



## BRIEFING

### Update on September red flights from Australia

<b>Date:</b>	3 September 2021	<b>Priority:</b>	Medium
<b>Security classification:</b>		<b>Tracking number:</b>	AUS-006 / 2122-0851

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Chris Hipkins <b>Minister for COVID-19 Response</b>	<p><b>Note</b> that as at 8:30am 3 September, 53 emergency and time sensitive travel allocations totalling 86 passengers have been approved for the 5 September flight from Sydney.</p> <p><b>Note</b> that you had previously agreed to release vouchers on 12 and 19 September to support red flights operating from Australia on those dates, however due to the current COVID-19 community outbreak, and other unanticipated events there is no longer MIQ capacity on these dates, and the flights will not go ahead.</p> <p><b>Note</b> that officials are aiming to proceed with a second red flight from Australia in mid-September, and this flight is likely to be on 15 September.</p> <p><b>Agree</b> that while MIAS vouchers are not being released and MIQ capacity is under continued pressure, any further September flights from Australia will continue to only be available for those with approved offline allocation vouchers.</p>	7 September 2021
Hon Kris Faafoi <b>Minister of Immigration</b>	<b>Copy</b> for your information	N/A

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

The following departments/agencies have been consulted
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Crown Law, Immigration New Zealand

Minister's office to complete:

Approved

Declined

Noted

Needs change

Seen

Overtaken by Events

**Comments**

See Minister's Notes

Withdrawn



# BRIEFING

## Update on September red flights from Australia

<b>Date:</b>	3 September 2021	<b>Priority:</b>	Medium
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### Purpose

To provide you with an update on the red flight from Australia scheduled to depart on 5 September and the planning for at least one further red flight from Australia for September.

### Recommended action

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

- a **Note** that you agreed on 28 August that while MIAS bookings are paused, the first red flight from Australia on 5 September would only be available for those with approved emergency allocation vouchers or existing offline MIAS allocations.  
*Noted*
- b **Note** that emergency allocation applications for the 5 September flight closed at 5pm on Thursday, 2 September.  
*Noted*
- c **Note** that at 8:30am 3 September, 53 offline allocations (emergency and time sensitive travel) totalling 86 passengers have been approved for the 5 September flight.  
*Noted*
- d **Note** that, as agreed by Cabinet on 23 July 2021 [CAB-21-MIN-0288 refers], the Minister of Immigration is certifying amendments to immigration instructions to enable eligible travellers in Australia (e.g. those on temporary visas) to return to New Zealand who were unable to previously return despite their best efforts and intentions to secure a flight in the green zone window.  
*Noted*
- e **Note** that these instructions were not in place by the emergency allocation application cut off for the 5 September flight, but will be for further flights in September.  
*Noted*
- f **Note** that any person captured by these changes will be eligible to apply for certain categories of emergency or time-sensitive MIQ allocations.  
*Noted*

#### *Red flights from Australia for the rest of September*

- g **Note** that you had previously agreed that MIAS vouchers be released for 12 and 19 September to support red flights operating from Australia on those dates, however due to the current COVID-19 community outbreak and other unexpected events there is no longer MIQ capacity on these dates, and flights on these dates will not go ahead.  
*Noted*

h **Note** that officials are planning to proceed with a further red flight from Australia on another date, and this flight is likely to be on Wednesday 15 September.

*Noted*

i **Note** that this date is subject to confirmation with Air New Zealand, demand for emergency allocations, and possible changes to MIQ capacity.

*Noted*

j **Agree** that while MIAS vouchers are not being released and MIQ capacity is under continued pressure, any further September flights will only be available for those with approved offline (emergency, time sensitive, group) allocation vouchers.

Agree / Disagree

k **Note** that MIQ and Air New Zealand have received feedback from a number of people who were eligible for, or had been approved, an Emergency Allocation that they had decided not to travel on the 5 September flight as they expected they would be able to return to New Zealand later in September under Quarantine Free Travel (QFT).

*Noted*

l **Note** that given the uncertainty of the current COVID-19 outbreak in New Zealand, and the pending decisions about the future of QFT with Australia, we will provide you with further advice on October flights from Australia at a later date.

*Noted*

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

Agree / Disagree



Kara Isaac  
**General Manager, MIQ Policy**  
MIQ, MBIE

3 / 09 / 2021



Hon Chris Hipkins  
**Minister for COVID-19 Response**

..8. / 09 / 2021

## Background

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1. On 15 August you agreed to end the New South Wales managed return process and recommence red flights from Australia while QFT remained suspended [AUS-003 / 2122-0450 refers].
2. Red flights from Australia had been planned for 1, 5, 12, and 19 September however the 1 September flight was subsequently cancelled due to the current outbreak of COVID-19 in New Zealand.
3. On 28 August, you agreed that while MIAS bookings are paused due to the current COVID-19 outbreak in New Zealand, the first red flight from Australia on September 5 would only be available for those with approved emergency allocation vouchers or existing offline MIAS allocations [AUS-005 / 2122-0741 refers].

## The first red flight from Australia is scheduled to depart on 5 September

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4. There is an Air New Zealand red flight scheduled to depart on 5 September from Sydney. Returnees on this flight are limited to those with emergency allocations and existing offline allocations (such as time-sensitive travel) and are required to have a valid negative pre-departure test result and the approved documentation.
5. Emergency allocation applications for the flight closed at 5pm Thursday 2 September. As at 8:30am 3 September, 49 emergency applications, 3 time sensitive travel applications and 1 construction sector accord application have been processed and approved for the 5 September flight, totalling 86 passengers all together. These applications have been passed on to Air New Zealand to liaise with passengers to confirm bookings for the flight, and there are 65 passengers currently booked on the flight. We will continue to process applications received after this date for a second emergency allocation focused flight later in September.

## The Minister of Immigration is certifying amendments to immigration instructions to enable eligible travellers in Australia to return to New Zealand

6. On 23 July 2021, Cabinet agreed [CAB-21-MIN-0288 refers] to an exception from pre-QFT settings for travellers who are 'ordinarily resident' in New Zealand but despite their best efforts and intentions could not secure a flight in the green zone window including:
  - a. holders of temporary visas and Australian citizens, who last departed New Zealand after 5 April 2021 (but before Saturday 24 July 2021);
  - b. holders of current permanent residence visas (including a resident return visa) issued by the Government of Australia who last departed New Zealand after 5 April 2021 (but before Saturday 24 July 2021); and
  - c. relevant family members of people listed in the above categories (relevant family member means: a spouse, civil union partner, or de-facto partner, a dependent child; or a parent of a dependent child (parent, in relation to a dependent child, means a person on whom the child is dependant)).
7. The Minister of Immigration is certifying amendments to immigration instructions to enable these travellers to return to New Zealand on the upcoming red flights, however the instructions were not in place by the emergency allocation application cut off for the 5 September flight but will be for any future flight.

## Decisions need to be made about further red flights from Australia for the remainder of September





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8. You had previously agreed that as part of a planned release of September and October vouchers to the release of some “QFT reserve” vouchers targeted to Australia on 12 September (175 rooms) and 19 September (105 rooms).

*The MIQ network is under immense pressure and capacity for September has changed significantly*

9. The MIQ landscape has changed significantly since these decisions were made and MIQ capacity for September is increasingly strained. MIAS voucher releases have been paused as the system responds to the current COVID-19 community outbreak in New Zealand, which continues to put pressure on and create uncertainty for the MIQ network. A number of other concurrent events including the workforce impacts of MIQ staff testing positive for COVID-19, the intake of arrivals from Afghanistan, and unplanned urgent maintenance on facilities are all contributing to an unprecedented level of stress on the system.
10. Therefore, any decisions on red flights from Australia for the remainder of September are driven by MIQ availability. Due to concurrent events there is no longer MIQ capacity for the planned red flight from Australia on 19 September. Without capacity, it is no longer feasible for this flight to go ahead.
11. While there is possibly limited capacity on 12 September, this is uncertain and there is not sufficient demand or time to approve enough passengers for a flight to be worthwhile.
12. Instead, officials will continue to explore the possibility of a flight for the period of 15-22 September, with the most likely date being 15 September where there is currently a cohort available with some capacity. However, this date is subject to confirmation with Air New Zealand, demand for emergency allocations, and possible changes to MIQ capacity. Officials will provide you with more information on this next week.

*Passengers should be limited to those who hold an emergency MIQ allocation*

13. We propose that any flights be limited to passengers who are eligible to obtain an offline (emergency, time sensitive or group) allocation, as per the 5 September flight.
14. While it could be possible to offer Air New Zealand any (limited) additional capacity to sell tickets to the general public who do not have MIAS vouchers to boost flight numbers and increase flight viability, we do not recommend this option.
15.  Legal professional privilege  
  
  
 Furthermore, it is essential that we limit non-urgent use of MIQ rooms to preserve our ability to respond to the current COVID-19 outbreak.
16. Officials will continue to coordinate with Air New Zealand on what is required for a flight in mid-late September to go ahead. Air New Zealand has continued to engage constructively to make these flights work in changing circumstances. It will be seeking certainty as soon as possible so it can revise its planning and expectations.

*Demand for further emergency allocations from Australia is unclear*

17. While we know there are people in Australia looking to return to New Zealand, the extent of demand for further emergency allocations is unclear. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade has recorded 111 consular cases in Australia involving 171 individuals who have received consular advice about sheltering in place, but phone enquiries and emails received by Posts in Australia that do not require follow-up by consular officials are not included in

these figures. Consular cases who have been advised to shelter in place are likely to have needs which become more urgent over time.

18. We have received 114 applications for emergency allocations from people wanting to travel outside of their immediate 14-day period meaning they did not meet the emergency allocation criteria and were ineligible for the 5 September flight. Some applicants submit further applications once they hit their immediate 14-day period. Travellers have been advised that we will continue to process emergency allocation applications and eligible people would be given priority on the next scheduled flight, a specific date for which has not been publicly specified.
19. You recently agreed changes to the emergency allocation criteria [2122-0651 refers]. These changes clarified category 1 to more clearly define risk to travellers' health or safety and reflect current processes, and created a third category for people who need to travel following the death of a close relative. The new criteria came into effect on 3 September. There may be a number of travellers from Australia who were not previously eligible for the 5 September flight who will have since become eligible for an emergency allocation.
20. Furthermore, there are likely to be a number of travellers holding out on making travel arrangements until further announcements on the future of QFT with Australia are made. We are aware that some New Zealanders are holding onto airline bookings for after 25 September (the end of the initial trans-Tasman bubble suspension period). These people are not actively seeking to return via an emergency allocation on the assumption that these flights will take place as scheduled. Both MIQ and Air New Zealand have also received feedback from people who were eligible for, or had an approved, emergency allocation that they had decided not to proceed with returning on the 5 September as they had decided to wait for QFT to resume in late September. There may be further eligible travellers who do not intend to make preparations to travel until decisions on QFT with Australia have been made publicly.

## October

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21. The current COVID-19 outbreak in New Zealand has caused significant capacity constraints on the MIQ system. The uncertainty surrounding the outbreak means that it is unclear what our MIQ capacity will look like in October.
22. Furthermore, pending decisions and announcements about the future of QFT with Australia mean that it is difficult to make decisions on further flight arrangements from Australia for October at this time.

### *Uncertainty around Trans-Tasman flights has an impact on the wider Pacific region*

23. The lack of Trans-Tasman red flights impacts the ability for New Zealanders to return from some locations in the Pacific. Similarly, Australians in other parts of the Pacific have also been prevented from transiting New Zealand to return to Australia. International relations

[Redacted text block]

## Next steps

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24. Officials will work with Air New Zealand on a second red flight in September, likely to be on Wednesday 15 September, and update you on this next week.
25. We will provide you with further advice on October flights from Australia later in September after the Government has publicly communicated the status of the current QFT suspension.