

# Fruit fly finds prompt quick response

Lisa Gibbison - KVH

Two different species of exotic fruit flies were found in Auckland earlier this year, both posing a risk to New Zealand's horticulture industry.

**K**VH, alongside other industry organisations, has been working with Biosecurity New Zealand (the biosecurity arm of MPI) since the first discovery of a single male Queensland fruit fly in a routine surveillance trap in the Auckland suburb of Devonport in February. Over the weeks that followed the initial detection, nine more male flies were found – six further Queensland fruit flies (in Northcote) and three facialis flies (in Otago), which are native to Tonga.

Fruit flies are considered the greatest biosecurity threat to the kiwifruit industry's billion-dollar export market, as incursions can severely impact where we sell our fruit as well as creating production losses from the damage they cause to fruit on the vine. The Queensland fruit fly has the most market impacts and the series of detections in February and March have put our industry on high alert.

Biosecurity New Zealand's notifications of detections, and the resulting initiating of



*Bactrocera tryoni* (Diptera: Tephritidae)  
Queensland Fruit Fly

## Where and when the flies were found

Flies have been found in separate surveillance traps in the Auckland suburbs of Devonport (one single fly), Northcote (eight single flies over an extended period) and Otago (three single flies over an extended period).

- Feb 14** Single male Queensland Fruit Fly (QFF) located in Devonport, on the North Shore.
- Feb 18** A different type of fruit fly, a male facialis, discovered in Otago, south Auckland.
- Feb 20** Another single male QFF found on the North Shore, this time in Northcote.
- Feb 21** A second single male facialis detected in Otago, only 70m from the first find.
- Feb 23** Another single male QFF found in Northcote.
- Feb 28** A third single male QFF found in Northcote, 270m from where the last was found.
- Mar 4** A fourth single male QFF found in Northcote, approximately 80m from where the last was found.
- Mar 5** A third single male Facialis located in Otago, 630m to the north of the last find.
- Mar 10** A fifth single male QFF found in Northcote, 60m from where the last was found.
- Mar 14** Another single male QFF located in Northcote, 650m south of the original find.
- Mar 22** Controls on the movement of fruit and vegetables in Devonport and Otago lifted after no further flies were found in these suburbs.
- Apr 25** A seventh single male QFF found in Northcote, 460m away from previous cluster.
- May 10** An eighth single male QFF found in Northcote, 1.6km from where the last fly was found. Operational response stepped up to include baiting.





responses in the three affected suburbs, triggered KVH to immediately engage KiwiNet.

KiwiNet is made up of representatives from across the wider industry and is responsible for coordinating the deployment of industry resources into a biosecurity response. KiwiNet was established as part of industry's commitment to readiness and response planning under Government Industry Agreements (GIA).

Within days of the responses being set up, 14 people from the kiwifruit industry were en-route to Auckland to assist Biosecurity New Zealand and AsureQuality in the field with trapping, monitoring and surveillance. By mid-April, when restrictions on fruit and vegetable movements were lifted from two suburbs because no flies had been found in those areas for some time, the kiwifruit industry had contributed 165 staff days to the responses.

Linda Peacock is the KiwiNet Response Coordinator for KVH, and she spent time working with post harvest to populate



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rosters and ensure the right people were being deployed into the field.

“We had 32 industry people working as part of the wider response team, made up of hundreds of people,” Linda explained. “Most of our people were working on fruit collection and inspection, trapping, surveying and public education by way of door knocking and attending events like the Otago market.

“We’ve been really pleased with the level of support and engagement from across the industry, and the keenness to provide people to be trained and deployed with very short notice. The feedback we’ve had from AsureQuality is that kiwifruit people working in Auckland were always well prepared, very committed, and willing to

help out in any way possible.

“We can all take reassurance from this response that KiwiNet functions well and the people that are part of it are well trained, with exceptional skills and expertise that will benefit the industry in any future response.”

KVH also deployed resources into other areas of the response team at the Wellington headquarters to provide industry specific knowledge and help with communications, intel, and logistics.

### What we can learn from the Auckland response

As well as representing the kiwifruit industry in the fruit fly response, KVH also

chairs the Fruit Fly Council - a governance group made up of impacted industry sector representatives and Biosecurity New Zealand under the Government Industry Agreement (GIA) partnership. They are also a founding member of the Tauranga Moana Biosecurity Capital (TMBC) initiative which aims to heighten biosecurity awareness amongst growers and the public, so that everyone is part of the 4.7 million biosecurity team.

After several weeks of intensive governance and operational activity, KVH chief executive Stu Hutchings says there is a lot that worked well during this latest response that form important lessons for the kiwifruit industry and the Tauranga Moana region.

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### What stood out for you about this particular fruit fly response?

**Stu:** “The complexity - originally a single fly was detected in Devonport and a response base was set up there by Biosecurity New Zealand, so to then find more flies in Northcote after that and a different species in Ōtara meant we essentially ended up with three parallel responses running at the same time.”

### What impact did that complexity have on the response?

**Stu:** “As more flies were found the operational team had to adapt quickly in terms of shifting people from one location to another and adjusting communications for different audiences. Suddenly there were multiple communities who needed to be informed and involved - including a diverse range of cultures and languages to consider. There were days when the messages were changing every hour as new discoveries were being made! It also meant huge pressure on the available resources required to run back-to-back responses.”

### What worked well?

**Stu:** “With fruit flies, Biosecurity New Zealand and industry, through GIA, have got well-organised plans in place and a standard Operating Agreement that we work to. These plans set out how industry and government will work together, the operational requirements for response activities as well as how the costs will be shared. With the detail worked out beforehand, we know exactly how we're going to respond and can jump straight into action. Overall, the plan worked brilliantly - it was put in place rapidly and followed closely, with good cohesive communications as a result.”



### How does this affect us in Tauranga Moana?

**Stu:** "It's easy to say 'Oh it's happening way up there, it's Auckland's problem' but actually it has a flow-on impact. As well as restrictions on the movement of fruit and vegetables within affected zones or suburbs, responses can often result in export restrictions because of the newly detected presence of fruit fly in New Zealand. These can have implications for fruit and vegetable industries nationally, especially during busy periods like harvest when goods might need to be picked, transported, or stored in or via areas affected by export restriction zones."

### What can we learn from this response?

**Stu:** "Vigilance is key and we can't get complacent. If the fruit fly was found in Tauranga Moana, it would have a devastating impact. So it's very important that we make sure biosecurity is ingrained into everybody's thinking and all take responsibility. In particular, everybody who travels has a part to play in making sure we think about the risks of bringing unwanted pests back into the country in food, luggage and gear we might have with us when travelling. The challenge is making it real for people - things that we take for granted such as the ability to grow veges and fruit in our backyard or buying fresh fruit from the supermarket - these are all at risk."

### What value do you see in TMBC, during a response?

**Stu:** "No other region has a network of passionate biosecurity supporters like Tauranga Moana. If we had an incursion here, we have the ability to draw on the TMBC network and utilise the various channels for sharing information and finding resource. Each member organisation has different touchpoints within the community which means we could get great coverage and act quickly. We could also use the TMBC network to mobilise volunteers where necessary - much like how KiwiNet works for the kiwifruit industry." ■

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## Fighting fruit flies: a KiwiNet member's first-hand account

Lori Topine - Orchard supervisor at OPAC

What an awesome opportunity to be a part of the fruit fly response team in Auckland. I found the experience to be a real eye-opener. Not only did it make me realise how vulnerable our industry can be to such a tiny fruit fly that breached our borders but I was also impressed how quickly the response teams were brought together from all over New Zealand (the logistics alone is mind-boggling).

The experience has led me to look at the bigger picture and be more observant on the orchard, to take notice of things that aren't the norm and ask the question "Why aren't we talking about biosecurity more?" We need to encourage everyone on-orchard to look for and report the unusual.

While working on the response, I got to work alongside and bond with colleagues from other parts of the OPAC business, meet and work with a great team of ladies from Apata packhouse, work with John, Linda and Karen from KVH and work with other people from different sectors within horticulture and biosecurity, sharing our own knowledge and experiences.

Health and safety was a big focus every morning, ensuring we were geared up correctly, had plenty of food and water to sustain us out in the community and that we were always safe. We were also reminded in the morning briefing how all of us played an important part in the response.

While working out in the field, community members in the affected suburbs were very receptive to us. We were turning up in our high-viz vests, carrying our gear and information, and they welcomed us on to their properties. It was good to see people who were growing their own gardens (many on a very impressive scale) want to do the right thing and play their part. They were ready with lots of questions out of curiosity but mostly, so they could know what part they needed to do to help protect the things that make their homes and communities special.

All I can say is, if you're ever asked whether you want to be a part of a response team (hopefully not any time soon), jump on board! ■

