



BRIEFING

Update on MIQ capacity and management of impacts from cohorting

Date:	14 July 2021	Priority:	Medium
Security classification:		Tracking number:	2021-4417

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Chris Hipkins Minister for COVID-19 Response	<p>Note that the implementation phase of cohorting has seen a higher than predicted impact on capacity.</p> <p>Note that MIQ will employ strategies to reduce this impact over time, such as applying some unoccupied rooms towards MIQ's contingency when a facility is unable to be completely filled by a cohort.</p> <p>Note that, following the NSW managed return, MIQ will release small numbers of additional vouchers targeted to certain locations when this can increase utilisation of rooms that would otherwise go unoccupied due to cohorting.</p> <p>Agree to a decision-making framework for any further cohorting exemptions or suspensions.</p>	21 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	Manager, Allocation and Supply, MIQ Policy		

The following departments/agencies have been consulted
Ministry of Health; DPMC has been informed

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 Withdrawn |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

Update on MIQ capacity and management of impacts from cohorting

Date:	14 July 2021	Priority:	Medium
Security classification:		Tracking number:	2021-3697

Purpose

This briefing provides you an update on the implementation of cohorting, and informs you:

- about the impact of cohorting on capacity since its implementation, and expected trends over time
- that MIQ intends to increase utilisation of rooms that would otherwise go unoccupied due to cohorting by releasing small numbers of additional vouchers targeted to certain flights
- when a facility is unable to be completely filled by a cohort, some of the unoccupied rooms will be applied towards MIQ's contingency.

The briefing also seeks your agreement to a decision-making framework for any exemptions or suspensions from cohorting.

Recommended action

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

- a **Note** that cohorting has been well received by much of the MIQ workforce, but is posing major challenges for the health workforce in particular.

Noted

- b **Note** that this will be discussed in the Ministry of Health's end-of-July Health Workforce Update, and a full review of cohorting will be undertaken in September 2021 and reported to you by the end of October 2021.

Noted

Managing capacity impacts

- c **Note** that cohorting resulted in 15-20% of otherwise available rooms going unused during its implementation phase.

Noted

- d **Note** that MIQ will employ strategies to reduce this impact over time, such as applying some unoccupied rooms towards MIQ's contingency when a facility is unable to be completely filled by a cohort.

Noted

- e **Note** that MIQ will release small numbers of additional vouchers targeted to certain flights when this can increase returnee numbers by utilising rooms that would otherwise go unoccupied due to cohorting.

Noted

Confirming current exemptions to cohorting

f **Agree** to continue exempting the following groups from cohorting [2021-3379 refers]:

Exempted group	Current relevant facilities
Aircrew	M Social Chateau on the Park
Mariners	Novotel Auckland Airport Rydges Rototura Commodore
Transits	Novotel Auckland Airport
Returnees with complex medical needs	Waipuna
Refugees	Holiday Inn Auckland Airport
Diplomats	SO
Unaccompanied minors	
Sports teams with bespoke requirements	Chateau on the Park (plus others as required)
Those entering quarantine	Dedicated and dual-use quarantine facilities (Wellington and Christchurch)

Agree / disagree

g **Note** that all other returnees in facilities accommodating special exempted groups are still subject to 96-hour cohorting windows, and that these returnees are kept separate from exempted groups through measures such as separately scheduled time for fresh air/exercise.

Noted

Proposed decision-making framework for further exemptions

h **Note** that urgently accessing a large portion of operational contingency in the event of an emergency or unexpected event requires cohorting to be at least partially suspended.

Noted

- i **Agree** to the following decision-making framework for further cohorting exemptions or suspensions:

Situation	Decision-making level
System-level cohorting exemptions	Minister for COVID-19 Response
Operational response to specific events/incidents Returnees/bubbles with higher public health risk	Joint Head of MIQ, Deputy Secretary, or Associate DCE of MIQ, in consultation with Medical Officer of Health/Ministry of Health (or delegate)
Individual returnee or bubble and lower public health risk	Regional coordination centre (RIQ) in consultation with Medical Officer of Health

Agree / disagree

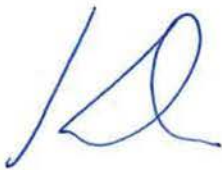
- j **Note** that MIQ will work with the Ministry of Health and public health officials on whether any additional risk mitigations are required for cohorting exemptions or suspensions.

Noted

Proactive release

- k **Agree** that this briefing is proactively released with appropriate withholdings under the Official Information Act 1982.

Agree / Disagree



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

14 / 7 / 21



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

16 / 7 / 21

Background

1. In April 2021, you directed MIQ to transition to cohorting arrivals [2021-3193 refers]. Cohorting has now been implemented in all facilities, outside of specified exceptions (see paragraph 25) and temporary suspensions to support managed return flights from New South Wales (NSW) [NSW-003 refers].
2. Cohorting involves MIFs only receiving returnees who have arrived in New Zealand within up to 96 hours of each other (potentially from multiple flights and origins). Facilities then stop accepting returnees until the cohort have completed their 14-day stay and the facility is cleaned. The 96-hour cohorting window was a compromise – 48-72 hours would be preferable from a public health perspective, but can be challenging from a logistical perspective. MIQ still aims to fill facilities in shorter windows where possible.
3. Cohorting is strongly supported by public health officials as it decreases the risk of in-facility transmission from returnees at the start of their stay to returnees towards the end of their stay. This significantly decreases the risk of an undetected COVID-19 positive returnee being released into the community.

Officials will provide further advice on the wider impacts of cohorting

4. Cohorting has been well received by much of the MIQ workforce, but is also posing challenges, especially for the health workforce.
5. Cohorting results in workload 'peaks' for staff. 'Surge' workforce capacity is required to test larger numbers of returnees on particular days of a cohort – sometime at short notice – as compared to the previous model where returnees arrived at a facility throughout a fourteen-day period.
6. The MIQ Facility (MIQF) dedicated health workforce policy requires a stand down period of at least 48 hours for staff to move from quarantine facilities (or dual-use quarantine and isolation facilities) to isolation facilities, reducing workforce ability to respond to 'surge' requirements.
7. It has also been difficult for the workforce to adjust to working across several different facilities depending on demand.
8. The Ministry of Health will provide further details about these challenges in their Health Workforce Update at the end of July 2021.
9. A full review of cohorting will be undertaken in September 2021 and the findings reported to you by the end of October 2021.

Cohorting has reduced MIQ room availability by 15-20% in the implementation phase

10. Cohorting has been in place for less than 2 months – a relatively short time for a major operational change to be embedded.
11. During that time, cohorting has resulted in approximately 15-20%¹ of otherwise available rooms going unused (600-850 rooms at recent levels of capacity). Some rooms sit empty during a facility's 'fill' and 'empty' periods, and any room that is not occupied by the end of a

¹ This number was higher in the initial weeks of adjustment to cohorting and is trending towards 15% over the coming weeks.

facility's 'fill' period sits unoccupied until the next cohort arrives 14-18 days later. A graphic demonstrating how cohorting impacts capacity is attached as **Annex One**.

12. Filling up a facility is challenging due to variable flight loads, 'no shows', and flight schedules outside of MIQ's control. This has varied day-to-day, depending on how well flight loads and schedules align with facilities available to be filled – a chart demonstrating this variability is attached as **Annex Two**.
13. Initial inefficiencies were partially a result of low demand during April and May 2021 (fewer people on flights makes it harder to 'fill' facilities), and unpredictable demand from travellers from Very High Risk countries.
14. The table below provides an overview of MIQ capacity, as at 5 July 2021 (i.e. before the announcement that MIQ would support the NSW managed return). A graphical overview is attached as **Annex Three**.

Overview of MIQ capacity (as at 5 July 2021)	
Total number of rooms contracted for MIQ	~6,200
..excluding ~900 rooms used for operational purposes such as worker accommodation, quarantine, aircrew/maritime short-stays	~5,300
...rooms currently offline for maintenance or remediation – historically up to 1,000, currently ~500	~4,300-5,300 allocable rooms <i>Currently ~4,800</i>
... operational contingency of 400 and QFT reserve of 500	~3,400-4,400 rooms allocated <i>Currently ~3,900</i>
...up to 20% rooms unoccupied due to cohorting	~2,700-3,500 rooms occupied <i>Currently ~3,100</i>
...~500 rooms for groups, 350 for emergency allocations, and 100 for time sensitive travel	~1,700-2,700 vouchers released for booking on MIAS <i>Currently ~2,200</i>

Proposals to manage capacity impacts of cohorting

15. MIQ is experiencing increased demand pressure for spaces in MIQ, particularly on MIAS. While there was significant availability of MIAS vouchers following the introduction of QFT through until May 2021, MIQ has been running at full capacity since early July 2021, and no vouchers are currently available online. When vouchers are released, they are being rapidly booked – 3,317 vouchers released on 7 July were fully booked within 2 hours. While there may continue to be seasonal lulls, we expect that demand will outstrip supply for much of the coming year, particularly around November-January.
16. MIQ is also likely to experience downward pressure on supply over the coming 6 months. In particular, strengthening ventilation systems across the MIQ portfolio will require some facilities to come temporarily offline and/or a permanent reduction the number of rooms able to be occupied.
17. MIQ has continually sought to learn from and fine-tune its operation, and has made significant changes to how planning and allocations are managed. This enables us to be

more confident in releasing available capacity onto MIAS to help offset these pressures. MIQ has and will continue to identify opportunities to reduce the impact of cohorting on the number of vouchers we release.

MIQ will use some unoccupied rooms from cohorting as part of operational contingency

18. MIQ currently holds 400 rooms as designated operational contingency, for situations such as accommodating returnees if a facility was evacuated. MIQ is using some of its operational contingency to support the NSW managed return; otherwise, MIQ has only rarely used meaningful portions of its operational contingency.
19. Going forward, MIQ will apply some unoccupied rooms towards MIQ's contingency when a facility is unable to be completely filled by a cohort (i.e. allowing rooms to count towards the 400). This recognises that there is less need to hold additional, separate contingency in periods where higher numbers of rooms are unoccupied due to cohorting. MIQ would not do this until the impact of the NSW managed return on overall MIQ contingency levels subsides [NSW-003 refers].

MIQ will release small numbers of additional vouchers targeted to certain flights on specific dates

20. In early July 2021, MIQ implemented a more sophisticated planning tool. This has provided greater visibility of opportunities to improve cohorting efficiency.
21. Cohorting efficiency could be improved, and more returnees accommodated, if MIQ was better able to influence numbers of people arriving on different flights. This could be achieved through releasing small numbers of additional vouchers targeted to certain locations (e.g. Christchurch) and flights. This would happen close to the arrival date once it is clear whether more space could be made available.
22. For example, there have been dates where additional returnees could be accommodated only if they arrived directly in Christchurch where rooms were available. While some returnees who arrive into Auckland are currently relocated to Wellington and Christchurch via air transfers, these can be restricted by aircraft availability, Air New Zealand scheduling requirements, or high costs for small numbers of returnees. For dates like this, MIQ will release a small number of additional vouchers and restrict MIAS bookings so that only flights arriving in Christchurch can be selected for that date. There will also be dates where maximising arrivals into Auckland, rather than Christchurch, will be desirable.
23. MIQ would seek to ensure these restrictions, and their rationale, are clearly communicated on MIAS (in particular through the Flight Checker tool). However, there is also the risk that this approach could cause frustration or confusion for returnees who don't realise that the voucher they have 'reserved' for a particular date is not applicable for all flights arriving into New Zealand.
24. MIQ intends to implement this practice once normal voucher release resumes (following the NSW managed return).

Exemptions from cohorting

Ongoing operational exemptions

25. As previously indicated [2021-3379 refers], certain categories of returnees have been exempted from cohorting for operational reasons.

Exempted group	Relevant facilities
Aircrew	M Social Chateau on the Park
Mariners	Novotel Auckland Airport Rydges Rototura Commodore
Transits	Novotel Auckland Airport
Returnees with complex medical needs	Waipuna
Refugees	Holiday Inn Auckland Airport
Diplomats	SO
Unaccompanied minors	
Sports teams with bespoke requirements	Chateau on the Park (plus others as required)
Those entering quarantine	Dedicated and dual-use quarantine facilities (Wellington and Christchurch)

26. Standard returnees in facilities accommodating special exempted groups are still subject to 96-hour cohorting windows, and are kept separate from exempted groups through measures such as separately scheduled time for fresh air/exercise and utilisation of separate corridors.
27. Wellington and Christchurch facilities have been operating as dual isolation and quarantine facilities (while otherwise applying the cohorting model). This is because a dedicated Wellington or Christchurch quarantine facility would often have very low utilisation – as of 11 July, there was 1 person quarantined in Christchurch and 0 people quarantined in Wellington – and therefore face challenges with staff retention and readiness. Additionally, there will only be one MIQF in Wellington once the Bay Plaza is decommissioned – it will have to continue operating as a dual facility for Wellington to accommodate both isolation and quarantine [2021-3641 refers].

Proposed decision-making framework for further exemptions

28. Following the implementation of cohorting, we have identified the need for a clear decision-making framework around further exemptions or suspensions to cohorting. We seek your agreement to a decision-making framework that indicates the decision-making level for different potential scenarios.
29. If there was the need to urgently access a significant portion of MIQ operational contingency, this would require cohorting to be at least partially suspended. This is because MIQ's contingency is spread throughout all its facilities, rather than being held entirely in a small

number of facilities at any one time, therefore most of the facilities would be partway through a cohorting cycle at any one time.

30. Further cohorting exemptions will be made under the following principles/guidelines:

- MIQ will endeavour to maintain cohorting wherever possible
- public health would remain the primary consideration, and any decision would be in consultation with the Medical Officer(s) of Health and/or the Ministry of Health.

31. We propose the following decision making framework:

Situation	Decision-making level	Example(s)
System-level cohorting exemptions	Minister for COVID-19 Response	Supporting unexpected red flights (e.g. emergency managed returns) Adding further ongoing exemptions to cohorting
Operational response to specific events/incidents Returnees/bubbles with higher public health risk	Joint Head of MIQ, Deputy Secretary, or Associate DCE of MIQ, in consultation with Medical Officer of Health/Ministry of Health (or delegate)	Facility or facilities evacuated due to emergency event Flight needs to be redirected due to weather or airport issues Close contact of positive case's stay exceeds 14 days because they refuse testing
Individual returnee or bubble and lower public health risk	Regional coordination centre (RIQ) in consultation with Medical Officer of Health	Individual or bubble's stay exceeds 14 days because they refuse testing QFT border averter or person subject to a Health Act Order directed into MIQ, but no local facility available at intake stage.

32. The framework recognises that:

- you should approve any system-level deviations from current cohorting policy
- in many other cases the need to exempt from cohorting will be driven by time-pressured operational circumstances, and decision-making should therefore be made at a senior level within MIQ
- it is most practical that exemptions for individual returnees or bubbles are made at the local operational level.

33. For each case where a cohorting exemption is required, MIQ would work with the Ministry of Health and public health officials around options to mitigate risk. Specific mitigations could vary depending on the facility, but could include restrictions on returnee movement (such as 'subcohorting' times for fresh air/exercise so they do not come into contact with returnees at a different point in stay) or a specific testing regime.

Next steps

34. If you agree, MIQ will implement the decision-making framework for further cohorting exemptions or suspensions immediately.
35. MIQ will begin targeting MIAS availability on certain dates to certain locations, to help improve cohorting efficiency, once normal voucher release resumes (following the NSW managed return).
36. A full review of cohorting, including enhancements discussed in this briefing, will be undertaken in September 2021 with the findings reported to you in October 2021.

Annexes

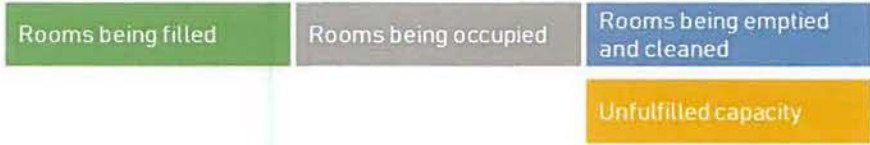
Annex One: Illustration of how cohorting impacts capacity

Annex Two: Chart showing variability in rooms unoccupied due to cohorting

Annex Three: Graphical overview of MIQ capacity

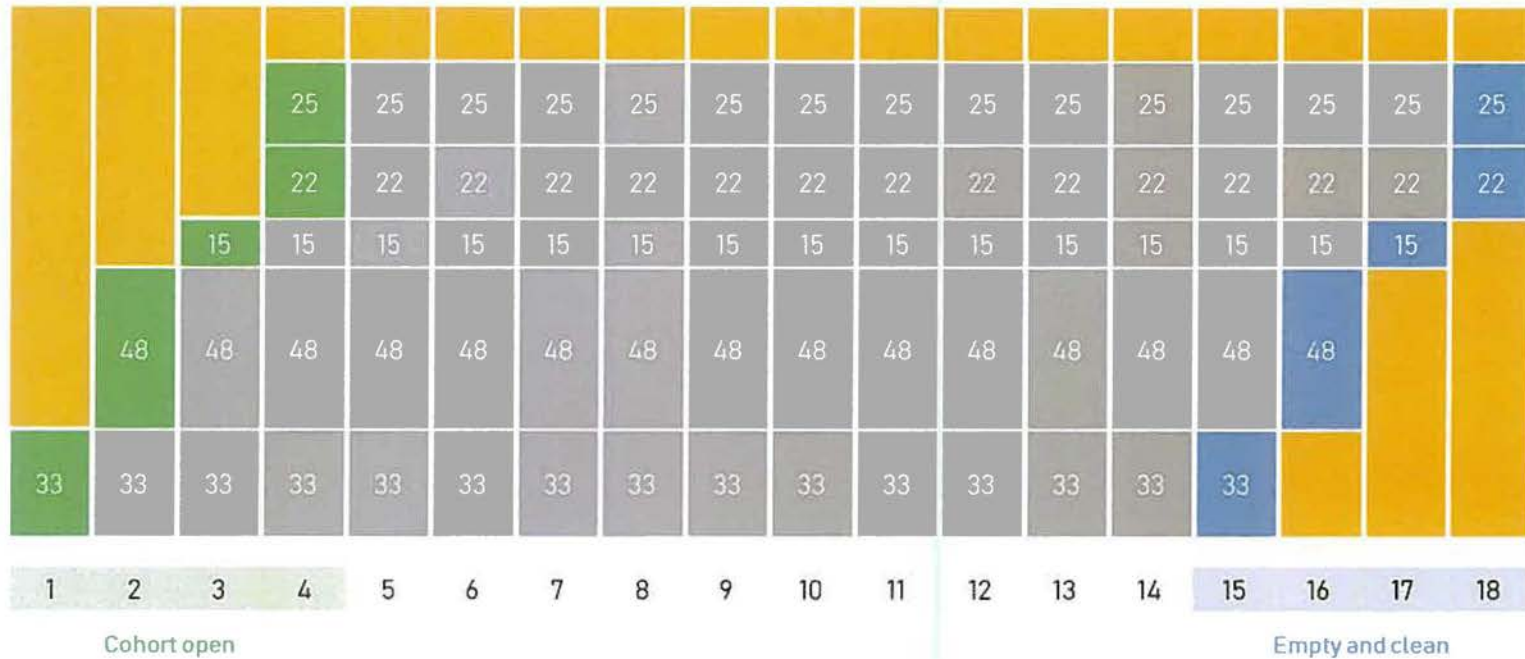
Annex One: Illustration of how cohorting impacts capacity

Unfulfilled capacity
(illustration using fictional data for one cohort)



Overall utilisation 70%

% of occupancy / utilisation (160 rooms)	21%	51%	60%	89%	89%	89%	89%	89%	89%	89%	89%	89%	89%	89%	89%	69%	39%	29%	0%
# rooms filled in MIF	33	81	96	143	143	143	143	143	143	143	143	143	143	143	143	110	62	47	0

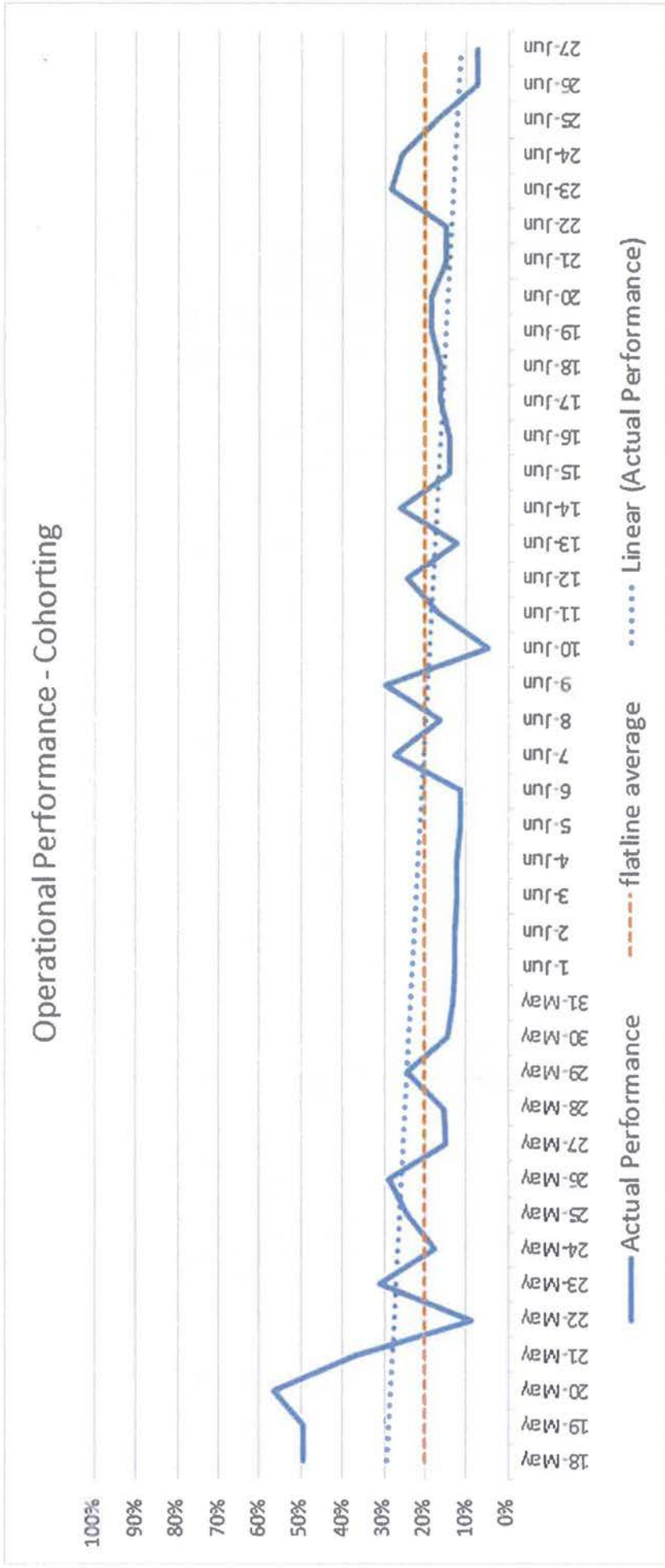


Date in July

Cohort open

Empty and clean

Annex Two: Chart showing variability in rooms unoccupied due to cohorting



Annex Three: Graphical overview of MIQ capacity

Capacity as at 5 July (figures vary day to day)

