NEW ZEALAND
CUSTOMS SERVICE
TE MANA ĀRAI O AOTEAROA

TIME RELEASE STUDY 2025

Acknowledgements

The New Zealand Customs Service (Customs) wishes to acknowledge the input, time, and work of Customs staff involved in completing this study. In particular, the work groups Strategic Systems & Service Optimisation (SS&SO) and Trade, Revenue & Compliance (TR&C). Customs would also like to acknowledge the industry partners involved in border clearance, such as port companies and air cargo companies, who Customs liaised with and provided data for the study. Thank you to all who contributed.

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Acronyms

CCA	Customs Controlled Area
CEDO	Customs Export Delivery Order
DO	Delivery Order
FCL	Full Container Load
JBA	Joint Border Analytics
LCL	Less than Container Load
NZCS	New Zealand Customs Service | Te Mana Ārai O Aotearoa
MPI	Ministry for Primary Industries (Biosecurity New Zealand)
SS&SO	Strategic Systems & Service Optimisation
TEU/FEU	Twenty-foot/Forty-foot Equivalent Unit (sea cargo container)
TR&C	Trade, Revenue & Compliance
TRS	Time Release Study
TSW	Trade Single Window
ULD	Unit Load Device (air cargo can)
WCO	World Customs Organization

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Time Release Study (TRS) is a World Customs Organization (WCO) method to measure Customs performance in clearing cargo. It measures the time taken from the arrival or departure of the vessel or aircraft transporting the goods to when the cargo is cleared by Customs.

The Trade, Revenue & Compliance (TR&C) group of the New Zealand Customs Service (Customs) was commissioned to carry out a TRS in 2025.

The main objectives for the 2025 study were to:

1. Provide certainty to industry partners and international trade of the processing time for import and export clearances in New Zealand.

2. Refine the 2023 baseline measures and methodology.

3. Share the findings and experiences from this study, including innovations to the methodology and reporting, with the WCO and other international fora to contribute to the knowledge on Customs involvement in international trade flows.

4. Communicate the outcomes with all interested parties.

This study targeted international cargo vessels and flights for the week **Thursday 28 August to Wednesday 03 September 2025** (7 days).

During this week, a total of 12,039 import entries and 6,226 export entries were reported for sea and air cargo:

- 98.49% of import and export entries lodged were cleared within five minutes.

- 95.35% of sea cargo import entries lodged for full container loads (FCLs) were cleared by Customs before arrival into New Zealand.

- 86.24% of air cargo import entries lodged were cleared before arrival.

- 89.40% of export entries for FCLs shipped by sea were lodged at least 48 hours before loading on the vessel for export.

- 100% of export entries for air cargo and sea cargo were cleared before departing New Zealand.

The 2025 TRS reaffirms Customs’ strong performance in facilitating trade while maintaining border security. The findings highlight the importance of collaboration with industry and the value of continuous improvement in Customs’ processes to support New Zealand’s economic growth.

Context and Guidance Notes for Interpretation of Data

Customs has a range of output performance measures set out in the Estimates of Appropriations documents prepared annually by the New Zealand Treasury. Performance against these measures is reported in the New Zealand Customs Service Annual Report.

The Goods Clearance and Enforcement Output Category measure (OC1.03) sets a minimum percentage of trade transactions (other than those referred for compliance checks) processed (including assessment against business rules and intelligence alerts) within a specified timeframe. Customs is expected to process 98% of trade transactions within 5 minutes[1]. The Customs Annual Report 2025 confirms actual performance for 2024/25 was achieved at 98.1%. This TRS confirms that 98.49% of entries were cleared within that timeframe and supports one of Customs' priorities to improve the experience of traders.

When interpreting TRS data, the following guidance notes should be considered:

- **Joint Border Processing:** The overall clearance times include processing by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) due to their integration in the Trade Single Window (TSW) joint border systems database. Transactions with high processing times were analysed to identify the cause of delays (and by which border agency).

- **Advance Lodgement:** Customs regulations allows for the lodgement of entries any time in advance of the importation or exportation of cargo. The timeliness of advance Customs clearance is reliant on entry lodgement by declarants (such as customs brokers, importers or exporters) for cargo related to the week selected for the TRS.

- **Methodology Consistency:** The 2025 TRS remains consistent with the 2023 TRS methodology.

- **Domestic Transhipment Requests (DTR):** Some cargo is moved from the port to another approved Customs-Controlled Area/Transitional Facility before Customs clearance using the DTR process. This can result in entries being cleared after physical removal from the port, affecting clearance time metrics. The DTR process was not implemented prior to the 2023 TRS. A low volume of cargo was identified and has been excluded from the 2025 TRS.

- **Snapshot of TRS:** The TRS comprises a week-long 'snapshot' of trade transactions where variances can occur within this period across multiple TRS reporting periods. This can contribute to outliers and variances with the data set that is collected and analysed for each study.

Notwithstanding the caveats above, it is still possible to observe general trends across the studies when analysing the movement of cargo. A consistent trend in both the 2023 and 2025 TRS studies is the high percentage of import entries of sea cargo lodged days in advance of the vessel's arrival.

Overall, the TRS confirms that Customs' processes and management of clearing cargo remains efficient and does not unnecessarily constrain the movement of legitimate cargo across the border.

[1] The Customs Annual Report 2023 published the standard timeframe for 2022/23 as 30 minutes. This was changed to 5 minutes for 2023/24 where the reduced timeframe reflects the improvement in the timeliness of Customs processing trade transactions.

Key Events and Times 2025: Export Transactions

Exports FCLs - Measures	Sea 2023	Sea 2025
Receipt to entry lodgement	1d 15h	2h 31m
Entry lodgement to load	5d 14m	5d 2h
Entry lodgement to clearance	8m 12s	1m
Receipt to load	6d 16h	5d 4h
Receipt to departure	7d 2h	5d 17h
Exports - Measures	**Air 2023**	**Air 2025**
Entry lodgement to departure	1d 12h	1d 19h
Entry clearance to departure	1d 12h	1d 19h
Entry lodgement to clearance	3m 18s	8m 49s

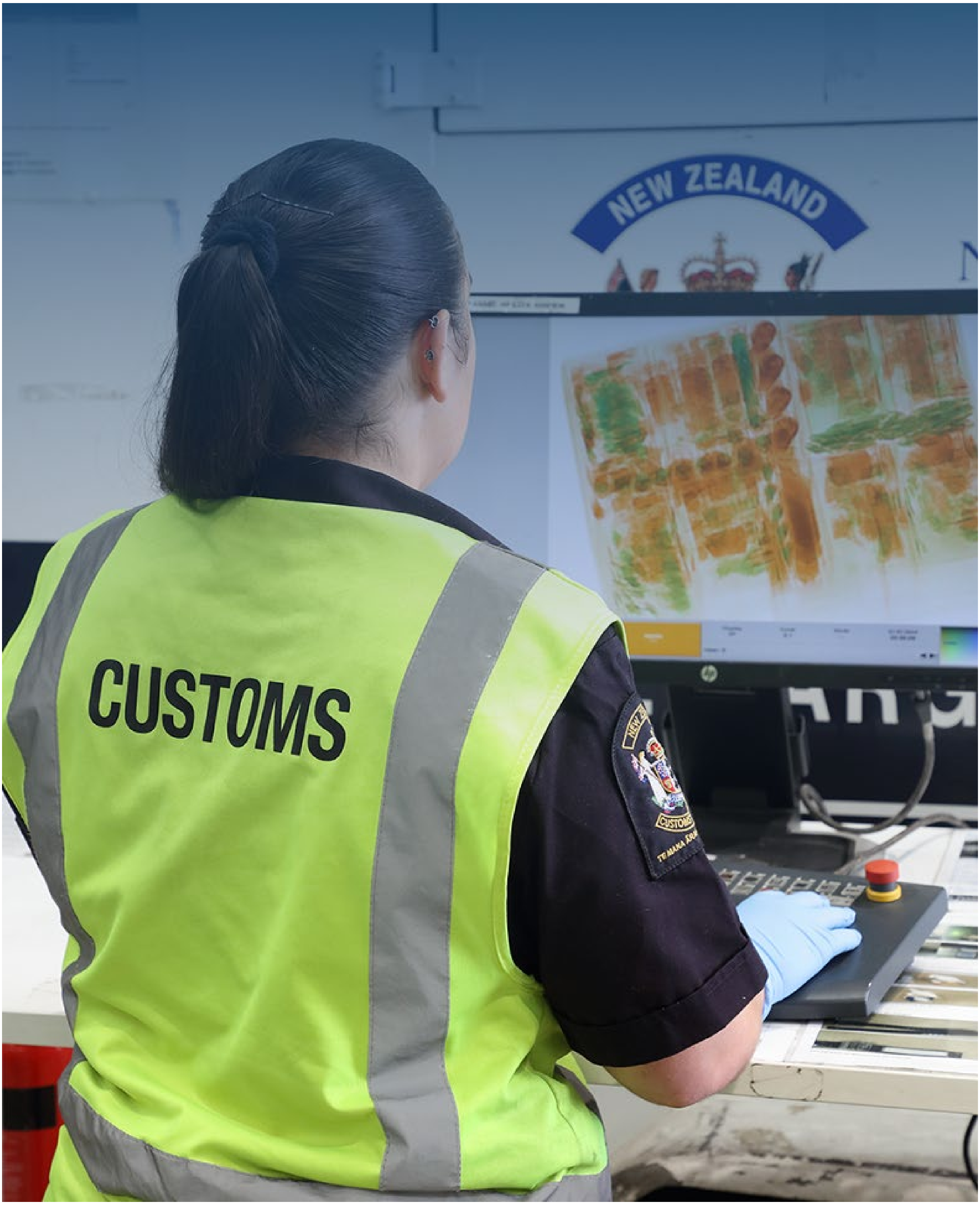
Key Events and Times 2025: Import Transactions

Imports FCLs - Measures	Sea 2023	Sea 2025
Entry lodgement to arrival	6d 13h	7d 2h
Entry clearance to arrival	6d 12h	6d 22h
Entry lodgement to clearance	1h 21m	4h 48s
Arrival to Gate-out	2d 20h	2d 11h
Imports - Measures	**Air 2023**	**Air 2025**
Entry lodgement to arrival	18h	1d 9h
Entry clearance to arrival	16h 47m	1d 8h
Entry lodgement to clearance	1h 6m	52m

Note 1: Clearance refers to Customs and MPI entry clearance.
Note 2: Some rounding may occur with timings.
Note 3: Large outliers can affect the mean or average measure.
Note 4: Only network problems would delay the processing of TSW lodged entries in any significant way.

SECTION ONE

SETTING THE SCENE



SECTION ONE: Setting the Scene

Introduction

Clearance of cargo by Customs is a significant activity in facilitating or holding up trade at the border. A Time Release Study (TRS) is a method endorsed by the World Customs Organization (WCO) to measure how efficiently Customs Administrations perform in the clearance of cargo through a standardised process. It measures the time taken from the arrival of the vessel or aircraft to when the cargo is cleared by Customs.

This TRS measures New Zealand Customs' contribution to trade facilitation, supporting efficient cross-border movement of goods and helping to strengthen New Zealand's economy.

This study provides an evidence-based measure of New Zealand's cargo-clearance performance, guiding continuous improvement in trade facilitation and alignment with WCO international standards.

Background

The 2025 TRS is the fifth comprehensive study carried out by the New Zealand Customs Service. The first two studies occurred in 2009 where one study looked at the New Zealand Customs Service (Customs), while the second study was conducted jointly with the Australian Customs Service (now known as the Australian Border Force).

A TRS was also conducted in 2022 and 2023 to provide an updated benchmark of Customs' clearance processes to allow an assessment of effectiveness over time. This 2025 TRS builds on, and refines, the methodology developed in 2023. Generally, Customs' performance in clearing cargo remained at a comparable and similarly high level to that found in 2023.

Aims and Objectives

The main aims of the 2025 TRS are to:

1. Provide data on clearance times and the physical movement of cargo across the border.
2. Refine the baseline measures and methodology used in the 2023 TRS and apply this to future studies.
3. Share findings with stakeholders, including international partners and industry.

The results from this study can be used to:

1. Assess and validate the effectiveness of current Customs procedures and technologies.
2. Establish an updated baseline dataset to measure and benchmark Customs' performance in trade facilitation.

Methodology

The methodology of this study followed the WCO's Time Release Study Guide Version 4, 2025 and adapted to local conditions, cargo volumes, and flows.

Phase One involved planning and preparation including a data sampling exercise:

- Establishment of a Working Group from the Trade, Revenue & Compliance group (TR&C) and Strategic Systems & Service Optimisation (SS&SO) to co-ordinate the 2025 study.
- Engagement with selected port companies and air cargo carriers on the study and request for the supply of data.
- Collection of a data sample (July 2025).
- Work by Joint Border Analytics (JBA) to verify/validate and automate some processes based on the sampling exercise.

Phase Two involved:
- Completion of JBA work and automation of some processes.
- Completion of the work in preparation for the actual TRS.

Phase Three involved:
- The actual TRS (August/September 2025).
- Collection of data from various sources.
- Merging and checking of the datasets.
- Analysis of the data including any changed methodologies for partial comparison.
- Publication of the TRS report.

Scope of the Study

Date Range: The week chosen in advance for the study was: **Thursday 28 August to Wednesday 03 September 2025** (7 days).

For the calculations of the measures the times are in New Zealand standard time.

Cargo Scope: The scope of the study looked at imported and exported air and sea cargo that required a declaration to Customs in the form of a standard import or export entry type, and that was discharged or loaded at selected New Zealand sea ports and international airports.

Air Cargo: Data from international flights that arrived or departed and carried cargo during the TRS week was collected and used in this study. The data was sourced from selected air cargo operators.

Sea Cargo: Data on containerised cargo (FCL and LCL) was sourced from selected port companies where a container vessel called at that port during the TRS week to unload or load containers. Other cargo types (breakbulk, bulk) were excluded from the study.

Exclusions: Some Customs data (such as outliers with significantly high processing times[2], transhipments, goods with a customs value less than $1,000) were excluded. Only cargo where the times could be confirmed and validated were included in this study.

[2] Outliers with high times were analysed to identify reasons for the delay. Reasons include entries held and referred for a Customs examination, entries are a replacement of an earlier cancelled entry or is a duplicate entry.

Inclusions: This study is to assess Customs' role in clearing cargo from arrival to when Customs releases that cargo from the control of Customs. Due to the joint border management system (Trade Single Window - TSW) providing clearance of cargo at the border, Ministry for Primary Industries (Biosecurity New Zealand) were included in the clearance times. Customs also administers a wide range of other agencies' legislation at the border that could also influence clearance times.

Entry Type: Only cargo that was declared and subsequently cleared by a Customs import or export entry through TSW were included in the study. Clearance by other entry types or methods (such as domestic transhipment requests) were excluded.

TSW entries: TSW is the standard system where international cargo is reported to Customs and MPI. Import and export entries are lodged electronically into TSW by a declarant (usually a customs broker, importer or exporter). TSW undertakes automated checking of the entry against business rules, alerts, and risk assessment processes and then accepts (and clears) or rejects the entry.

Only a cleared entry can generate an electronic Delivery Order (DO). This is the time that a clearance is given for cargo. The DO authorises the delivery of imported goods from the port (Gate out) or loading of exports onto the vessel or aircraft.

Time stamps are electronically recorded and saved to a database for TSW lodged entries. The required information including times were extracted from this database. If an entry is adjusted an updated version is created, this new version becomes the current version.

Legislation: *The Customs and Excise Act 2018* (the Act) and *the Customs and Excise Regulations 1996* (the Regulations) set out the legal requirements in respect to imported and exported goods. Regulation 21 of the Regulations specifies when an import entry must be made (for goods covered under section 75(1) of the Act). In the case of goods imported by sea or air, the entry must be made **before the date** on which the goods are imported **or within 20 working days after** the date of importation. An import entry is deemed to have been cleared when a DO message is generated by Customs in respect of that entry.

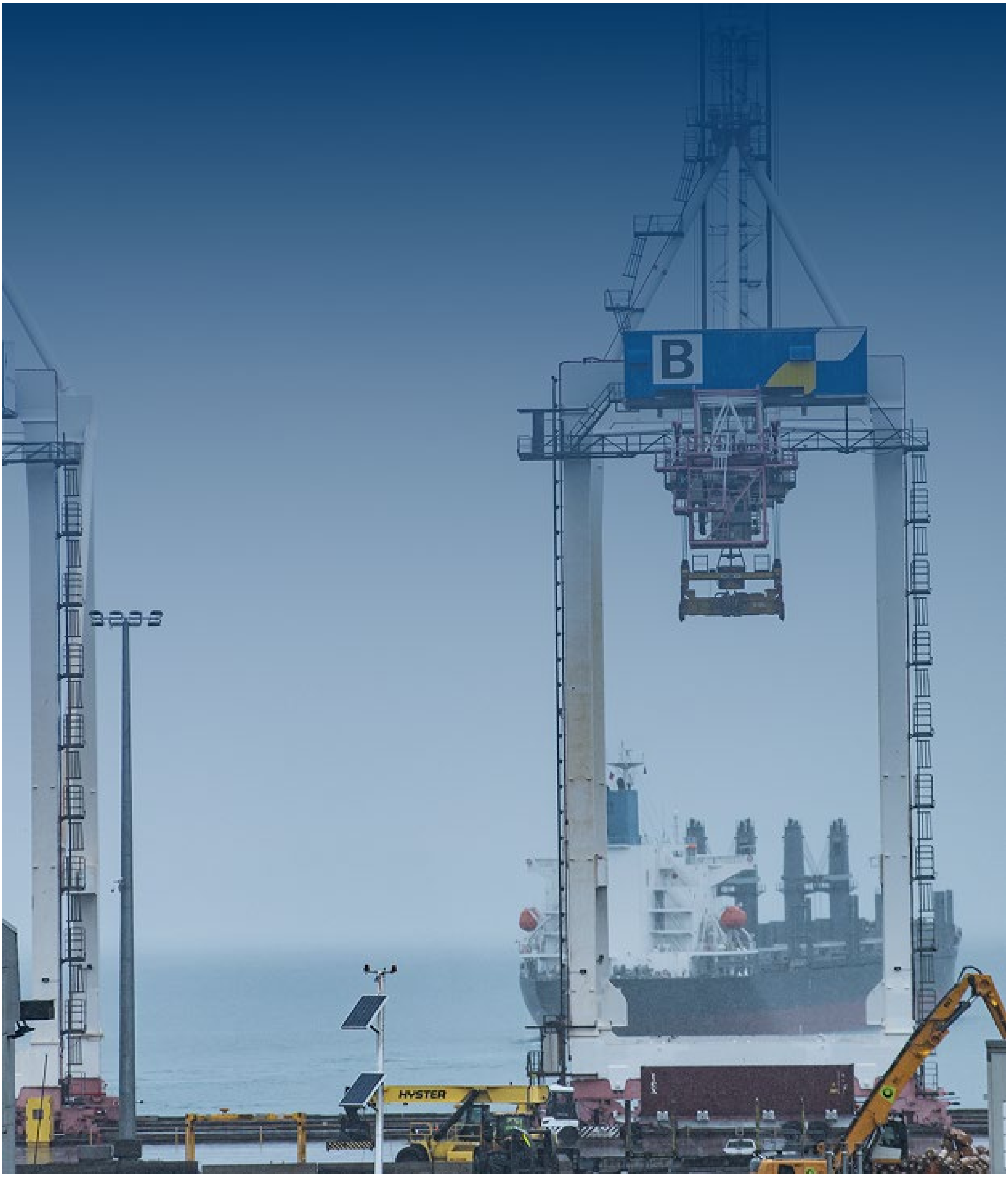
Regulation 28 of the Regulations specifies when an export entry must be made (for goods covered under section 89(1) of the Act) before the goods are shipped for export. An export entry is deemed to have been cleared when a DO (or 'CEDO') is generated by Customs in respect of that entry.
Other Data Sources: TSW does not record all events related to the importation of cargo. Data was therefore sourced from other parties.

Selected port companies provided vessel details, times, discharge list and gate out times recorded when containers left the port. Air cargo data was sourced from selected air cargo operators.

The additional data provides a more complete picture of the cargo clearance process.

SECTION TWO

ANALYSIS OF CONTAINERISED SEA CARGO



SECTION TWO: Analysis of Containerised Sea Cargo

Imports: Key Data and Measures

Event/Measures	FCLs		LCLs	
	2023	2025	2023	2025
Import entries	4,987	5,518	358	418
Containers	7,764	8,342	367	420
Container vessels	25	27	17	15
Entry lodgement to arrival (mean)	6d 13h	7d 2h	4d 5h	4d 7h
Entry clearance to arrival (mean)	6d 12h	6d 22h	4d 4h	4d 2h
Entry lodgement to clearance (mean)	1h 21m	4h 48s	1h 3m	5h 15m
Arrival to discharge (mean)	1d 1h	17h 33m	1d 1h	17h 35m
Arrival to gate-out (mean)	2d 20h	2d 11h	2d 5h	2d 3h
Entry cleared before arrival	94%	95%	91%	80%

Note: Some rounding may occur with timings.

Data from 5,936 import entries via sea cargo were matched with data from port companies consisting of 8,342 FCL and 420 LCL containers. The data sets were integrated to analyse the process through Customs with the physical movement of cargo on the ports.

The mean or average time calculated for 'entry clearance to arrival' for sea cargo FCLs was 6 days 22 hours. This indicates that these entries were cleared and released by Customs and MPI over 6 days before the arrival of the vessel carrying that cargo.

Customs regulations allow lodgement and clearance of imported goods at any date before import. Determination of this advance lodgement time is at the discretion of the declarant (usually a customs broker or importer). This compares to the regulations that were in force from earlier studies (prior to the 2023 TRS) where import entries could only be lodged 5 days before import and up to 20 working days after arrival, which had not changed.

During this TRS, there were import entries lodged and cleared well in advance of the date of arrival or date of import. The earliest time an entry was lodged and cleared was 34 days 7 hours before the arrival of the vessel carrying that cargo. The last entry lodged and cleared was 17 days after the arrival of the vessel.

The opportunity to receive advance clearance continues to result in a significant number of sea cargo entries cleared in advance – with 95.35% of imported sea cargo FCLs cleared before arrival. This TRS identified a small number of sea cargo imports that had entries cleared after removal from the port. This occurred due to the Domestic Transhipment Request (DTR) process allowing uncleared cargo to be transported from the port CCA/Transitional Facility (TF) to another approved

CCA/TF prior to formal Customs clearance. This data has been excluded with little effect on the outcome of this TRS.

The unloading of containers commences soon after the vessel is tied up and other arrival formalities completed. During the TRS week, the earliest a container was unloaded recorded 24 minutes after arrival while the latest time a container was unloaded from a vessel was 2 days after arrival. On average, FCLs remained on the port for 1 day 17 hours after unloading from the vessel. This gave a range from the earliest gate out time of 15 minutes to over 10 days 18h after unloading.

LCL cargo is different to FCL cargo and is analysed separately. However, the Customs process for reporting the cargo are the same, and the port processes are similar. This study found 80.24% of entries for LCL cargo were cleared pre-arrival at an average of 4 days 2 hours before the arrival of the vessel.

Imports: Port Data

Sea Cargo: Key Events and Measurements by Port for FCLs

Event/ Measures	Auckland 2025	Tauranga 2025	Napier 2025	Wellington 2025	Nelson 2025	Lyttelton 2025	Timaru 2025	Otago 2025
Import entries	3,673	935	133	249	11	445	18	54
FCLs unloaded	5,212	1,692	227	365	13	675	61	97
Container vessels	12	12	6	5	1	3	1	3
Entry lodgement to arrival (mean)	7d 6h	6d 19h05m	7d 12h 53m	6d 0h 59m	5d 4h 20m	7d 11h 19m	5d 13h 27m	5d 15h 28m
Entry clearance to arrival (mean)	7d 2h 21m	6d 11h 51m	7d 9h 25m	5d 23h 18m	5d 4h 20m	7d 10h 22m	5d 10h 42m	5d 15h 28m
Entry lodgement to clearance (mean)	3h 39m	7h 14m	3h 28m	1h 41m	seconds	0h 56m	2h 45m	seconds
Arrival to discharge (mean)	20h 2m	13h 52m	11h 32m	6h 37m	11h 53m	14h 10m	20h 49m	1d 2h 51m
Arrival to gate-out (mean)	2d 11h 39m	2d 9h 11m	2d 55m	3d 10h 22m	2d 6h 58m	2d 2h 54m	2d 6h 3m	2d 1h 39m
Entry cleared before arrival	96%	94%	90%	97%	100%	97%	89%	94%

Note: Some rounding may occur with timings.

There are some variations in the measures by individual ports; however, a high percentage of import entries were lodged and cleared before the arrival of the vessel for all ports. Shipping line schedules will impact on the number of vessels that call into a port per week.

Exports: Key Data and Measures

Event/Measures	FCLs		LCLs	
	2023	2025	2023	2025
Export entries	2,848	3,353	60	63
Containers	6,383	8,010	60	63
Container vessels	24	29	16	20
Receipt to lodgement (mean)	1d 15h	2h 31m	-12h 28m	-2d 15h
Receipt to clearance (mean)	1d 16h	2h 32m	-12h 18m	-2d 15h
Receipt to load (mean)	6d 16h	5d 4h	4d 15h	3d
Entry lodgement to load (mean)	5d 14m	5d 2h	5d 4h	5d 15h
Entry clearance to load (mean)	5d 6m	5d 2h	5d 3h	5d 15h
Entry lodgement to clearance (mean)	8m 12s	1m	17m 34s	seconds
Entry clearance to depart (mean)	5d 10h	5d 15h	5d 9h	5d 22h
Entry cleared before receipt	37%	47%	70%	84%
Entry lodged 48 hours before load	87%	89%	91%	95%

Note 1: Some rounding may occur with timings.
Note 2: Negative values reflect when the entry lodgement or clearance occurs before the export cargo is receipted.

Data from 3,416 export entries and data for 8,010 FCL and 63 LCL[3] containers from port companies were analysed. Almost 90% of export entries were lodged at least 48 hours before loading – improvement from 87.7% in 2023.

On average, export entries for FCLs were lodged and cleared by Customs approximately 5 days 2 hours before loading. There were 47% of export entries cleared by Customs before the containers were receipted or delivered (Gate-in) at the port.

LCL cargo is reported at least two days later than FCLs, relative to the time of receipt at the port or depot. This later reporting is likely due to the nature of LCL shipments, which are consolidated and managed by freight forwarders who often pre-lodge entries. Due to the relatively small number of LCL containers, loading ports, and associated entries, no detailed analysis was carried out for this segment.

[3] LCL containers were only loaded at five ports: Auckland, Tauranga, Wellington, Nelson and Lyttelton.

Exports: Port Data

Sea Cargo: Key Events and Measurements by Port for FCLs

Event/Measures	Auckland 2025	Tauranga 2025	Napier 2025	Wellington 2025	Nelson 2025	Lyttelton 2025	Timaru 2025	Otago 2025	Bluff 2025
Container vessels	9	12	7	5	3	4	1	3	1
FCLs loaded	1,068	3,779	872	483	314	1,108	13	366	7
Export entries	496	1,466	403	181	143	446	10	207	1
Receipt to lodgement (mean)	-5d 8h 3m	4h 6m	20h 17m	4d 14h 27m	6d 8h 49m	-13h 46m	7h 22m	4d 5h 46m	1d 23h 30m
Receipt to clearance (mean)	-5d 8h 2m	4h 7m	20h 17m	4d 14h 27m	6d 8h 49m	-13h 43m	7h 22m	4d 5h 46m	2d 1h 12m
Receipt to load (mean)	8h 22m	5d 5h 20m	5d 1h 29m	10d 17h 14m	11d 3h 35m	4d 14h 9m	6d 4h 58m	8d 8h 3m	14d 11h 23m
Entry lodgement to load (mean)	5d 16h 25m	5d 1h 14m	4d 5h 12m	6d 2h 47m	4d 18h 47m	5d 3h 55m	5d 21h 37m	4d 2h 17m	12d 11h 53m
Entry clearance to load (mean)	5d 16h 25m	5d 1h 13m	4d 5h 12m	6d 2h 47m	4d 18h 46m	5d 3h 52m	5d 21h 36m	4d 2h 17m	12d 10h 11m
Entry lodgement to clearance (mean)	seconds	seconds	seconds	seconds	seconds	3m 18s	seconds	seconds	1h 41m
Entry clearance to depart (mean)	5d 16h 26m	5d 19h 8m	4d 19h 42m	6d 8h 50m	5d 21m	5d 15h 15m	6d 13h 3m	4d 18h 17m	13d 9h 4m
Entry cleared before receipt	99.91%	44%	18%	17 %	22%	58%	8%	30%	0%
Entry lodged 48 hours before load	95%	91%	90.83%	76%	80%	83%	100%	94%	100%

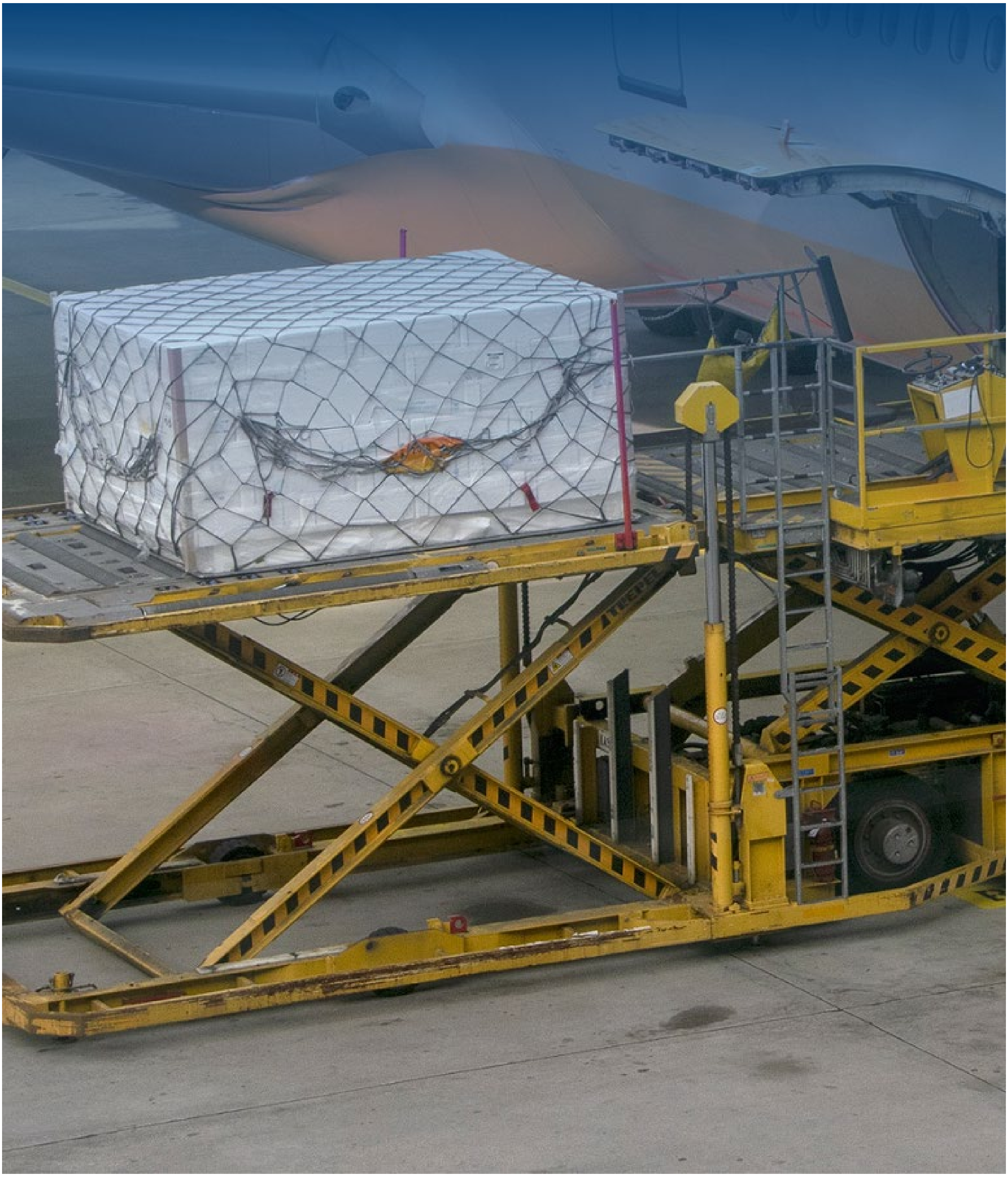
Note 1: Some rounding may occur with timings.
Note 2: Negative values reflect when the entry lodgement or clearance occurs **before** the export cargo is receipted.

A high proportion of export entries were lodged at least 48 hours before loading across all ports. On average, containers were cleared by Customs between 4 and 12 days prior to loading.

The ratio of FCL container sizes remained consistent with previous years at 71:29 – with 71% being 40-foot containers and 29% being 20-foot containers.

SECTION THREE

ANALYSIS OF AIR CARGO



SECTION THREE: Analysis of Air Cargo

Flight Details

During the TRS week, data from 571 international flights that carried air cargo was collected. Auckland International Airport accounted for 87.42% (271 out of 310) of the flights that carried imported air cargo[4]. Export cargo was loaded onto 261 flights going to 79 countries during the week.

The unloading of aircraft followed a similar process for all flights. After ‘on-blocks’ - when the aircraft has stopped outside the terminal, passengers’ luggage is usually unloaded first - the unloading of cargo follows, firstly unit load devices (ULDs – aircraft shipping containers or ‘air cans’), followed by pallets, and bulk cargo. For departing aircraft carrying cargo, generally this process is followed in reverse.

Cargo is delivered to the air cargo operators’ premises which are Customs-Controlled Areas (CCAs) located near the Airport. Cargo is usually delivered to the CCAs within an hour after unloading from the aircraft.

Imports: TRS Events and Times

Imports Air Cargo: Key Events, Measures and Times				
Event/Measures	Measure (mean)		Measure (median)	
	2023	2025	2023	2025
Entry lodgement to arrival	18h	1d 9h	20h	1d 13h
Entry clearance to arrival	17h	1d 8h	19h	1d 12h
Entry lodgement to clearance	1h	52m	seconds	seconds

Note: Some rounding may occur with timings.

A total of 6,103 import entries and 5,457 airway bills were used to calculate the times for air cargo imported during the TRS week.

The mean/average time from ‘entry clearance to arrival’ was 1 day 8 hours before the arrival of the aircraft – this accounted for 86.24% of entries cleared before arrival.

Lodgement and clearance ranged from 11 days before the arrival of the flight carrying that cargo to 19 days after arrival. The timing of lodgement is determined by the declarant, usually the customs broker or importer where there is no restriction on the advanced period to lodge an entry before arrival of cargo.

[4] Due to the high volume via Auckland International Airport, individual Airport measures are not reported. Air Cargo statistics and measures are reported at the national level.

The time between finalising the manifest, loading the aircraft, flight times, receiving all the information and completing the import entry provides a bigger constraint on the ability to pre-lodge and receive clearance before arrival for air cargo, which is why the pre-clearance percentage is not as high as sea cargo.

Exports: TRS Events and Times

Exports Air Cargo: Key Events, Measures and Times				
Event/Measures	Measure (mean)		Measure (median)	
	2023	2025	2023	2025
Entry lodgement to departure	1d 12h	1d 19h	1d 1h	1d 10h
Entry clearance to departure	1d 12h	1d 19h	1d 1h	1d 10h
Entry lodgement to clearance	3m 18s	8m 49s	seconds	seconds

Note: Some rounding may occur with timings.

A total of 2,810 export entries and 2,615 airway bills were used to calculate the times for air cargo exported during the TRS week.

The time cargo is loaded onto the aircraft is not collected or recorded. The nearest event to this is the departure time of the aircraft. The mean/average time for ‘entry clearance to departure’ was 1 day 19 hours before departure.

SECTION FOUR

SUMMARY

SECTION FOUR: Summary

The 2025 TRS provides a useful assessment of the efficiency of Customs' (and MPI's) processes in the movement and clearance of cargo for trade.

Lessons learned from the 2023 study led to minor changes to the methodology and calculations. However, the broad measures and results from this study are consistent and comparable with the earlier study. For example, both studies confirm a high percentage of Customs entries for imports by sea are lodged and cleared before the arrival of the craft carrying that cargo. Exports by sea are, on average, lodged at least 48 hours before loading.

The Customs Annual Report 2025[5] outlines the output measures and standards used to assess overall performance as an organisation. These are reviewed annually to make sure they are fit for purpose, accurately reflect the services Customs delivers, are relevant, and provide a quantifiable way of assessing performance.

Since the 2021/22 reporting period, Customs was expected to process 98% of trade transactions within 30 minutes[6]. Due to the improved processing time and consistent achievement of performance targets, the specified timeframe was reduced to 5 minutes for the 2023/24 reporting period. These exclude entries referred for further Customs intervention.

During this TRS, 98.49% of all import and export entries lodged were cleared within 5 minutes. Notably, 97.73% were cleared in under 20 seconds.

These measures confirm Customs has good processes in place to facilitate the clearance of cargo and does not unnecessarily impede the delivery of cargo that is reported correctly. These processes include electronic reporting, business rules, risk management and alert systems, deferred payment schemes, post entry auditing capability, and on-going engagement with the importing and exporting industry at all levels in Customs.

Customs will continue to leverage these findings to strengthen engagement with New Zealand businesses and other interested parties, supporting increased trade facilitation.

Customs will conduct a Time Release Study every two years (next one scheduled for 2027) and will continue working with port and cargo operators to achieve this.

[5] customs-annual-report-2025.pdf
[6] Since 2008/09 Customs was expected to process 95% of trade transactions within 30 minutes before this was increased to 98% in 2021/22.

SECTION FIVE: APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Definitions

Key Event	Definition
Arrival	The date and time of the arrival of the means of transport (sea or air) conveying the goods at importation and when the goods enter Customs control. For sea cargo this means the docking time of the vessel at the port of discharge. The actual arrival time was supplied by the port authority. For aircraft this means the actual arrival time as recorded by the Customs passenger arrival report.
Clearance	The point at which all border agency controls are completed, and the consignment is completely unimpeded. This is the time recorded as final clearance. However, the goods may still be subject to holds by shipping lines and port companies.
Departure	The date and time of the departure of the means of transport (sea or air) conveying the goods at exportation. For sea cargo departure, this means the time that the vessel departs from the port of loading. For air cargo departure, this means the off-blocks time recorded for the aircraft.
Discharge (or availability)	This is the time recorded on the Discharge List when the container was physically unloaded off the vessel. The list and times were supplied by the port authority. This is also the time when the goods are physically available for delivery should the goods receive pre-arrival customs clearance.
Gate out (or delivery)	This is the time recorded when the container/cargo is physically transported out the port gates. Authority to remove the goods is presentation of a Customs DO.
Load	The date and time recorded by the port company when the container is physically loaded on-board the vessel transporting it to an overseas destination.
Lodgement	When a customs declaration or entry is reported and declared to the Customs Administrations including all relevant and required information to obtain the release of the goods. For TSW entries: this is the time stamp recorded when TSW accepts and writes the information to the database, recorded as Entry Header Lodgement Date.
Processed (trade transactions)	This is the time taken for a Customs declaration or entry to pass through different stages from lodgement within TSW to a decision of final clearance or rejection.
Receipt (or Gate in)	The point at which goods are delivered to a place of export at the port of export and enter physical customs control at the Customs port or airport. For sea cargo this is time recorded by the port company when the container is receipted at the port gates. For air cargo it is the time recorded when the consignment is received from the shipper.

APPENDIX B: Additional Data

Sea Imports: Top 10 Overseas Economies 'Port of Loading'

Economy 'Port of Loading' – Import FCLs					
Economy	Vessels	FCLs	Entry cleared before arrival	Entry clearance to arrival (mean)	Arrival to gate-out (mean)
All Economies (53)	27	8,342	95%	6d 22h	2d 11h
China, Peoples Republic of	14	2,733	96%	6d 22h	2d 8h
Singapore	6	1,150	95%	7d 5h	2d 21h
Malaysia	4	1,095	96%	6d 8h	2d 15h
Australia	17	970	95%	5d 17m	2d 8h
Hong Kong (Special Admin Reg)	11	886	97%	8d 4h	2d 3h
Korea, Republic of	6	476	97%	9d 22h	2d 12h
United States of America	10	229	93%	6d 15h	2d 4h
Taiwan	4	155	99%	5d 20h	2d 16h
Panama	1	99	78%	8d 10h	1d 17h
Thailand	5	71	97 %	6d 2h	3d 11m

Note: Some rounding may occur with timings.

During the TRS week, containers were shipped (based on port of loading) from 53 economies. The top 10 overseas export economies accounted for over 94% of all import FCLs unloaded during this week.

A total of 27 container vessels made 35 calls to New Zealand ports during the week. Many of the vessels loaded cargo from more than one overseas port before arriving in New Zealand. Of the 27 vessels, 17 loaded containers at an Australian port.

Import entries for containers loaded in an Australia port were cleared the closest to the arrival time of the vessel at 5 days. This may reflect the short transit times across the Tasman with fewer days between loading and arrival at a New Zealand port.

Some shipping schedules are operated on a fortnightly or monthly and may not have been scheduled to call at a New Zealand port during the TRS week. Weekly statistics therefore vary and are dependent on vessel calls and routes.

Sea Exports: Top 10 Overseas Economies 'Port of Discharge'

Economy 'Port of Loading' – Export FCLs					
Economy	Vessels	FCLs	Entry lodgement to load (mean)	Entry lodged 48 hours before load	Entry cleared before receipt
All Economies (69)	29	8,010	5d 2h	89%	47%
Australia	11	1,416	5d 19h	93%	56%
China, Peoples Republic of	15	1,150	5d 29m	84%	47%
Malaysia	7	1,108	4d 21h	92%	44%
Singapore	6	564	4d 9h	86%	43%
United States of America	9	470	4d 20h	86%	41%
Japan	12	373	5d 8h	100%	39%
Korea, Republic of	8	336	4d 13h	99%	40%
Hong Kong (Special Admin Reg)	9	327	4d 18h	82%	49%
Belgium	5	290	5d 9h	100 %	3%
Taiwan	8	260	5d	85%	35%

Note: Some rounding may occur with timings.

The top 10 economies for export containers accounted for over 79% of all FCLs loaded during the TRS week. Like imports, the shipping schedules will change the port of discharge numbers weekly.

Sea Cargo: Entry Version Statistics

Imports and Exports Entry by Version Number					
Imports: Version	Count	Percent	Exports: Version	Count	Percent
1	5,098	86%	1	2,972	87%
2	647	11%	2	342	10%
3	149	3%	3	77	2%
4	29	0.49%	4	21	0.61%
5	11	0.19%	5	9	0.26%
6	5	0.08%	6	1	0.03%
8	1	0.02%			

Note: Rounding up/down will affect the overall total percentage to be approximate 100%.

When data and information is entered into TSW to lodge an entry, an entry version is created and the time recorded. Every time that entry is changed or adjusted, a new version number is created and a new time recorded.

For most entries, it is the current or latest version that is used to calculate the TRS measures as clearance would have been completed within a very short timeframe after lodgement. However, for some entries, other versions and times are used as that version is the version where clearance for delivery or loading was authorised, for example, if Customs intervention had occurred or errors/changes by the declarants (customs brokers, importers or exporters) were resolved.

For the TRS week, 86% of the total import entries lodged were cleared (5,098 cleared from a total of 5,940 import entries lodged). For exports, 87% of the total number of entries lodged were cleared (2,972 entries cleared from a total of 3,422 export entries lodged).

Air Imports: Top 10 Overseas Economies ‘Port of Loading’

Economy ‘Port of Loading’ - Imports by AWB			
Economy	**AWBs**	**% Entry cleared before arrival**	**Entry clearance to arrival (mean)**
All Economies (66)	5,457	86%	1d 8h 16m
Australia	3,048	95%	1d 20h 10m
United States of America	726	70%	2h 24m
Singapore	663	85%	1d 4h 17m
China, Peoples Republic of	353	76%	20h 41m
Hong Kong (Special Admin Reg)	148	78%	22h 33m
United Arab Emirates	80	76%	1d 14h 56m
Fiji	76	75%	8h 13m
Malaysia	76	93%	2d 1h 23m
Qatar	66	77%	1d 23h 33m
Japan	59	86%	1d 16h 7m

Note: Some rounding may occur with timings.

The economy ‘port of loading’ is based on the airport IATA code of the loading airport and was sourced from the Customs import entry and data supplied by the air cargo operators. Some cargo may not have been loaded in that economy but would have been reloaded onto another aircraft in another economy before arriving in New Zealand.

The reverse applies to the economy ‘port of discharge’ for exported air cargo on the next table.

Air Exports: Top 10 Overseas Economies ‘Port of Discharge’

Economy ‘Port of Discharge’ – Exports by AWB			
Economy	**AWB**	**% Entry cleared before departure**	**Entry clearance to departure**
All Economies (79)	2,615	100%	1d 19h
Australia	957	100%	1d 17h
United States of America	461	100%	1d 17h
Singapore	225	100%	1d 13h
China, Peoples Republic of	133	100%	1d 7h
Fiji	88	100%	1d 22h
Hong Kong (Special Admin Reg)	78	100%	1d 23h
Canada	73	100%	1d 20h
United Kingdom	62	100%	1d 18h
United Arab Emirates	50	100%	2d 18h
Japan	46	100%	1d 22h

Note: Some rounding may occur with timings.

The top three economies ‘port of discharge’ were noted to be Australia, United States and Singapore, with Australia accounting for nearly a third of overall destinations - 957 air cargo shipments out of the total of 2,615.

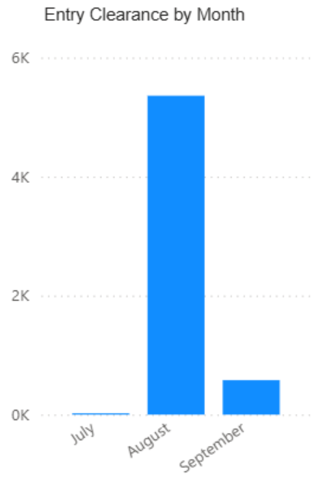
100% of export entries were cleared prior to departure of the aircraft. Goods were generally cleared 1 day prior to departure.

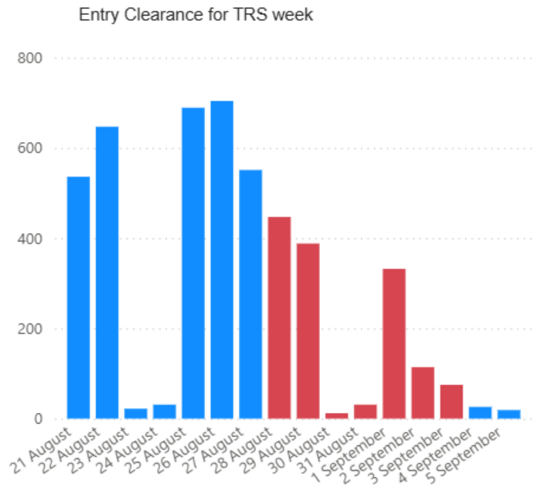
Date of Entry Clearance Relative to the TRS week

The following graphs illustrate the entry clearance for air and sea cargo during the TRS week to provide a comparison of activity with other time periods.

The selected Ports and Airport cargo operators work 24 hours, 7 days a week, and entries can be lodged and cleared 24/7 unless referred for border agency intervention.

Sea Cargo: Imports

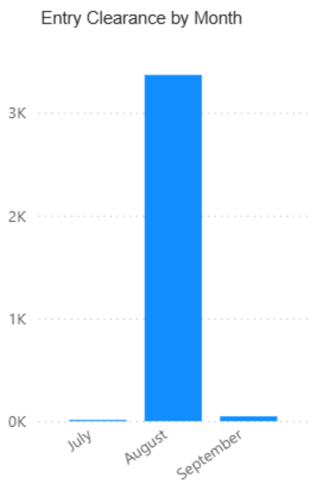


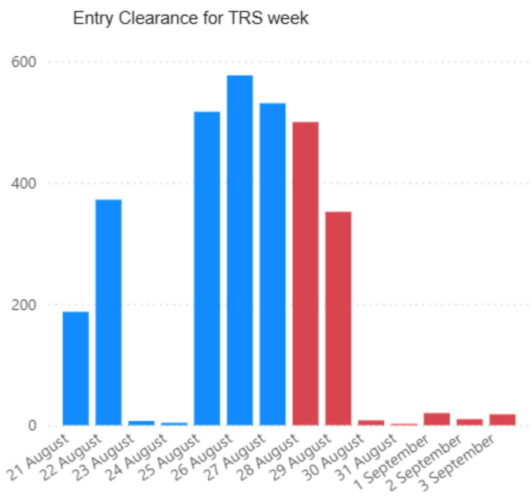


Import entry clearances showed a declining trend following a peak observed in the days immediately prior - particularly 25-27 August, where daily volumes reached their highest levels (close to or above 600 entries).

From 28 August onward, clearance volumes began to taper off, with a notable drop is visible over the weekend (31 August–1 September), consistent with the expected ‘weekend effect’ when fewer entries are lodged and processed. Activity remained subdued through 2 - 3 September, suggesting that the bulk of import processing occurred before the TRS week commenced.

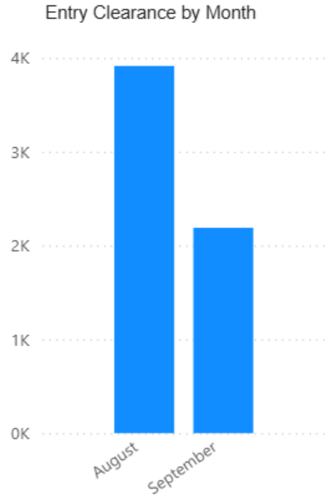
Sea Cargo: Exports

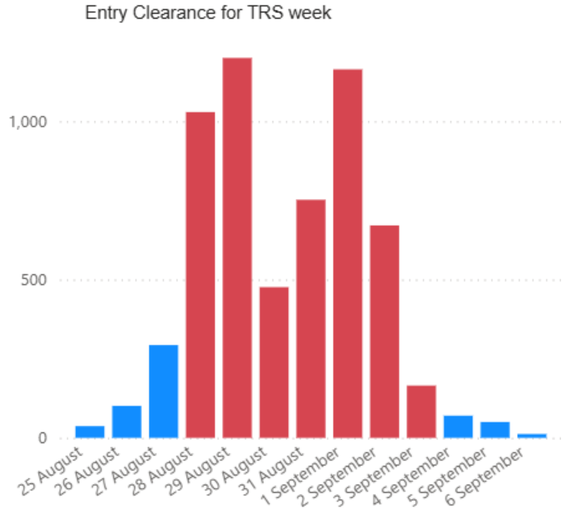




Sea cargo export entry clearances peaked during 25–27 August, with the highest daily volumes recorded in that period. This was followed by a gradual decline from 28 August onwards, with a sharp drop observed over the weekend (31 August–1 September) and continuing into early September. The pattern suggests a strong ‘weekend effect’ influencing clearance activity.

Air Cargo: Imports

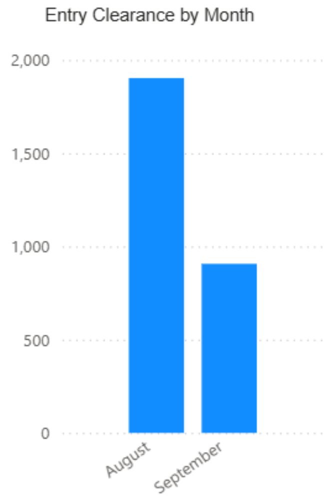


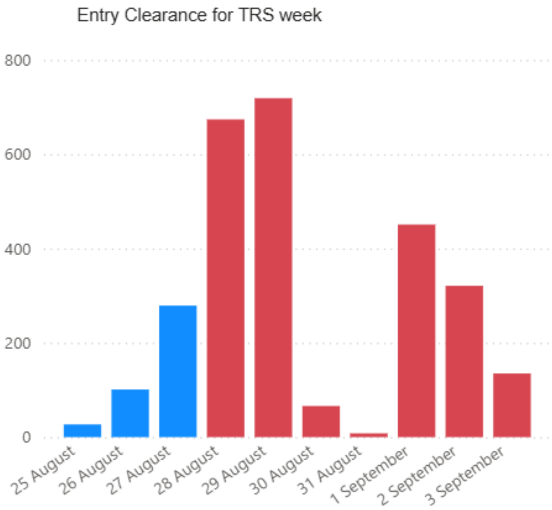


Air cargo import entry clearances showed elevated activity during the TRS study period from 28 August to 3 September 2025, with notable peaks on 29 August and 1 September, each exceeding 1,000 clearances. These peaks suggest concentrated processing efforts during the early and middle parts of the TRS week.

The data also reflects a weekend effect, with clearance volumes dipping slightly around 31 August (Sunday), though not as sharply as in sea cargo, suggesting that air cargo processing may be less impacted by weekend constraints.

Air Cargo: Exports

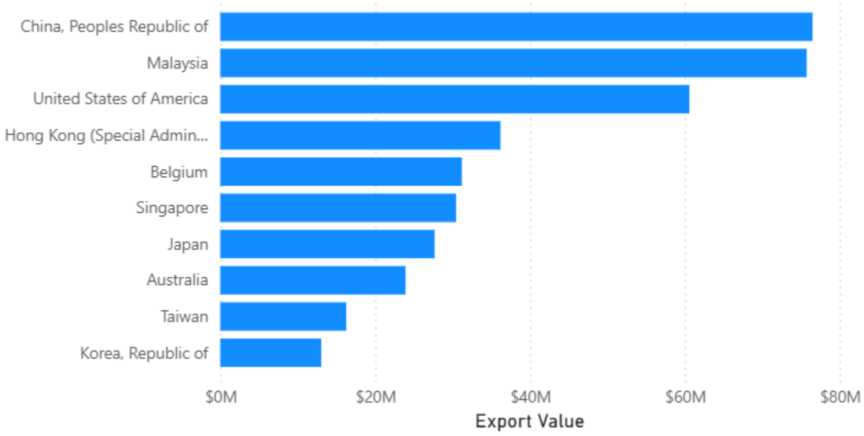




Air cargo export entry clearances peaked on 29 August, with volumes reaching approximately 750 entries - the highest recorded during the period. 28 August followed closely as the second highest day, indicating strong pre-weekend processing activity. In contrast, 30 August showed a sharp decline, making it the second lowest day for clearances.

This pattern reflects a concentrated processing effort leading into the weekend, followed by a noticeable decline in activity. While a weekend effect is evident, it appears to be less pronounced for air cargo exports compared to sea cargo.

Top 10 Exports Economies based on SES

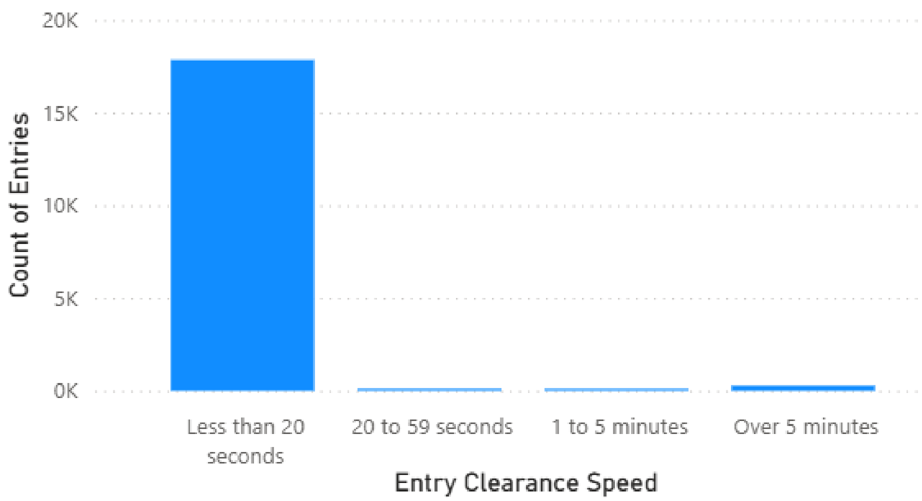


During the TRS week, most Secure Export Scheme member exports were noted to have China, as the economy 'country of discharge', followed by Malaysia and then United States of America. China is noted to account for (NZD) $76,491,517 of trade during the TRS week. Malaysia follows suit with (NZD) $75,731,847 and United States of America (NZD) $60,580,270.

Entry Clearance Speed

All Import and Export Entries – Sea Cargo and Air Cargo

Entry Clearance	Total Entries	Total %
Less than 20 seconds	17,851	97.73%
20 to 59 seconds	100	0.55%
1 to 5 minutes	39	0.21%
Over 5 minutes	275	1.51%



97.73% of all entries during the TRS week were cleared in less than 20 seconds of being lodged, with a further 0.55% cleared within 1 minute.

An overall 98.49% of trade transactions were cleared within 5 minutes of lodgement.