such medicine containing bear bile is Tan Re Qing. It is used to treat upper respiratory infections and has been touted as beneficial to Covid-19 patients.

All bears are protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).



The Tan Re Qing treatment contains bear bile.



## Cook Islands eye food clearance scheme

It is likely the Cook Islands will be the next Pacific nation to adopt our pre-clearance programme for food parcels carried by air passengers.

We met with government officials from the Cook Islands in early March to discuss the introduction of what we are now calling the Border Clearance Pacific Island Food Programme. There was a lot of enthusiasm.

We were initially looking at getting the scheme running in April. The pandemic has altered this timeframe, but we want to get it in place within the next few weeks.

Under the programme, local officers inspect selected low-risk food items carried by passengers before they board their flights to New Zealand.

## Tonga shows the way

The Border Clearance Pacific Island Food Programme has been operating in Tonga since late 2018. The results so far are very positive.

- The **current compliance rate is 99.86%** for food arriving in New Zealand that has been through the new inspection processes in Tonga. Compliance has been greater than 99% for more than a year.
- To date, there have been no interceptions in New Zealand of any fruit fly host material or high risk food items in parcels that have gone through the programme.
- Tongan authorities have been highly motivated to maintain the high compliance level. Local interceptions include fruit fly host material such as breadfruit, fresh chillies, mangoes, bananas, pineapples and oranges, and

CITES items such as clam and turtle meat.

- The time it takes for New Zealand-based officers to clear a normal Tongan flight has reduced from three hours to 15 minutes since the introduction of the programme.



## Border activity for January, February and March

	Jan-20	Jan-19	Feb-20	Feb-19	Mar-20	Mar-19
<b>Passenger</b>						
Total Arrivals	749,873	734,322	576,239	621,076	319,999	582,787
NZ/Australia	394,351	384,824	282,664	268,277	192,931	293,584
Rest of World	355,522	348,795	293,575	350,460	127,068	287,331
Risk Items Seized	14,150	12,015	10,587	10,609	5,472	9,215
Risk Items Treated or Destroyed	13,968	11,854	10,456	10,423	5,417	9,085
Infringement Notices	1,321	1,293	1,039	1,346	446	1,153
<b>Mail</b>						
Mail Items Screened	2,969,100	3,112,425	1,645,296	2,276,303	1,688,593	2,644,303
Mail Items Requiring further Inspection	4,711	3,530	3,799	2,028	3,403	2,226
Risk Mail Items Treated or Destroyed	1,702	1,531	1,145	930	767	942
<b>Sea Containers</b>						
Sea Container Arrivals	66,819	64,823	60,295	61,353	64,537	67,546
Sea Containers Inspected	3,359	1,701	3,231	1,847	3,940	2,197
<b>Cargo</b>						
Cargo Lines of Interest to MPI	19,338	17,051	17,468	15,537	17,931	17,258
Cargo Lines Inspected	6,593	6,235	5,905	5,939	5,716	5,990
Cargo Lines Treated, Reshipped or Destroyed	2,079	2,218	1,654	2,067	1,828	2,291

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