



BRIEFING

Allocating places in MIQ at short notice for economic and cultural purposes

Date:	22 January 2021	Priority:	Urgent
Security classification:		Tracking number:	2021-2075

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Chris Hipkins Minister for COVID-19 Response	Agree to MIQ allocating vouchers to The Wiggles musical group and crew, and five staff required for upcoming Summer of Cricket events, using rooms currently set aside for contingencies.	25 January 2021

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)				
Name	Position	Telephone	1st contact	
Megan Main	Deputy Secretary, MIQ	Privacy of natural persons		✓
Privacy of natural persons	Policy Director, MIQ Policy			
	Policy Advisor, MIQ Policy			

The following departments/agencies have been consulted

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 Withdrawn |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

Allocating places in MIQ at short notice for economic and cultural purposes

Date:	22 January 2021	Priority:	Urgent
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Purpose

To provide advice on allocating MIQ vouchers to prevent disruption to large events.

Recommended action

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

- a **Note** your office has asked that MIQ officials provide advice on pragmatic options for managing a small allocation, separate to the emergency allocation process, which could enable groups or individuals to secure places in MIQ where their inability to secure vouchers on MIAS (for time-specific economic and/or cultural travel) could cause large scale disruption. *Noted*
- b **Note** the only process currently available for allocating places in MIQ when none are available on MIAS is the emergency allocation process. *Noted*
- c **Note** two groups (The Wiggles and broadcasting staff associated with the Summer of Cricket) are not eligible for an emergency allocation under the current emergency allocation criteria, nor would they be eligible under the revised criteria officials proposed in a briefing sent to your office on 23 December 2020 [2021-1866 refers]. *Noted*
- d **Note** officials do not recommend broadening emergency allocation criteria for groups like these, as this would:
- i. take places away from other eligible applicants with more urgent need
 - ii. set a precedent incentivising other groups to use emergency allocations as a backdoor into MIQ, when they could have secured a voucher online through MIAS with some forward planning
 - iii. likely result in high numbers of eligible applications that cannot all be accommodated within capacity, creating prioritisation difficulties. *Noted*
- e **Note** there have been other examples where individuals or groups are seeking time-critical or time-specific (but not emergency) travel for significant economic and/or cultural purposes for dates when no vouchers are available on MIAS, which suggests there could be merit in creating an additional allocation process. *Noted*

f **Note** this separate process could be set up as an option of last resort when the need is time-critical travel for significant economic and/or cultural purposes, when no vouchers are available online, by ring-fencing a small number of rooms on MIAS.

Noted

g **Note** this new process would require a decision-making framework where either:

- i. Ministers decide which groups or individuals to accommodate at their discretion, or
- ii. Officials allocate places from this allocation on a first in first served basis.

Noted

h **Note** officials will report back to you with more detail on if and how this new process could be implemented on 5 February 2020.

Noted

i **Note** that as an interim measure to accommodate people who would likely be eligible under the new allocation process, MIQ could allocate rooms currently set aside to manage emergencies such as if a facility needs to be evacuated.

Noted

j **Note** allocating rooms set aside for contingencies will require increasing the current risk tolerance, as there will be less rooms available in the event that one or more facilities need to be evacuated or a large community outbreak occurs.

Noted

k **Agree** as an interim approach that MIQ allocate vouchers for rooms currently set aside to manage emergencies to:

i. The Wiggles musical group and crew

Agree Disagree

ii. Five staff required to support the upcoming Summer of Cricket events.

Agree Disagree

l

Free and frank opinions

Noted



Megan Main
Deputy Secretary
Managed Isolation and Quarantine Unit, MBIE

22 / 1 / 2021

The two requests in K should be able to be accommodated due to space opening up as a result of 1-way travel from the Cook Islands.



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

26 / 1 / 21

Background

1. Your office has directed MIQ officials to provide advice on how to accommodate critical workers who need to enter New Zealand within a particular timeframe when managed isolation space is limited ('time-specific travel'), and the impact of their not being able to enter New Zealand could create significant disruption.
2. Two immediate examples of these types of group have been identified:
 - a. 'The Wiggles' musical group and crew are looking to secure places in MIQ in time for their New Zealand tour in March. The tour will consist of 25 shows in 10 regional centres, and the tour promoter has indicated around 40,000 tickets have already been sold.
 - b. Five staff critical to deliver requirements and broadcast coverage for Summer of Cricket events need to enter New Zealand in early February.
3. While current 'offline' allocation processes do not allow for such allocations, there is an option to create a new process to facilitate time-specific travel, where limited places are available for the required travel dates on MIAS, that will result in significant economic or cultural benefits to New Zealand.
4. This paper:
 - a. sets out the gap in current offline allocation processes (e.g. Emergency Allocations) for time-specific travel
 - b. suggests a new allocation process to address this gap
 - c. provides an interim solution to address immediate and specific demands
 - d. highlights the risks of introducing the proposed approach.

Current offline allocation processes

5. Currently, MIQ has two processes in place for allocating MIQ places 'offline' (i.e. where travellers do not or cannot book vouchers on MIAS):
 - a. **Group arrivals** – MIQ officials manually allocate vouchers to groups who are eligible to enter New Zealand where it would be impractical to require travellers to book individually (e.g. RSE workers, international mariners). These allocations are made well in advance of the group arrival and requires considerable advance planning.
 - b. **Emergency Allocations** – where no vouchers are available online, MIQ can allocate vouchers to facilitate urgent, time-critical travel for applicants who meet a list of public-facing criteria. Around 150 rooms are made available per fortnight for emergency allocations.
6. These processes do not provide for situations where travel is time-specific (but not 'emergency'), and people require certainty with more lead-in time than the emergency allocation process provides (people must be willing to travel within seven days). In some of these cases, there are considerable economic and or cultural justifications for the travel.
7. Officials previously provided you with advice on expanding the emergency allocation criteria to account for broader circumstances where urgent travel is required [briefing 2021-1866 refers]. This followed Cabinet's direction on 16 December to increase the rooms available for emergency allocations to 250 per fortnight from late January [CBC-20-MIN-0141 refers].

8. While these expanded criteria would apply to some situations of time-specific travel where there are considerable economic or public health benefits for New Zealand, we do not consider they would apply to many other time-specific cases, such as The Wiggles' tour or broadcasters for key sporting events.
9. Furthermore, there are additional compelling reasons not to use the emergency allocation process for time-specific (but non-emergency) travel, including that it would:
 - a. take places away from other eligible applicants with more urgent need
 - b. set a precedent incentivising other groups to use emergency allocations as a backdoor into MIQ, when they could have secured a voucher online through MIAS with some forward planning
 - c. likely result in high numbers of eligible applications that cannot all be accommodated within capacity, creating prioritisation difficulties.
10. In addition, this would not align with current public messaging. For example, the MIQ website states that emergency allocations do not account for "economic activity such as commercial or business activity". Using the emergency allocation process to support broader ranges of time-specific travel would seriously risk undermining public trust in the MIQ allocation process.

Proposed approach

11. While current offline allocation processes are not fit-for-purpose to use for time-specific travel by critical workers, officials consider there is a potentially viable option to consider.

A separate process could be set up to enable time-critical travel for significant economic and/or cultural purposes, when no vouchers are available online

12. MIQ officials could ring-fence a small number (e.g. 20) rooms on MIAS and set these aside for offline allocations.
13. This would either reduce the number of rooms available to the general public on MIAS, or reduce the rooms available for group arrivals (currently 400 rooms per fortnight are held back from MIAS to allocate to groups).
14. While this would provide an avenue for people who 'fall through the cracks' of existing offline allocation processes, there would still need to be a mechanism in place to prioritise applicants. We suggest this would be done by either:
 - a. Ministers' direction, either by directly agreeing to issue places to a group and / or by agreeing to a set of prioritisation criteria, OR
 - b. allocating places on a first in first served basis.
15. We expect the new process would be for time-specific travel by critical workers, where there is a significant economic or cultural benefit to New Zealand, and where no MIAS vouchers are available on the required dates.
16. Deciding the number of rooms to ring-fence for this process would require a trade-off between the need to make places available for all who could be eligible, and the risk of reducing the places available for other eligible travellers, including New Zealanders.

We propose an interim measure of allocating rooms from the contingency

17. There are currently around 444 MIQ rooms set aside for an emergency contingency (this number varies slightly from day to day, depending on a number of operational factors). Situations where these rooms may currently be used include:
 - a. evacuating floors of a facility due to water or other damage, as has occurred in some facilities recently
 - b. evacuation of one or more MIQ facilities due to fire or earthquake
18. As much as possible, MIQ officials aim to avoid using contingency rooms as this increases the level of risk if something were to go wrong. However, these rooms are empty and usable if Ministers are willing to accept a higher level of risk.
19. The main benefit of using the contingency for the purposes outlined is that no potentially eligible traveller under the emergency allocation process would be displaced from MIQ.
20. Should you wish to accommodate The Wiggles and the cricket broadcasting group, we recommend using a limited number of rooms from this contingency.
21. We would not recommend using the contingency to support an allocation process for time-specific travel on an ongoing basis.

Practical implications and risks

22. This approach is likely to:
 - a. prove difficult to operationalise in the short – medium term due to the ‘hands-on’ work required to allocate places offline for each individual traveller. There is a risk that MIQ will take on the role of planning private individuals’ travel rather than requiring travellers themselves to do this, and this is resource intensive.
 - b. create a precedent for future events, whether or not the new process is implemented (thereby incentivising other travellers to avoid booking a place in advance via MIAS).
 - c.

Free and frank opinions
23.

Legal professional privilege

Next steps

24. We will provide you with further advice on the new allocation process, including implementation and risks, on 5 February.
25. Should you agree to the recommendation in this paper, officials will allocate MIAS vouchers to the 18 members and crew of The Wiggles and the five cricket staff for their required dates of travel.
26. If needed, we can provide talking points and communications messaging to support any public announcements early next week.