



BRIEFING

Managing capacity pressures by deferring group arrivals

Date:	2 September 2021	Priority:	High
Security classification:		Tracking number:	2122-0824

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Chris Hipkins Minister for COVID-19 Response	<p>Note the reduction in numbers of the refugee cohort that had been due to arrive in September</p> <p>Note the voluntary deferral of 31 fishers previously due to arrive in Auckland 14 September.</p> <p>Note that discussions will soon commence with industry on deferring the late September cohort of RSE workers until after QFT (if it has not been implemented prior)</p> <p>Note MIQ is under significant pressure but is currently able to accommodate all remaining planned border arrivals in September as long as the Crowne Plaza is back online by 9 September 2021.</p> <p>Note that if this changes then the next preferred option will be to either scale down or defer the group of 100 fishers due to arrive in Christchurch on 21 September.</p> <p>Refer this briefing to the Minister of Immigration and the Minister for Oceans and Fisheries.</p>	6 September 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 Advisor, Allocation and Supply		

The following departments/agencies have been consulted

MPI, MBIE Immigration, INZ

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Withdrawn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 inform you of steps MIQ has taken to reduce pressure on facilities by deferring some group arrivals, and advise you that no further changes to group allocations are necessary at this time.

Recommended action

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

- a **Note** based on current modelling, the peak community case occupancy of quarantine facilities will be 6-12 September, prior to the arrival of most September groups.
Noted
- b **Note** due to the community outbreak, evacuees from Afghanistan and unexpected ventilation issues at one facility, there is very little contingency space in Auckland over the month of September.
Noted
- c **Note** officials have made some changes to group arrivals that will increase the amount of contingency space available:
 - a. The refugee cohort due to arrive in September has reduced from 116 people to around 40;
 - b. 150 RSE workers with group allocations, due to arrive 10 September, have been deferred (and are anticipated to be cancelled) as negotiations are underway regarding the implementation of one-way quarantine-free travel (QFT) with Samoa;
 - c. 31 fishers with group allocations, due to arrive 15 September and enter MIQ in Auckland, have agreed to defer entry until 4 October.*Noted*
- d **Note** that discussions will soon commence between MBIE officials and industry on deferring the late September cohort of RSE workers from Vanuatu until after QFT (if it has not been implemented prior).
Noted
- e **Note** MIQ is under significant pressure but is currently able to accommodate all remaining planned border arrivals in September as long as the Crowne Plaza on back online by 9 September 2021.
Noted
- f **Note** that no further changes to group allocations for September are being progressed by officials at this time.
Noted

- g **Note** if another managed isolation facility is taken offline in September that is not currently planned for, then it is likely further steps would need to be taken to reduce the number of border arrivals.
Noted
- h **Note** cancelling group vouchers would be a part of the response to this circumstance, and officials are continuing to engage with agencies as well as preparing separate advice around possible MIAS voucher cancellation scenarios.
Noted
- i **Note** that if further deferrals of group allocations are necessary, officials recommend working with the fishing industry to further defer the arrival of fishing crews before making changes to planned Antarctic arrivals.
Noted
- j **Note** fishers undergo 14 days' self-isolation in Russia prior to coming to New Zealand, so any changes to their arrival schedules should take this into consideration.
Noted
- k **Agree** to refer this briefing to the Minister of Immigration and the Minister of Oceans and Fisheries.
 Agree / Disagree
- l **Agree** this briefing be proactively released with any appropriate withholdings under the Official Information Act 1982.
 Agree / Disagree



Kara Isaac
General Manager
MIQ Policy, MBIE

2 / 9 / 21



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

8 / 9 / 2021

Context

1. Community transmission of COVID-19 was detected in Auckland on 17 August 2021. Since the first case, there have been 611 additional cases (as at 1pm 31 August), all of which have gone into quarantine facilities in the MIQ network.
2. To provide MIQ capacity to respond to the current COVID-19 community outbreak, MIQ has implemented a range of measures to reduce pressure on the MIQ system and stand up additional quarantine capacity [briefing NZ-002/2122-0706 refers].
3. In addition to measures already implemented, you requested that officials provide further advice on whether cancelling, or deferring, large groups of overseas workers scheduled to arrive in the coming weeks could free up MIQ capacity.
4. There are two potential ways in which deferring group arrivals to reduce the number of people in MIQ could relieve pressure on the system – helping to manage the peak of demand for quarantine rooms, and helping to maintain sufficient isolation room availability in light of current demands.

Pressure on MIQ

Quarantine peak

1. MBIE are working closely with Ministry of Health to model the likely impact of the community outbreak on available MIQ quarantine capacity. Based on information available on Wednesday 1 September, officials anticipate that the peak in demand will occur between 6 September and 12 September.
2. Should the current community outbreak peak as anticipated, groups currently scheduled to arrive in September will arrive after the peak in demand for quarantine rooms, meaning that cancelling or deferring groups does not offer a potential avenue to help manage demand for quarantine rooms over this time.
3. In addition, officials have not identified any other managed isolation facilities in Auckland that can be converted to quarantine use, meaning that freeing up additional managed isolation capacity would not be advantageous for responding to community outbreak demand.

Isolation capacity

4. Freeing additional capacity could be used to help relieve pressure created by a reduction in available isolation rooms across the coming weeks. This reduction is due to two MIFs being repurposed to provide additional quarantine capacity, and another MIF being dedicated to additional short-notice arrivals such as those from Afghanistan. The result of these pressures is the unanticipated removal of over 1000 rooms from September availability in the Auckland region, placing considerable pressure on isolation capacity in the Auckland region.
5. There will be sufficient rooms to meet the demand of returnees who already hold vouchers as the Crowne Plaza is available for an incoming cohort starting on 9 September. However, there will be little to no contingency rooms in the Auckland area for the month of September. This means that if any rooms currently in use are taken out of circulation (eg due to an emergency evacuation), there would not be contingency rooms to replace them.

Groups arriving in September

6. The following table sets out the groups that were scheduled to arrive in September as agreed by Border Ministers. The majority of arrivals are **not** intended to enter MIQ in Auckland. MIQ can arrange transfer flights to Christchurch for standard returnees if groups are deferred, but

at short notice it is challenging to fill Christchurch facilities as efficiently as pre-arranged group arrivals do.

Group	Number of rooms	MIQ location	Status
Refugees	Approx. 80 (116 pax)	Auckland	Number of arrivals reduced
Construction Sector Accord	40 (45 pax)	Flexible	Proceeding – arrivals spread across the whole of September
RSE workers	232 (300 pax)	Hamilton	10 September flight deferred. Discussions about deferring 26 September flight to commence with industry shortly.
Fishers (n.b. – mix of group allocations and MIAS vouchers)	120/160	Auckland/Christchurch	31 arrivals deferred
Antarctic programme	412	Christchurch	Proceeding

7. To relieve pressure on Auckland MIQ facilities, the following actions have been taken:
 - a. The refugee arrivals have been reduced to around 40 emergency cases only;
 - b. RSE flight five, scheduled to arrive 10 Sept, has been deferred until the opening of QFT with Samoa. This frees up more rooms than the RSE workers occupy, as they have sole occupancy of two facilities with 129 rooms in total;
 - c. 31 fishers, due to enter MIQ in Auckland, have been deferred until October as agreed between MPI, MBIE and the fishing companies.
8. Deferring entry of Antarctic programme travellers will have limited benefit on the Auckland region, as they are travelling directly to Christchurch. The same applies to the majority of fishers. While MIQ could arrange transfer flights to bring standard returnees to Christchurch instead, this is a logistically complex arrangement that is unlikely to result in Christchurch capacity being as efficiently used as it would be by the planned groups.
9. The other group whose deferral would make a material difference for Auckland capacity is the RSE flight six scheduled to arrive 27 September. While they enter MIQ in Hamilton, it is much easier to move returnees from Auckland to Hamilton than it is to move them from Auckland to Christchurch. Officials will open this discussion with industry in the coming days seeking their agreement to defer the flight.
10. These changes will result in contingency space increasing in Auckland, improving the resiliency of the MIQ network over the peak occupancy September period.

Fishers with MIAS vouchers

11. Of the 120 fishers due to enter MIQ in Auckland, only 31 hold group allocation vouchers. These 31 have agreed to defer entry until October. The other 89 all hold MIAS vouchers.

12. Group allocations are granted by Ministers, which gives you more flexibility over when the groups in question enter New Zealand. However, targeting particular MIAS vouchers (eg vouchers held by fishers) could cause equity issues. In order to maintain the integrity of MIAS, we recommend any changes to MIAS vouchers are done in a systematic and equitable way. For this reason, we do not recommend deferring the 84 fishers entering Auckland on MIAS vouchers as they can currently be accommodated.
13. If further reductions to group entries are necessary, there is a group of 100 fishers due to arrive in Christchurch on 21 September that would be the next option to consider deferral.
14. As part of their COVID-19 preparations, all fishers undertake 14 days' self-isolation before their travel to New Zealand. Officials recommend any further decisions to defer arrival of fishers are taken far enough in advance so that the fishers do not enter self-isolation to no purpose.

Alternative scenario planning

15. If a managed isolation facility in Auckland needed to be suddenly and unexpectedly removed from the network for any reason (eg fire or flood), we would urgently need around 200 rooms (depending on facility). In the immediate instance the first response would be to relocate returnees to another facility or facilities with a cohort at a similar point of stay.
16. We are also preparing you separate advice on how MIAS voucher cancellations for individuals could work if needed, which you will receive later this week.

Next steps

17. We will continue to provide you with advice on MIQ capacity pressures and possible mitigations as the situation evolves.