



## AIDE MEMOIRE

### Implementing the RSE Border Class Exception: MIQ Resourcing Impacts

<b>Date:</b>	26 November 2020	<b>Priority:</b>	High
<b>Security classification:</b>		<b>Tracking number:</b>	2021-1507

<b>Information for Minister(s)</b>
Hon Hipkins <b>Minister for COVID-19 Response</b>

<b>Contact for telephone discussion (if required)</b>				
Name	Position	Telephone		1st contact
Privacy of natural persons	Manager, Allocation and Supply, MIQ Policy	Privacy of natural persons		✓
	Senior Policy Officer, MIQ Policy			
	Director Operations (Air), Managed Isolation & Quarantine			

<b>The following departments/agencies have been consulted</b>
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

**Minister's office to complete:**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Approved             | <input type="checkbox"/> Declined            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Noted                | <input type="checkbox"/> Needs change        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seen                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Overtaken by Events |
| <input type="checkbox"/> See Minister's Notes | <input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn           |

**Comments**

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### Executive summary

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This paper notes the MIQ operational implications of the 1 March 2021 deadline for 2,000 Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) workers to enter New Zealand and complete their managed isolation.

Due to capacity constraints, and the resourcing pressure on MIQ Operations from facilitating the arrival of such a large and high need group, officials previously advised ministers that we could accommodate the arrival of this group by mid-March (as distinct from them having “completed” MIQ). The change in date and the stipulation that the group will have “completed” MIQ by 1 March effectively halves the amount of time MIQ Operations have to facilitate the arrival of this group.

This paper highlights the considerable pressure that this compressed timeframe will place on Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ) facilities, as well as industry, and sending countries in order to meet this deadline, and it may not be physically achievable. This pressure will be compounded by the Christmas and New Year holiday periods.

Efforts to facilitate the entry of RSE workers at a rate greater than what was originally proposed would potentially stretch MIQ operations beyond acceptable operating limits and take more of our facilities offline. Our preferred approach, as per previous advice, is to set aside 500 rooms in managed isolation per fortnight for RSE workers from 14 January to mid-March 2021. This would mean that the last cohort of RSE workers would likely exit MIQ on or around 17 March.

We are currently ‘holding’ rooms in managed isolation for RSE workers starting in mid-January. Given the significant amount of work required to organise the arrival of the RSE workers, including the negotiations with Pacific countries and employers, we also understand there is some uncertainty about whether RSE workers will be able to start arriving by mid-January.

If this delay occurs, it would further strain our ability to accommodate the RSE workers by 1 March. In addition, January is almost completely ‘booked out’ as demand for managed isolation remains high, although it currently drops off in February. We are working with officials to better understand the feasibility of the mid-January arrival date. If this date is not feasible, we would like to release these rooms back ‘online’ in MIAS as soon as possible, as we have received a large number of emergency allocation requests over this period.

Privacy of natural persons

**Manager, Allocation and Supply**  
MIQ Policy, MBIE

26 / 11 / 2020

## RSE border exception

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1. On 16 November, Cabinet agreed to a critical workforce class exception for 2,000 RSE workers. Cabinet applied a number of conditions on industry and also directed officials to ensure that RSE workers are able to enter New Zealand and complete managed isolation before 1 March 2021 [CAB-20-MIN-0473].
2. This is the largest class exception to the border closure to date and will place significant pressure on the MIQ system. Due to these pressures and particularly the challenges for MIQ operations from facilitating the arrival of such a large high needs group (requiring bespoke MIQ arrangements), officials previously advised ministers that we could likely safely accommodate the arrival of this group by mid-March – as distinct from them having “completed” MIQ [Briefing notes 2021-1204 and 2021-1168 refer].
3. The change in timeframe for accommodating the group and specifically the stipulation that the group will have “completed” MIQ by 1 March, considerably shortens the amount of time MIQ operations have to facilitate the arrival of this group. This will place considerable pressure on MIQ, pushing us up against safe operational limits and exacerbating existing workforce pressures.

### *What a mid-March exit means for MIQ*

4. Our initial MIQ plan to accommodate the RSE workers was to set aside 500 rooms in MIAS for RSE workers to use from 14 January to mid-March. Under this timeframe, it was envisaged MIQ would process RSE workers through managed isolation roughly every 16-17 days, with charter flights bringing in tranches of 150-170 workers every 72 hours. Workers would be rotated in and out of either one or two dedicated facilities with MIQ managing up to four different cohorts of RSE workers concurrently. At this processing rate, it was anticipated that the last cohort of RSE workers would exit MIQ on or around 17 March.
5. The timing and logistics required to implement this were still challenging and placed considerable pressure on the MIQ system and workforce. A proposed timeframe of tranche arrivals under this planning scenario is attached as **Annex One**.

### *What a 1 March exit means for MIQ*

6. If the process rate was changed in order to meet a 1 March deadline, then MIQ would require an additional two flights of RSE workers arriving per fortnight. This effectively means a tranche of 150-170 RSE workers arriving every 48 hours. It would also require us to increase the number of facilities required to accommodate the group, with potentially three facilities being taken ‘offline’ to manage up to six cohorts of RSE workers concurrently.
7. For the MIQ system the implication of this would include such complexities as:
  - checking in 150-170 people arriving in one group per facility every 48 hours (when our standard operating procedure is to check-in 100 people per facility at one time).
  - temperature checks for these 150-170 arrivals
  - congestion at check-in reception and nursing stations
  - moving these 150-170 people to their rooms
  - medical staff needing to conduct up to 150 COVID-19 swabs per day for the RSE workers alone over the majority of this period
  - checking out 150-170 people in one group every 48 hours (after the first 14 days); As per arrival, our usual operating limit is 100 people.

8. As the RSE group may have complex and high-demand needs these processes are more challenging, particularly if they are required more frequently, and we will need to deploy additional staff to facilities. This likely includes additional staff for security, wraparound health services, and linguistic and pastoral support.

9. Planning for these deployments requires considerable lead-time and will place additional stress on our existing staffing resource at a time when our resources are already stretched due to operating at full capacity over the holiday period. Staff fatigue for medical staff in particular is a real concern.

10. What the different timeframes practically means for MIQ is shown in table one below, including if we were to push out the MIQ completion requirements to late March rather than early or mid-March.

**Table 1: 1 March vs mid-March exit: MIQ processing rates**

Exit Date	Flight Size	Flight Frequency	Dedicated MIFs Required	Concurrent Cohorts
01 March	150-170	Every 48 hours	2-3	6
Mid- March	150-170	Every 72 Hours	1-2	4
Late March <b>(recommended)</b>	150-170	Every 96 hours	1-2	3

*Steps need to be taken now in order to guarantee a first tranche arrival by mid-January*

11. There are a number of key steps that need to be taken before the RSE workers can enter the country. Sending countries, employers and agencies will make every effort to meet these deadlines. However, it will be very challenging to put arrangements in place within the timeframe required to meet the operational demands. These steps are outlined in **Annex Two**.

12. From an MIQ perspective, in order to facilitate the arrival of the first tranche on 14 January MBIE officials need to receive details (names, flight details, originating country, lead agency point of contact) for the first RSE cohort ideally by 18 December to lock in the necessary logistical arrangements with the MIF(s) that will be handling arrivals.

13. Given recent advice received from Immigration New Zealand and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade it will be challenging to have all of the necessary approvals in place to facilitate the arrival of the first tranche of workers by mid-January.

14. Should the arrival of the first tranche of RSE workers slip, with workers not arriving until sometime in early February, then physically accommodating 2,000 RSE workers over a four week period to meet the 1 March deadline would likely not be operationally feasible, pushing us beyond our safe operational limits.<sup>1</sup>

15. Using more facilities to try and accommodate this many RSE workers over an even more compressed timeframe would also increase the displacement risk for New Zealanders over this period and for other critical workers, given wider MIQ system impacts. This is due to the amount of time it takes to empty out a facility for a cohort’s use and cleaning it afterwards.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, there are operational limits on how many people each MIF facility can safely check-in (ideally no more than 100 at a time) and the number of passengers our international airports can safely facilitate each day (roughly 450 passengers).

*We need to release any unused RSE rooms back onto MIAS for New Zealanders to book*

16. Due to high demand for rooms from returning New Zealanders in MIQ over this period as well as from other critical workers, the public-facing MIAS currently has no availability for travellers until 28 January.

17. The specific MIQ details and arrangements for RSE workers need to be finalised with sufficient lead-time to allow for any unused RSE rooms to be released back into the system<sup>2</sup> and made available online to the public in MIAS. If arrival by mid-January is not possible, we would like to release these rooms back 'online' in MIAS as soon as possible, as we have received a large number of emergency allocation requests over this period.

18. At a minimum, we would need to know four weeks out that any rooms will no longer be required so we can give enough time to people to book these rooms. We aim to maximise MIQ utilisation and it would be undesirable to have any rooms sitting vacant during this period of very high demand from returning New Zealanders.

## **Next steps**

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19. You may wish to refer this memo to the Minister of Agriculture and also the Minister of Immigration for their information.

20. We understand a public announcement will be made tomorrow morning about the RSE border class exception decision.

21. You will also shortly receive advice on the timing of the arrival of the second tranche of the Russian fishermen. There is a risk that if their arrival is delayed it could overlap with the arrival of the RSE workers.

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<sup>2</sup> Given 500 rooms are currently set aside for their use per fortnight over the mid-January to mid-March period.

## **Annexes**

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Annex One: Timeframe for RSE arrivals

Annex Two: Key steps that need to be taken before the first RSE workers can arrive

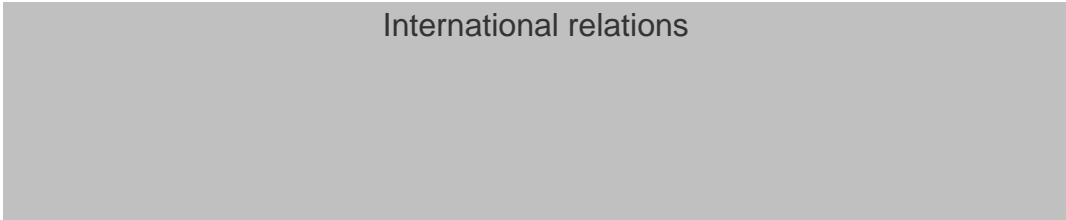


## Annex One: Timeframe for RSE arrivals

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<b>MIQ Entry/Exit dates</b>		
<b>Enter MIQ</b>	<b>Exit MIQ from</b>	<b>RSE Numbers (2,000 total)</b>
14 January	28 January	155
18 January	1 February	155
22 January	5 February	155
26 January	9 February	155
30 January	13 February	155
3 February	17 February	155
7 February	21 February	155
11 February	25 February	155
15 February	1 March	155
19 February	5 March	155
23 February	9 March	150
27 February	13 March	150
3 March	17 March	150

## Annex Two: Key steps that need to be taken before RSE workers can start arriving

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- **Pacific countries** need to agree to the repatriation requirement and stand up worker sending units
  - MFAT will only formally start discussions after Ministerial announcement and does not have current timeframes for agreement
  - MFAT is working to provide details on which countries are eligible from 5 December. Additional countries may subsequently commit to the terms of the Cabinet agreement and will therefore also be available
  -  International relations
  - 
  - 
- **Industry leads** need to agree allocation of places to regions and employers and priority sequencing of regions for the first MIQ cohorts
  - We expect this to take a week minimum at the regional level, then further time to allocate to specific employers
- **Individual employers** need to understand the conditions and agree to participate
  - Employers need to identify and recruit workers based on their allocation, eligible countries and agreements with other employers
- **Workers** need to obtain medical checks including x-rays for tuberculosis (1 week) and get visas issues (5 days pre-COVID) – this often involves travel to main centres within the their country
- **Flights** need to be arranged and sequenced to align with MIQ capacity, Pacific Island country readiness, and regional workforce priorities.