



BRIEFING

MIQ capacity and group allocation requests

Date:	11 March 2021	Priority:	High
Security classification:		Tracking number:	2021-2435

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Chris Hipkins Minister for COVID-19 Response	<p>Note the Border Exceptions Ministerial Group is scheduled to meet next week</p> <p>Note the high demand for MIQ spaces and constraints on group allocation capacity</p> <p>Recommend group allocation requests for the NZDF, Antarctic Programme and post-Olympic travel be approved by the Border Exceptions Ministerial Group</p> <p>Direct officials whether to consider cohorting of international students for a group allocation request</p> <p>Refer this a copy of this briefing to the Minister of Immigration</p>	15 March 2021

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)			
Name	Position	Telephone	1st contact
Privacy of natural persons	Manager, MIQ Allocation and Supply	Privacy of natural persons	✓
Privacy of natural persons	Senior advisor, MIQ Allocation and Supply	Privacy of natural persons	

The following departments/agencies have been consulted
Ministry of Education (education-specific text only), MFAT (Pacific travel text only), Immigration policy

Minister's office to complete:

Approved

Declined

Noted

Needs change

Seen

Overtaken by Events

See Minister's Notes

Withdrawn

Comments



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Purpose

To provide you with information in advance of the Border Exceptions Ministers' Group on:

- Demand for MIQ spaces and MIQ capacity constraints
- Group allocation requests being made to the Border Exception Ministers' Group
- Problems securing MIQ space that previously granted class exceptions are experiencing

Executive summary

Demand for MIQ spaces remains high and is likely to remain so for the medium term. All MIAS vouchers release online have been fully booked until mid-June, and it is likely that the rest of June and July (the current period available) will book out in the next few days. International students and essential travellers to the Pacific, both groups previously granted border exceptions, are struggling to enter New Zealand because of this demand.

There are currently 400 rooms set aside per fortnight for group allocations. Requests for group allocations exceed the number of rooms set aside for this purpose, which will require Ministers to make trade-offs in determining which groups should be assigned space from this allocation.

A number of proposals for group allocation requests are going to the Border Exceptions Ministers' Group for consideration. One request (for pre-Olympics travel) does not meet the group allocation criteria and we do not recommend assigning these travellers spaces from the group allocation.

The other three requests do meet the criteria, but due to the number of people wishing to enter MIQ in August and September, scaling and staggering of cohorts will be needed to facilitate the entry of the returning Olympians and the first cohorts of the US and Italian Antarctic programmes.

Recommended action

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

- a **Note** the Border Exceptions Ministerial Group is scheduled to meet next week to discuss a number of border exceptions and group allocation requests.

Noted

- b **Note** demand for MIQ spaces continues to significantly outstrip capacity, and that this is not expected to change in the short term.

Noted

- c **Note** due to high MIQ demand and unavailability of vouchers online in MIAS, groups previously granted class exceptions are struggling to enter New Zealand

Noted

- d **Note** the group allocation process is not designed to facilitate the travel of individuals, but can accommodate cohorts travelling together

Noted

Release of unused group vouchers

- e **Note** the allocation of group places to groups should always be weighed up against the benefit of releasing them onto MIAS to allow New Zealanders to come home.

Noted

- f **Note** any group places that are still unallocated for April will be released onto MIAS after the meeting of the Border Exceptions Ministerial Group.

Noted

- g **Note** going forward MBIE intends to release any unallocated group vouchers into MIAS from the 'groups' allocation, if these places are still unassigned six weeks prior to their assigned date

Noted

New group allocations

New Zealand Defence Force

- h **Note** the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) are seeking a group allocation for 45 people to arrive on 4 June

Noted

- i **Note** this is not a complex group request and does not require a border exception.

Noted

- j **Note** there is capacity in the group allocation on the date requested.

Noted

- k **Recommend** to the Border Exceptions Ministerial Group that officials to assign the NZDF spaces for this request from the group allocation.

Agree/disagree

US and Italian Antarctic Programme

- l **Note** a group allocation is being sought for 1,300 US and Italian Antarctic personnel to travel to Antarctica via New Zealand between August 2021 and February 2022, and the first cohort of 150 people is seeking to arrive in early August.

Noted

- m **Note** New Zealand has obligations under international law to facilitate the travel of Antarctic personnel.

Noted

- n **Note** this is a complex group request due to the size of the cohorts and demand it would place on managed isolation facilities.

Noted

- o **Note** there are a number of demands on the group allocation in August and September and that prioritisation or staggering of groups may be necessary.

Noted

p **Note** this is not the full extent of the demand on MIQ related to travel to Antarctica during the austral summer. MBIE expects to receive separate group allocation requests to facilitate the South Korean and Australian Antarctic programmes as well, though these numbers are expected to be smaller.

Noted

q **Recommend** to the Border Exceptions Ministerial Group that officials to assign space for the Antarctic Programme from the group allocation, subject to a discussion on scaling and staggering of cohorts.

Further advice on phasing as discussed.

~~Agree/disagree~~

r **Recommend** to the Border Exceptions Ministerial Group that exact numbers and timing of this group are subject to final approval by you, based on MIQ operational advice.

Agree/disagree

Pre-Olympics travel

s **Note** a group allocation is being sought for 157 Olympians and Paralympians to take part in pre-Olympics qualifying events between May and July.

Noted

t **Note** a related request for 41 spaces for pre-Olympics travel in March and April was granted [2021-2573 refers].

Noted

u **Note** this is a complex request as the travellers have bespoke MIQ requirements, there is limited certainty about dates of travel, and travellers are not arriving as a cohort, but rather as multiple small groups (many less than 5 people) or as individuals from multiple locations and on different flights

Noted

v **Recommend** to the Border Exceptions Ministerial Group that officials ~~do not~~ assign space from the group allocation to this request.

Agree/disagree

Post-Olympics travel

w **Note** a group allocation is being sought for 500-600 Olympians and 100 Paralympians to facilitate their return from the Tokyo Summer Olympics/Paralympics in August and September.

Noted

x **Note** this is a complex group request due to the size of groups and uncertainty around dates of travel, with the likelihood that the athletes and support staff will be arriving on 2-3 chartered or commercial flights.

Noted

y **Note** there are a number of demands on the group allocation in August and September and that prioritisation or staggering of groups may be necessary.

Noted

z **Recommend** to the Border Exceptions Ministerial Group that officials assign space for the return of Olympic/Paralympic athletes and essential support staff, subject to a discussion on scaling and staggering of cohorts.

Further advice .

~~Agree/disagree~~

aa **Recommend** to the Border Exceptions Ministerial Group that exact numbers and timing of this group are subject to final approval by you, based on MIQ operational advice.

Agree/disagree

Update on previous class exceptions

International students

bb **Note** the Border Exceptions Ministerial Group granted a class exception to 1000 international students to enter New Zealand from April 2020.

Noted

cc **Note** the students were expected to use MIAS to secure MIQ places as at the time of this decision, demand for MIAS places was not as high as at present.

Noted

dd **Note** with current high level of demand for MIQ spaces, it is unlikely the majority of the international students will be able to secure MIAS vouchers and enter New Zealand in time for trimester 2.

Noted

ee **Note** if the students are unable to enter, the Ministry of Education has advised that there is likely be to reputational and financial ramifications for education providers.

Noted

ff **Direct** officials to either:

i. Continue to expect students to secure MIAS vouchers

Agree/Disagree

ii. Explore the possibility of students entering New Zealand in cohorts via the group allocation process

Not at this stage but this could be a possibility in future.

Agree/Disagree

Essential travel to the Pacific

gg **Note** Cabinet granted a border exception for essential travel for citizens of Tonga and Samoa through New Zealand;

Noted

hh **Note** the Border Exceptions Ministerial Group granted a class exception for essential travel to and from New Zealand and the Cook Islands; Niue; Tokelau; Tonga; or Samoa to allow 100 travellers entry to New Zealand over six months [2021-0950 refers].

Noted

ii **Note** these travellers were expected to use MIAS to secure MIQ places as at the time of decision, demand for MIAS places was not as high as at present.

Noted

jj **Note** Polynesian countries have raised concerns that travellers under these border exceptions have struggled to enter New Zealand, International relations

International relations

Noted

kk **Note** a number of these travellers are likely to be eligible for travel under the time sensitive work travel allocation currently being developed [2021-1991 refers].

Noted



Kara Isaac
General Manager, MIQ Policy
MIQ, MBIE

11, 3, 21
..... / /



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

6, 4, 21
..... / /

MIQ Capacity Update

MIQ continues to operate at near-full capacity

1. There remains strong demand for places in our managed isolation facilities with MIAS fully booked online until mid-June. Following the announcement of a voucher release on 5 March, the MIAS website received 1 million page views in a 12 hour period. All slots released were booked within four hours. June and July spaces were released on 9 March and have been filling rapidly. As of writing, more than 11,000 people have secured a place in MIQ for June and July, with more than 8,000 rooms having been allocated. Most of this demand is from returning New Zealanders who continue to make up the majority of MIQ bookings (70% of arrivals over the last three months).
2. The large volume of emergency allocation applications that MBIE has received since MIAS was implemented (2156 applications between 30 October 2020 and 14 February 2021) is also a sign of this strong demand. From 1 April, 350 rooms will be available for emergency allocations.
3. Demand for MIQ from groups and critical workers also remains strong but 'lumpy' (eg., there is not a 'steady flow'). Sports teams continue to make up a high proportion of incoming groups, and often require additional planning, support and staff to facilitate safely due to their training requirements which fall outside the normal provision of MIQ services. This raises issues with the equitable distribution of 'group allocation' spaces as other sectors continue to face challenges accessing critical workers.
4. The unavailability of spaces in MIAS to book means that many New Zealanders are currently needing to wait more than three months to receive a place in managed isolation. Legal professional privilege

Legal professional privilege
5. MBIE expects further capacity reductions will be caused by changes to cohorting and necessary planned hotel maintenance, over the next six months. This may extend the wait times for New Zealanders trying to secure a place in managed isolation even further.

Allocations for complex groups are resource intensive

6. While some groups have minimal additional impact on MIQ due to having no additional requirements over standard MIQ, experience managing large complex groups such as the Russian fishermen, the RSE workers, and various sports teams has put significant stress on MIFs and relevant DHBs. The staggering of these groups allowed processes to be improved between each cohort, but even when group allocations went smoothly, they posed difficulties to the system.
7. Additional services complex group allocations may require include:
 - a. MIQ Operational engagement to meet with sponsoring agency, establish group needs, accommodate flight or name changes, brief Managed Isolation Facilities (MIFs) etc
 - b. Higher levels of wrap-around support while at a MIF including pastoral care, nutritional needs, medical care, facilitation of training both on and off-site, and ad hoc requests
 - c. Higher levels of compliance monitoring/enforcement to ensure groups are abiding by the terms of their health exception (where applicable)
 - d. 'Wasted'/'dead' rooms where necessary to separate groups from other returnees

This results in significantly greater demands on an already stretched health, security and logistics workforce while the complex group is in the MIF.

8. Notwithstanding the above, group allocations are at times the most efficient way of achieving government priorities. However, group allocations should always be balanced against the alternative of releasing additional spaces onto MIAS, allowing New Zealanders and critical workers to enter the country in a less resource-intensive way.

Potential upcoming pressures on MIQ

9. The number of agreed and proposed groups seeking to enter MIQ over the next quarter risks exceeding MIQ operational capacity. These include:
 - a. 70 refugees every 8 weeks [confirmed]
 - b. 157 New Zealand Olympians and Paralympians leaving and re-entering the country for Olympic qualifying events. These groups have requested bespoke MIQ arrangements to allow them to continue training while in isolation [for consideration]
 - c. 600-700 New Zealand Olympians and Paralympians returning from the Tokyo Summer Olympics from mid-August onward [for consideration]
 - d. 1300 US and Italian Antarctic Programme critical workers for the summer 2021 season. The first cohort of 150 would arrive early August, followed by a second cohort of 250 in mid-September [for consideration]
 - e. Travel for the Dubai Expo. Travel from August onwards, precise dates and numbers still uncertain [unconfirmed]
 - f. Winter Games in late August and Crankworx mountain bike competition in early November. Precise dates and numbers still uncertain [unconfirmed]
 - g. A potential proposal to bring in additional RSE workers between April and August. Precise dates and numbers still uncertain, but likely to be around 3000 [unconfirmed]
10. Unless some of these proposals are deprioritised or have their arrival staggered over a much longer timeframe, in August/September MIQ will likely exceed its safe operating limits and officials will be required to take a considerable number of MIAS vouchers 'offline' from the general pool available to New Zealanders to book and to use these spaces for group allocations.
Legal professional privilege
Legal professional privilege We do not recommend either of these options and suggest that Ministers seek to prioritise across group requests.

Group Proposals

New Zealand Defence Force

11. The NZDF have requested a group allocation to allow the return of 45 personnel following a deployment in Japan. The request meets the criteria for a group allocation.
12. Travellers will be arriving on a military aircraft. This allows more flexibility in which MIF they enter as they can travel directly to a location outside of Auckland. In addition, the NZDF has not requested any bespoke arrangements, and travellers are likely to have a high level of compliance with MIQ requirements.
13. There is capacity to accommodate this request on the date required and it is a straightforward group to accommodate.

14. The NZDF are working to prepare a summary of all of their travel over the next year to feed into our pipeline of group demands on MIQ. This will be put to Ministers at a later date.

US and Italian Antarctic Programmes

15. The Antarctic Programme is a government approved programme. Cabinet has previously agreed a border exception category for Antarctic personnel to complete MIQ in New Zealand before travelling to Antarctica.
16. Around 1,300 arrivals from the US and Italian Antarctic programmes are requesting entry between August 2021 and February 2022. The first cohort of 150 is planned for early August, followed by a second cohort of 250 in mid-September. Most cohorts will be arriving by military charter flights.
17. The request meets the criteria for a group allocation and does not require bespoke arrangements. However, the size of it and the number of cohorts to manage makes it a complex group request.
18. In particular, the first two cohorts are seeking to enter MIQ at a time when there are a number of other demands on the MIQ group allocation. It may not be possible accommodate all of the groups inside the 400 rooms currently set aside for the group allocation.
19. Staggering the arrival of the August and September cohorts or reducing their size needs to be considered to ensure vouchers do not need to be drawn down from MIAS, reducing the availability of MIQ space for New Zealanders coming home over this period.
20. Separate group allocation requests will be submitted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade for the South Korean and Australian National Antarctic Programmes, once there is greater clarity around numbers and proposed cohort entry dates.

Pre-Olympics travel

21. The Tokyo Summer Olympics and Paralympics have been identified as a key sporting priority for New Zealand and the government has invested in the Olympics and Paralympics campaign. In preparation for the Olympics, a number of New Zealand athletes need to leave New Zealand for qualifying events and essential preparation.
22. Places from the group allocation were assigned to 41 Olympic travellers between late March and end May [2021-2573 refers]. This has now reduced to 19 travellers due to event cancellations. Sport New Zealand is seeking a further group allocation to facilitate pre-Olympics travel for an additional 157 athletes between May and July.
23. This request does not meet the group allocation criteria and would pose significant difficulties for operational staff due to:
 - a. The uncertainty of arrival dates
 - b. The small size of arrival groups (many of less than five people) and some as individuals), with athletes arriving from multiple locations on different flights and on different dates, rather than as cohorts on charters arriving together.
 - c. The requests for bespoke MIQ and in-room training equipment
24. Assigning places in managed isolation to those willingly leaving New Zealand, above those seeking to return home who are 'stuck' overseas, may be negatively perceived and impact MIQ's social licence.
25. There is an additional risk of setting a precedent if the group allocation is used to facilitate the arrival of individuals or small groups which do not meet the established criteria. The new 'groups' allocation pathway was not designed or set up to facilitate individual travellers.

Group vouchers are only issued when it is more operationally efficient or practical for MBIE to do so. This does not apply when travellers are arriving individually or in very small groups from multiple locations on different dates.

Post-Olympics travel

26. In addition to pre-Olympics travel, Sports New Zealand have requested a group allocation for Olympians and Paralympians returning from the Tokyo Summer Olympics and Paralympics. This will involve the entry of 500-600 Olympians over August and 100 Paralympians in September.
27. This is a complex group request given the size of the cohorts and the uncertainty around dates. The exact dates of travel may not be finalised until very soon beforehand as it depends on how long athletes stay in Olympic competition for.
28. Unlike the pre-Olympics travel request, athletes will travel back to New Zealand in cohorts, likely on two-three charters or commercial flights, and there is some ability to stagger their entry, making this request more operationally feasible.
29. As noted with the Antarctic Programme request above, capacity is likely to be strained over August and September and staggering or scaling of groups will be necessary to accommodate them all within the group allocation.

Entry of previously granted border exceptions

International students - Ministry of Education comment

30. A class exception was granted for up to 1,000 international students to enter New Zealand from April 2020. The intention behind this was to ensure students would be able to resume their studies at the latest by semester two which starts mid-July.
31. Students are expected to use MIAS to secure their MIQ space. Due to high levels of demand, universities are reporting concern that students will struggle to secure MIAS vouchers. If students are unable to arrive in time for semester two their study for 2021 may be delayed further and they are likely to need to consider if they will have to defer till 2022 or not complete their study. This may in turn lead to students requiring fee refunds and students being unable to gain a qualification that they have already invested a great deal in.
32. Providers need clarity as to when the students will be able to enter MIQ, as they need to identify and nominate eligible students, and some providers may not be able to accommodate some students if they are unable to restart their studies at the beginning of semester two. Some providers also need lead in time to be able to re-organise courses. Having reasonable clarity around availability of places for students in MIQ would greatly assist providers in their planning, and enable a much better experience for students.

33. **International relations**

MIQ comment

34. At present, there is no alternative avenue to MIAS for this cohort if these students are arranging their own travel and arriving individually, rather than in groups. MIQ Operations is not resourced to manually allocate MIQ spaces to 1000 individual travellers.

35. Alternative solutions may be possible. Groups of students arriving together as cohorts rather than as individuals may be eligible to be manually allocated space in MIQ and issued a group voucher through the group allocation pathway. MIQ officials seek Ministers' direction on whether this option should be explored in more detail and with education providers. This may, for example, involve an education provider organising dedicated charter flights to bring in a couple of large cohorts of students prior to July.

Essential travel to the Pacific

36. A border exception was granted for essential travel to and between New Zealand and the Cook Islands; Niue; Samoa; Tokelau; or Tonga the Pacific in September 2020 [2021-0950 refers] allowing 100 travellers entry under this exception from November 2020. These travellers were to source their own MIQ places by booking using MIAS. This category supplemented the pre-existing border exception for citizens of Tonga and Samoa to travel through New Zealand for an essential reason.

37. When the border exceptions were granted, there was generally still space available to book through MIAS. However, the high demand for spaces we have seen since December 2020 has meant that travellers under this border exception have struggled to secure MIQ spaces.

38. New Zealand posts in Polynesia have received representations that nominated travellers have been unable to enter New Zealand due to the scarcity of vouchers. This is causing delay in the travel of essential workers to the Pacific

International relations

International relations

39. Because travellers under these border exceptions generally travel as individuals rather than cohorts, they are not suitable for manual allocation of spaces from the group allocation. However, the time-sensitive work travel allocation currently under development [2021-1991 refers] will include travel to the Pacific in its criteria. This may be the best pathway for assisting work travellers under this border exception to secure places in MIQ. Individuals that need to travel for repatriation, non-urgent medical care or for an essential reason other than work will still face difficulties.

Next steps

40. Use the contents of this briefing to inform discussion around MIQ capacity and group requests at the Border Exceptions Ministerial Group.