



BRIEFING

Wider implications on MIQ of New South Wales returnees

Date:	13 July 2021	Priority:	Urgent
Security classification:		Tracking number:	NSW-004 [2122-0115]

Action sought

	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Chris Hipkins Minister for COVID-19 Response	<p>Agree that the 20 percent quota for managed return flights for urgent or exceptional cases only apply to people who left New Zealand prior to 11.59pm, 22 June 2021 with a discretion to consider cases for people who left New Zealand after 22 June.</p> <p>Agree in principle, that MIQ capacity for any further managed return flights from New South Wales after 25 July be reduced to approximately 500-550 rooms a fortnight to enable a sustainable response.</p> <p>Note that this will enable MIQ to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proceed with previously scheduled ventilation at the Four Points Auckland; • Ensure it has sufficient capacity for a growing number of unexpected arrivals; and • Release a small number of MIAs vouchers for August and September 	14 July 2021

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)

Name	Position	Telephone	1st contact
Kara Isaac	General Manager, MIQ Policy	Privacy of natural persons	✓
Privacy of natural persons	Senior Policy Advisor		

The following departments/agencies have been consulted

Ministry of Health, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet have been informed.

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Withdrawn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 update you on the impact on Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ) of the New South Wales, Australia (NSW) managed return and seek your direction that:

- following the first tranche of 1,000 rooms, after 25 July, MIQ allocation for NSW returnees is reduced to approximately 500-550 rooms a fortnight to support a sustainable response
- the 20 percent quota for managed return flights for urgent or exceptional cases only apply to people who left New Zealand prior to 11.59pm, 22 June 2021 with a discretion to consider cases for people who left New Zealand after 22 June.

Recommended action

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

- a **Note** that the MIQ response for NSW returnees was scaled up quickly and 1,000 rooms a fortnight is not sustainable beyond July.

Noted

- b **Agree** in principle that MIQ capacity for any further managed return flights from NSW after 25 July be reduced to approximately 500-550 rooms a fortnight to support a sustainable response.

Agree/Disagree

- c **Note** that this will enable MIQ to:

- proceed with previously scheduled ventilation remediation at the Four Points Auckland;
- ensure we have sufficient capacity for a growing number of unexpected arrivals; and
- release a small number of MIAS vouchers for August and September

Noted

- d **Note** the emerging issues and increasing numbers of “unexpected arrivals” from multiple sources that may compromise MIQ’s ability to deliver on the 1,000 rooms for NSW managed returnees if they continue to grow;

Noted

- e **Note** that MIQ is reviewing capacity for the fortnight from 29 July and will report back to you with further details about capacity and a proposed plan for the next phase of the managed return by Friday 16 July.

Noted

f **Agree** that the 20 percent quota for managed return flights for urgent or exceptional cases only apply to people who left New Zealand prior to 11.59pm, 22 June 2021 with a discretion to consider cases for people who left New Zealand after 22 June.

Agree Disagree

g **Agree** to defer the report back on the operation and impact of the Quarantine-Free Travel (QFT) reserve of 500 rooms two months after the implementation of the Trans-Tasman QFT [CAB-21-MIN-0081 refers] until September.

Agree Disagree

h **Agree** to proactively release this briefing with appropriate redactions consistent with the Official Information Act 1982.

Agree Disagree



Kara Isaac
General Manager, MIQ Policy
Managed Isolation and Quarantine, MBIE

13.7.21



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

15 / 7 / 2021

Background

1. We previously advised you on 10 July of some of the impacts on MIQ from managing the return of people from NSW, including: delayed ventilation remediation for the Four Points Hotel, loss of room contingency for any other emergency situations; and withholding the release of the remaining Managed Isolation Allocation System (MIAS) vouchers for August [MBIE briefing NSW-002 refers].
2. We also advised you further on a number of other risks on 11 July including: the increasing volume of unplanned admissions/border averters, and MIQ workforce impacts such as requiring cancelling planned leave [MBIE briefing NSW-003 refers]. We also signalled that we may need to drop back to the 500-room QFT reserve following the first two weeks of this emergency response.
3. So far, there have been a high volume of calls and strong demand for the flights available through Air New Zealand and Qantas, including people arriving at Sydney Airport without tickets trying to get flights. We understand that the initial Air New Zealand flights for NSW returnees have sold out, while Qantas is proactively managing bookings and expect to fill their capacity. Both airlines are also expecting high demand for flights for the following fortnight.

Implications on MIQ beyond two weeks

4. The current response for NSW returnees was scaled up quickly and is not sustainable at current levels beyond July, in part due to the large and complex groups arriving at the end of July/early August that will consume a significant amount of resource (in particular 600 returning Olympians and support staff).
5. If MIQ is required to allocate 1,000 rooms for NSW returnees beyond two weeks, there will be enduring impacts and increased risks of failure in the MIQ system.
6. The earliest that MIQ will be able to accept a new tranche of NSW managed returns will be Thursday 29 July. This takes into account that the first arrivals (due today) will depart MIQ on Tuesday 27 July and that two days is required to clean and prepare rooms for the next returnees.

Impacts on MIQ capacity

7. Allocating 1,000 rooms for managed returns from NSW over the next fortnight puts a strain on our emergency contingency and our ability to respond to other outbreaks or emergencies.
8. We currently have approximately 400 rooms as emergency contingency but this capacity is influenced by a number of factors and risks that may reduce overall MIQ capacity and our ability to meet the 1,000-room allocation for the managed return. There are also emerging factors absorbing capacity that were not known last week. Factors include:
 - a. a surge in unexpected admissions into MIFs due to not meeting QFT pre-requisites (i.e. border averters). As at 7.30am on 13 July there are 60 people that have been placed into a MIF for 14 days due to not meeting QFT pre-requisites, e.g. unable to provide correct proof of a pre-departure test or having been in NSW before travelling to New Zealand via a different port on a QFT flight. This number is continuing to grow;
 - b. unexpected arrivals from non-QFT countries: for example 10 travellers recently arrived from India, having boarded a flight in Serbia, with hardcopy MIAS vouchers, even though their vouchers had been cancelled in our system. This number may continue to grow ; and

- c. MIFs being unavailable due to a fire or other emergency.
- 9. While previously these figures would have ordinarily been able to be absorbed into MIQ contingency, this contingency is now operating on a very thin margin. Any increase in border averters or unexpected arrivals from other sources may compromise our ability to provide the 1,000 rooms for NSW returnees.

There are growing complaints about the lack of vouchers for people in other parts of the work

- 10. There is ongoing very high demand for MIAS vouchers, which is likely to increase leading into the summer season.
- 11. There was a large increase in complaints for the week 6-12 July with 311 complaints received. The increase was driven mainly by 248 complaints about MIAS – 228 about being unable to book and 15 about technical queries or issues. MIAS cases represented about 80% of all complaints received this week.
- 12. While we have scheduled upcoming releases for vouchers for October and November, reducing the NSW managed returns allocation will enable us to release a small number of vouchers for August and September for New Zealanders or critical workers seeking to come to New Zealand from other parts of the world.

We need to continue with the ventilation remediation programme of work

- 13. We previously advised you that the scheduled maintenance, including ventilation remediation at the Four Points Auckland would need to be delayed to accommodate NSW returnees and that careful management to reduce intra-Managed Isolation Facility (MIF) transmission would be needed [MBIE briefing NSW-002 10 July refers]. Increased demand on facility capacity will defer other maintenance and ventilation remediation works (as with Four Points) and will also affect our ability to address other public health concerns arising from ventilation findings.

Impacts on the workforce

- 14. We previously advised you that scaling up capacity in the system within this compressed timeframe and at short notice has a range of workforce implications, including: increased pressure on Auckland health teams due to ongoing staff attrition issues; additional demands on Police and security teams due to predicted increases in breaches and non-compliant behaviour; and staff needing to cancel planned leave to provide capacity [MBIE briefing NSW-003 11 July refers]. While the MIQ workforce is experienced in dealing with short turn-arounds and a changing environment, we expect there to be some additional challenges and complexity for the NSW returnees in this situation.
- 15. We previously advised you that prior to the Australian travel bubble being implemented, travellers from Australia were the leading cause of disruptive and/or non-compliant behaviour [MBIE briefing NSW-003 11 July refers]. We can expect to see increases in infection, prevention and control (IPC) breaches and non-compliant behaviour. In order to maintain cohorting as much as possible, there may be restrictions around access to fresh air, exercise and smoking times. These measures are likely to negatively affect the 'customer experience' leading to increased frustration and challenging behaviour with impacts for our workforce including the need for increased security and Police.
- 16. There have been high call volumes to the Immigration Contact Centre (ICC) MIQ and to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) call centre. There were over 1,000 calls during the first two hours of the MFAT call centre opening on 12 July, and staff processed 628 calls and emails. In addition to high volumes, the main challenge is the type and nature of the calls. ICC have advised that staff are facing considerable well-being issues after facing calls with travellers who are abusive, distressed, and desperate.

17. We also know that MIQ workers already often face stigma and discrimination from their communities or providers of health, education and welfare services due to their work at MIQ. With potentially negative public perceptions of this border settings change, we will need to monitor any flow-on impact on our workers. Our #treatmefairly reporting system went live last week, which provides a mechanism for our staff to report instances where they have been treated unfairly or discriminated against, and we will ensure we are reminding all MIQ workers of the support they can receive if they face these sorts of challenges.
18. If the NSW response extends beyond two weeks, it will impact other areas of the MIQ system, such as managing group arrivals which are more resource intensive for our workforce. In the coming weeks, large groups from the United States Antarctica Program (around 200-300 people) will start to arrive from 16 July and around 600 returning Olympic athletes will arrive from 2 August.

Health workforce impacts

19. As well as the broader workforce impacts above, there may be specific challenges with maintaining health staffing at the levels required to manage the first tranche of NSW returnees. As previously advised, the Ministry of Health is actively working to alleviate some of the pressure on the Auckland MIQ health workforce and is investigating the possibility of using nurses from other District Health Boards to carry out health checks remotely [MBIE briefing NSW-003 11 July refers].
20. Christchurch has a plan in place for the next week – but has indicated there may be issues with border screening if there are extra flights since the border team is drawn from the MIQ workforce (in Auckland border screening is carried out by a dedicated team). This means there is a limited pool of health workers to draw on in Christchurch.
21. Another potential issue for the health workforce is the fact that some NSW returnees may have high health and welfare support needs but MIQ facilities will not be aware of those needs in advance as they would if returnees had booked through MIAS, and provided that information.

We recommend reducing NSW intake to 500 rooms beyond the initial two weeks

22. If managed returns from NSW continue beyond this first initial tranche, we recommend that MIQ capacity for returnees be reduced to approximately 500-550 rooms a fortnight. This would be more sustainable and is consistent with previous messaging on QFT contingency (although noting that this would not leave room for any Cook Islands QFT contingency if needed).
23. We expect that reducing to approximately 500-550 rooms a fortnight would allow us to:
 - a. proceed with previously scheduled ventilation remediation at the Four Points Auckland;
 - b. ensure we have sufficient capacity for a growing number of unexpected arrivals; and
 - c. release a small number of MIAS vouchers for August and September.
24. We considered whether we could increase overall MIQ capacity by commissioning another hotel, however due to the continued constraints on the workforce, as well as the time (three to four months) and cost required to set up a new facility, it would not be ready in time to respond to the demand from the NSW managed return.

25. We will continue to review capacity for the fortnight beginning 29 July and will report back to you with further details about capacity and a proposed plan for the next phase of the managed return by Friday 16 July.

Prioritising quota for urgent or exceptional circumstances

26. As per a discussion with your office, we are seeing significant demand for the 20 percent quota for managed return flights for urgent and exceptional cases.
27. You previously agreed broad criteria for this quota [MBIE briefing NSW-002 10 July refers].
28. While we initially did not propose prioritisation within this quota, we consider that, given significant demand, there is rationale for prioritising people that travelled to Sydney from New Zealand before the lockdown and restrictions came into force at 11.59pm on 22 June.
29. In order to manage demand, we seek your agreement that the 20 percent quota for managed return flights for urgent or exceptional cases only apply to people who left New Zealand prior to 11.59pm, 22 June 2021 with a discretion to consider cases for people who left New Zealand after 22 June.
30. The reasons for this are:
- a. people who travelled to Sydney after that were likely to know they were travelling into a rapidly deteriorating situation;
 - b. it reasonable to prioritise people who travelled to Sydney before the lockdown and restrictions came into effect; and
 - c. some people who travelled to Sydney from 23 June had a genuine need to do so and also have an urgent need to return, so some discretion should be allowed.
31. Currently there is significant demand for these spaces, if demand should soften then we will reconsider removing this requirement.

Iwi engagement

For those iwi with MIQ facilities located within their rohe, there are a range of potential areas of interest related to the managed return flights from NSW. We do not anticipate that there are any substantial impacts related to the operationalisation of the return flights, but there is likely to be interest in settings which impact on the return of tangata whenua, such as criteria for accessing the urgent or exceptional cases quota. We intend to engage with these iwi shortly to understand any particular areas of interest they have in relation to these flights.

Next steps

32. We will continue to monitor the situation and will report back on Friday 16 July on the implementation of the managed return flights.
33. Cabinet noted on 22 March that MIQ would review and report back to you after two months of the Trans-Tasman QFT on the operation and impact of the QFT reserve of 500 rooms [CAB-21-MIN-0081 refers]. Given current events, we propose revisiting this report-back in September and, at this time, consider options for the use of this reserve.