

# Future Problem Solving International Conference

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Pictured: (Left to Right) Angela Bell (Coach), Cassandra Wang, Mikaela Wong, Naushiha Aravinthan, Elise Bailey

It's been a week since we've settled back into our school lives, but the fervour of our five days competing at the Future Problem Solving International Conference is still buzzing in our minds. Our first two days at the University of Wisconsin, where the event was held, were a flurry of last minute cramming of obscure fish diseases, timber infestation response plans, and hopeful guesses about what aspect of our topic Biosecurity we would encounter – alien DNA from space travel? Agricultural bioterrorism? We made sure to Google them all! On the day of the actual competition, we trundled into the University Ballroom where tables for each of the 59 senior teams had been laid out. The lockdown itself felt much shorter than the designated two hours as we scrambled around the table reading over the future scene – a 2050 world where a gene bank of extinct species sitting on the bank of Zealandia is about to be used to reanimate an extinct plant – and come up with challenges, an underlying problem, and some solutions. These we adapted into a futuristic plan of action: a DNA-detecting, solar-powered, spore-killing drone shaped like a native insect.

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However the pressure was not off as we then had three hours to prepare a creative performance to demonstrate this technology in action.

But it was after the competition was over that an even more valuable part of our experience came. Over the next two days we had the incredible opportunity to meet people all around the globe who were passionate about science, technology, creativity, and improving our world. Some of the most fascinating conversations were spawned - about bioethics and neurotechnology; and also some of the most strangely specific - about our newfound appreciation for the intricacies of remote surveillance or the drawbacks to liquid termiticides. The air buzzed with ideas. We also had the chance to attend a highly inspiring exhibition of social projects, where Community Problem Solvers displayed their progress countering issues in our world today such as the lack of organ donors and the refugee crisis.

On our last day we attended prize giving, cheering on our new friends and fellow New Zealanders. Though we didn't place in the competition, the experience in itself was worth so much more than any placing could ever be. Biosecurity was something that we knew little about besides from an occasional MPI Facebook posts, but our research into the topic illuminated an entire field with deeply fascinating prospects, especially exciting new surveillance technology for assessing risks remotely. The implications on international relations and macroeconomics were also deeply fascinating. This came at a very opportune time in our lives, and has shaped our pathways into university and beyond, where ecology, biology, and biosecurity is something that all of us are now looking into studying further.

At the International Conference, talking to such diverse people united by our fight for a better future brought to light our own potential as the leaders of tomorrow, and though our research only highlighted the complexities of the increasing environmental and social issues faced, we returned to New Zealand with the reignited conviction that anything can be possible when we come together and try.



Pictured: Flying into SFO



Pictured: Team Photo



Pictured: University of Wisconsin

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