



BRIEFING

Establishing a clear process for managing Group Demands on Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ)

Date:	4 February 2021	Priority:	Medium
Security classification:		Tracking number:	2021-1728

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Chris Hipkins Minister for COVID-19 Response	Discuss this briefing with the Chair of the Border Exceptions Ministerial Group.	5 February 2021

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)				
Name	Position	Telephone		1st contact
Kara Isaac	General manager Policy, MIQ			
Privacy of natural persons	Manager, Supply & Allocations, MIQ Policy		Privacy of natural persons	✓

The following departments/agencies have been consulted
Ministry of Health, Immigration Policy, MFAT, Treasury

- 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 Withdrawn |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



BRIEFING

Establishing a clear process for managing Group Demands on Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ)

Date:	4 February 2021	Priority:	Medium
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Purpose

This paper proposes to establish a clear process for managing group requests for managed isolation spaces, with a focus on requests for manual allocation of spaces. Officials recommend that the Border Exceptions Ministerial Group be responsible for making these allocation decisions.

Executive summary

There is very high demand for managed isolation spaces and a high level of public scrutiny over any 'manual' allocation of managed isolation vouchers. It is therefore crucial for a clear and transparent process for any allocation decisions.

Most groups will be directed to secure their place in managed isolation using the managed isolation allocation system (MIAS). However, there are circumstances in which manual allocation of MIQ vouchers for group bookings may be necessary, particularly in cases where the group's entry is a high priority and its characteristics or time criticality make manual allocation necessary.

Class exception requests from groups, such as recognised seasonal employer (RSE) workers, are considered by the Border Exceptions Ministerial Group. This group determines whether the class exception should be granted, and whether the group is 'manually' allocated vouchers or required to book online using MIAS.

There is no clear ministerial process for manual group allocation decisions where the groups do not require a class exception, such as groups of critical workers or returning New Zealanders. MBIE regularly receives these requests from these groups and decisions on whether to allocate them space have been made on an ad hoc basis.

There is a need for a clear and transparent decision making process for the manual allocation of limited MIQ spaces available for groups (currently 400 per fortnight, with no availability until April).

This paper proposes that the role of the Border Exceptions Ministerial group, and the officials' process that supports this, be expanded to include consideration of all group allocation requests, regardless of their visa status. This would be a separate application process from the one used to consider class exceptions but decisions would be made by the same group of Ministers, and with similar considerations.

You may wish to discuss this proposal with the Chair of the Border Exceptions Ministerial Group. We understand the next Border Exceptions Ministerial Group will take place in mid-February.

Recommended action

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment recommends that you:

- a **Note** there continues to be high demand for managed isolation vouchers, including from groups seeking the 'manual' allocation of vouchers
Noted
- b **Note** most groups are encouraged to book online via MIAS, but in some instances the 'manual' allocation of vouchers may be required due to the nature of the group or their time critical travel needs
Noted
- c **Note** there is an established ministerial decision making process (through the Border Exceptions Ministerial Group) for groups requesting new class exceptions, which considers whether to manually allocate vouchers
Noted
- d **Note** there is currently no clear decision making process for the manual allocation of vouchers to groups that do not require class exceptions, such as groups of critical workers or returning New Zealanders, and allocation decisions for these groups have been made on an ad hoc basis
Noted
- e **Note** officials suggest the mandate of the Border Exceptions Ministerial Group be expanded to include all group manual allocation decisions, regardless of visa status, which will enable the clear and transparent prioritisation of all group requests on MIQ
Noted
- f **Discuss** the proposals in this briefing with the Chair of the Border Exceptions Ministerial Group.

Agree Disagree



Kara Isaac
General Manager Policy, MIQ, MBIE

4/02/2021



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

13 / 2 / 2021
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Demand from groups and the impact of group arrivals on MIQ

1. There is strong demand for places in managed isolation facilities, with travellers currently unable to secure any MIQ voucher online in the Managed Isolation Allocation System (MIAS).
2. Some of the demand pressure is coming from the high and growing number of groups seeking places in MIQ, many of which have high and complex needs. Some groups need bespoke arrangements that require an approved health exemption, such as larger bubble sizes or access to training facilities.
3. Room availability is just one constraint on our ability to accommodate groups. Our ability to plan and coordinate their requirements also requires considerable effort¹. Groups tend to be more resource intensive to manage, especially where a dedicated facility or individualised services are required, such as for sports teams.
4. Class exception requests from groups such as recognised seasonal employers (RSE), are considered by the Border Exceptions Ministerial Group. This group determines whether the class exception should be granted, and whether the group is 'manually' allocated vouchers or are required to book online using MIAS. To facilitate the 'manual' allocation of vouchers, officials set aside 400 rooms each fortnight for group arrivals. These rooms have now been allocated up until April and the high demand for these spaces looks to be ongoing.
5. For groups that do not require class exceptions, such as groups entering New Zealand as 'critical workers' or returning New Zealand sports teams, there is no clear decision making process for determining whether they should be 'manually' allocated vouchers. MBIE regularly receives requests from these groups. These groups can have significant demands on MIQ rooms and operations, especially if they require bespoke arrangements.

Managed Isolation Allocation System

6. MIAS is the method by which most migrants, including groups of migrants, can access the MIQ system. Bookings in managed isolation are assigned to travellers through an efficient automated process, which is relatively simple to administer. It is also fair and transparent, with vouchers being assigned to travellers on a 'first-come first-served' basis.
7. Legal professional privilege

Legal professional privilege For this reason MBIE considers that manual booking processes should be used sparingly and only where use of MIAS is impractical. MIAS should be the default mechanism by which all travellers access places in MIQ.

Prioritisation of group demands on MIQ

8. Given the high demand from groups, MBIE proposes that the role of the Border Exceptions Ministerial Group (Ministerial Group) and the supporting Senior Officials Group be expanded to include prioritisation across all group demands for MIQ space and resources, regardless of immigration status.
9. There are some group demands on MIQ capacity that the Ministerial Group currently does not have visibility of, or are decided via separate Ministerial processes. These include:
 - Groups with pre-existing immigration approvals (e.g. groups on the major events lists, such as the Americas Cup and various sports teams);
 - Groups of New Zealanders seeking to return home (such as returning sports teams);

¹ Typically eight weeks is needed by MIQ to plan for a large group's arrival – see **Annex 2** for more detail.

- Groups that qualify for entry through the current critical worker definitions (a recent example of this is the Disney film production crew approved for entry into New Zealand for film Season 2 of *The Wilds*); and
 - Other groups that relate to international commitments or a government approved programme, such as the Antarctic Programme or the Refugee Quota.
 - Charter flights.
10. While border entry decisions are an important part of managing the flow of incoming arrivals, the key constraint is MIQ capacity and resources to accommodate groups. MBIE therefore proposes that manual allocation of MIQ vouchers for groups be prioritised by the Ministerial Group, supported by the Senior Officials Group. MBIE will provide analysis and advice to support the prioritisation process.
11. The broadened group prioritisation process will enable trade-offs between different sectors or industries to be made more clearly. Group booking requests that offer limited benefits and which are inconsistent with Government priorities would be filtered out by officials. These groups have the option of booking through MIAS.

Proposed decision making process

12. Class exceptions and group arrivals through MIQ require similar types of considerations. We propose therefore that similar decision-making processes are used to assess both types of applications. However, the two application processes would be distinct and would operate in parallel.
13. MBIE proposes the following steps for deciding group arrival requests. It is envisaged that this process would take a minimum of eight weeks:
- i. **A sponsoring government agency submits a request to MBIE:** Groups would be required to approach the relevant agency (eg, Ministry of Education for student groups) to request support for their application for MIQ assistance. After a prioritisation process of their sector requests, agencies would either submit a class exception request² or a group request for MIQ assistance to MBIE for groups they are willing to sponsor. A group request asks for space in MIQ to be manually allocated to a specific group and/or for bespoke MIQ arrangements. MBIE would only accept proposals from government agencies that are supported by the relevant portfolio minister.
 - ii. **Initial assessment by the Ministry of Health and MBIE-MIQ:** The proposal would undergo an initial high-level risk assessment to identify public health or MIQ operational risks and would also be assessed against group criteria, see Table 1 below. In order to meet the threshold for MIQ assistance, groups would need to demonstrate that their entry aligns with a stated government priority and that they need to complete MIQ as a single unit by a certain date. Proposals that are high risk or that cannot be accommodated within MIQ resources would be rejected at this point. Rejected applicants would be encouraged to use MIAS to secure their place in MIQ, if feasible.
 - iii. **Applications considered by Senior Officials Group:** Group proposals that pose an acceptable level of risk would be referred to the Border Exceptions Senior Officials Group. The Senior Officials Group would prioritise applications based on Government priorities, the pipeline of known group arrivals already in the system, any new class exceptions being considered, and MIQ capacity constraints. They will then prepare advice and recommendations for Ministers.

² MBIE has recently provided you with separate advice on class exceptions.

- iv. **Border Exceptions Ministerial Group:** Ministers would make final decisions on which groups should be prioritised for available MIQ space and resources.
- v. **Implementation:** If prioritised by the Ministerial Group, the sponsoring agency would be informed and directed to make contact with the Prioritisation and Group Arrivals Team in MIQ. At this stage, once the group request has been approved, the agency would be directed at the appropriate time to the Ministry of Health to formally apply for a health exemption for any bespoke arrangements or services that are required while the group is in MIQ.

14. The proposed end-to-end process for considering group requests is outlined in the flow diagram in **Annex 1**. This process is not suitable for short-term or immediate demands on MIQ, as at the very least it takes eight weeks to complete. Criteria for assessing group requests is detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Group criteria to determine if a group meets the threshold for MIQ assistance

Criterion	Explanation	Examples
Government Priority <i>[Mandatory]</i>	Group's entry is beneficial for implementing stated government priorities	RSE workers, deep sea fishing crew, shearers, refugees, Antarctic workers
Time sensitive <i>[Mandatory]</i>	Group's entry is time-critical with the group needing to be in New Zealand by a specific date or for a specific period and there is limited or no room availability in MIAS	RSE workers, shearers, sports teams
Entry as single unit <i>[Mandatory]</i>	Group needs to complete its isolation as a single unit and cannot perform its function if members do not arrive together.	Sports teams, performing artists
Plus at least one of the following factors would also need to apply:		
Additional Needs <i>[Key consideration]</i>	Group has needs or characteristics (e.g. cultural, linguistic, high profile, training, high health needs/risk) that require the provision of specific resources or wraparound services, for example, non-English speakers	Deep sea fishing crew, RSE workers, refugees, sports teams
Size/Scale <i>[Key consideration]</i>	Due to the size of the group, or the number arriving at once (e.g. via charter flight), manual allocation would be more efficient for MIQ	RSE workers, deep sea fishing crew, Antarctic workers

Next steps

- 15. You may wish to discuss this paper with the Chair of the Border Exceptions Ministerial Group. Depending on your feedback on the paper, MBIE will provide you with further advice on implementation.
- 16. It may be necessary for Cabinet to agree to the extended role for the Ministerial Group. Depending on your response to the paper, MBIE can provide you with advice to support an oral item to Cabinet.

Communications

17. If you and the chair of the Border Exceptions Ministerial group support the proposed process, we will communicate the process to relevant portfolio agencies. This will include reiterating that spaces in MIQ are extremely tight and applications for group entry will only be considered if the group's entry provides significant benefits to New Zealand. Low priority groups, including returning New Zealanders, will be directed to use MIAS.
18. The MBIE website will direct groups seeking a group allocation for managed isolation to their portfolio agencies in the first instance.

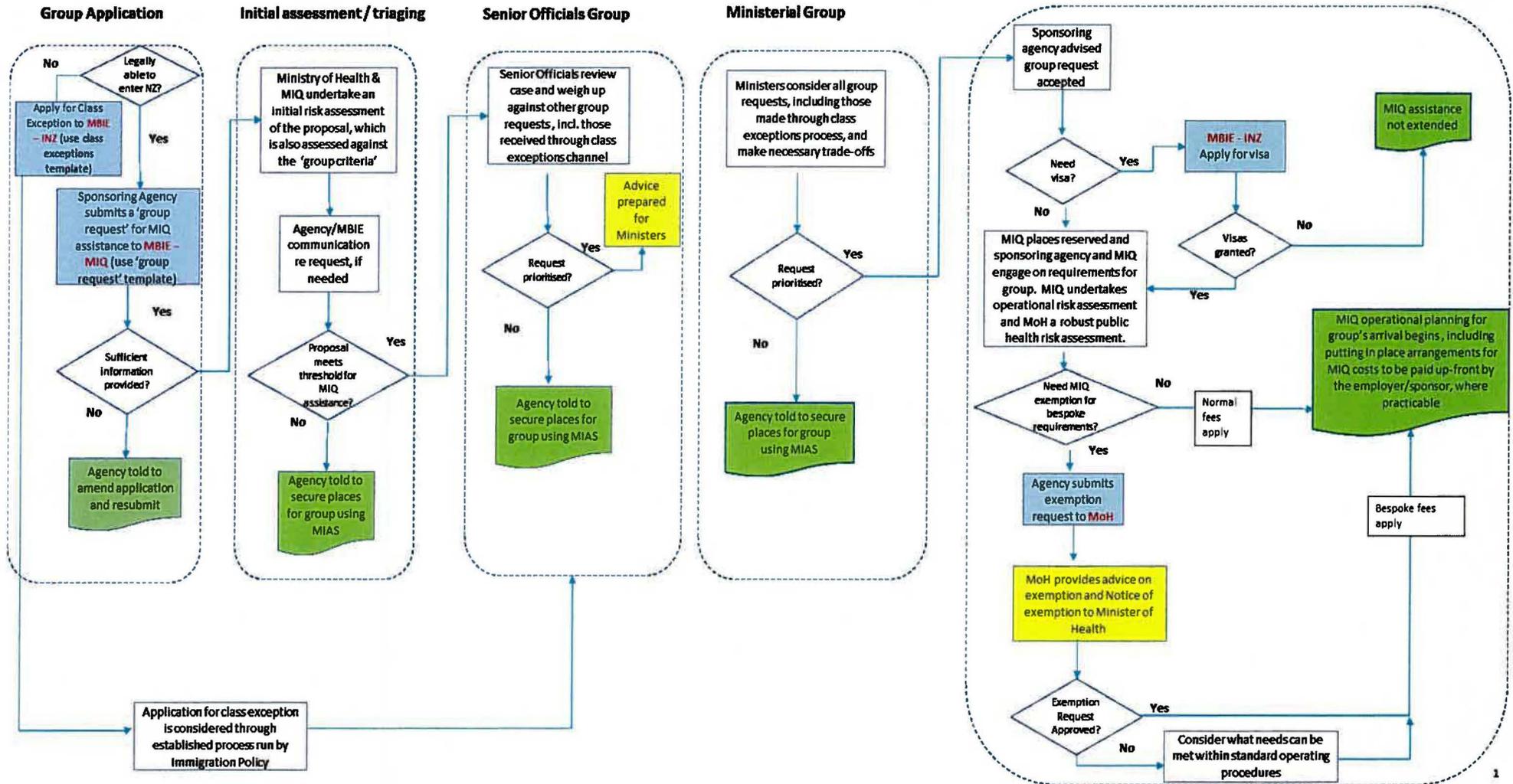
Annexes

Annex One: End-to-End Process for Considering Group Requests

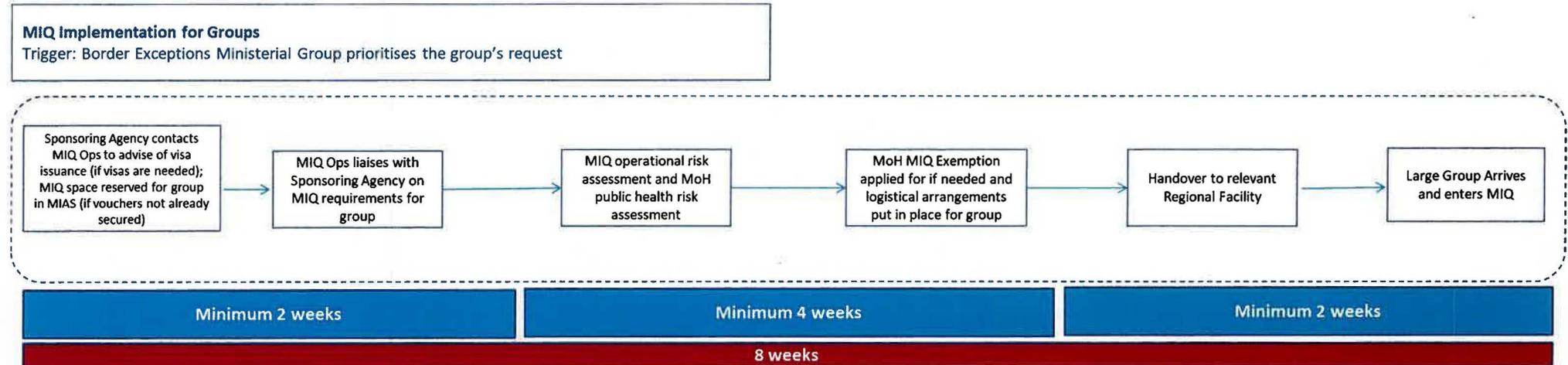
Annex Two: Group Arrivals: Planning time horizons needed for MIQ

Annex 1: End-to-End Process for Considering Group Requests for MIQ Assistance

Implementation



Annex 2: Group Arrivals: Planning time horizons needed for implementation phase³



³ It may be necessary to compress this timeframe in some circumstances