



BRIEFING

Self Isolation Pilot Evaluation Report: Application Processes

Date:	26 November 2021	Priority:	Medium
Security classification:		Tracking number:	2122-2004

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Chris Hipkins Minister for Covid-19 Response	Note the attached evaluation report Agree to distribute to Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministerial Group	29 November 2021

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)			
Name	Position	Telephone	1st contact
Christina Sophocleous Jones	General Manager Self-Isolation Pilot	Privacy of natural persons	✓
Privacy of natural persons	Principal Advisor Policy		

The following departments/agencies have been consulted

Minister's office to complete:

Approved

Declined

Noted

Needs change

Seen

Overtaken by Events

See Minister's Notes

Withdrawn

Comments



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Self Isolation Pilot Evaluation Report: Application Processes

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Purpose

This briefing provides you with the first Evaluation report for the Self-Isolation pilot, covering the pre-travel application processes for the pilot

Recommended action

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

- a **Note** the first findings from the evaluation of the Self-Isolation pilot consider the pre-travel application processes. *Noted*

- b **Note** that we will provide two further rapid evaluation reports prior to Christmas covering the arrivals *Noted*

- c **Note** the key findings of the evaluation of application processes, which are:
 - The two-stage expression of interest and ballot successfully identified 82 participants to pilot a closely-monitored approach to self-isolation as an alternative to MIQ.
 - The strict criteria adopted for the pilot per Cabinet’s agreement, including the requirement to isolate close to the port of arrival meant that options for participation were severely limited for travellers living outside Auckland. There were few international flights scheduled into Christchurch (none from Australia and only from Singapore).
 - Streamlining and automation would be required to implement any self-isolation application process at scale if an application or pre-registration process with validation or verification of key information is a requirement.
 - Multiple agency involvement requires that information is speedily, efficiently, and securely shared to facilitate a clear self-isolation pathway for travellers. Systems for information sharing will have a determining effect on the ability of a self-isolation pathway to be rolled out at scale. *Noted*

- d **Agree** to distribute this report to the Reconnecting New Zealand Ministerial Group Agree / Disagree

- e **Agree** that this briefing will not be proactively released at this time as the Self-Isolation pilot Evaluation is still in progress Agree / Disagree



Christina Sophocleous-Jones
General Manager, Self-Isolation Pilot
MBIE

26/11/2021



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for the Covid-19 Response

3 / 12 / 21

One of the reasons for doing the pilot was to resolve solutions to findings (c) and (d). This does seem to have been a missed opportunity. CH.

Background

1. You agreed the Evaluation Plan for the Self-Isolation Pilot [2122-1778 refers]. The plan proposed that we report the evaluation in phases.
2. The first evaluation report covering the pre-travel application processes is attached (Annex one).

Key findings

3. The key findings from the early stages of the pilot are:
 - a. The two-stage Expression of Interest and ballot successfully identified 82 participants to pilot a closely-monitored approach to self-isolation as an alternative to MIQ.
 - b. The strict criteria adopted for the pilot per Cabinet's agreement, including the requirement to isolate close to the port of arrival meant that options for participation were severely limited for travellers living outside Auckland. There were few international flights scheduled into Christchurch (none from Australia and only few from Singapore).
 - c. Streamlining and automation would be required to implement any self-isolation application process at scale if an application or pre-registration process with validation or verification of key information is a requirement.
 - d. Multiple agency involvement requires that information is speedily, efficiently, and securely shared to facilitate a clear self-isolation pathway for travellers. Systems for information sharing will have a determining effect on the ability of a self-isolation pathway to be rolled out at scale.

Next Steps

4. We will report on the arrival processes, and the isolation experience before Christmas.

Annex One: Title

Draft Monitoring and Evaluation of Self-Isolation Pilot: the application process.

Monitoring and Evaluation of the Self Isolation Pilot

Stage one: Application Processes

Key findings

- The two-stage expression of interest and ballot successfully identified 82 participants to pilot a closely-monitored approach to self-isolation as an alternative to MIQ.
- The strict criteria adopted for the pilot per Cabinet's agreement, including the requirement to isolate close to the port of arrival meant that options for participation were severely limited for travellers living outside Auckland. There were few international flights scheduled into Christchurch (none from Australia and only from Singapore).
- Streamlining and automation would be required to implement any self-isolation application process at scale if an application or pre-registration process with validation or verification of key information is a requirement.
- Multiple agency involvement requires that information is speedily, efficiently, and securely shared to facilitate a clear self-isolation pathway for travellers. Systems for information sharing will have a determining effect on the ability of a self-isolation pathway to be rolled out at scale.

Background

The Self-Isolation Pilot was set up to test some of the systems and processes for isolation in the community as an alternative to managed isolation and quarantine for low to medium-risk international arrivals. This pilot is part of the Reconnecting New Zealanders work programme to allow for a phased border reopening around a risk-based system.

The pilot was approved by Cabinet on 27 September pilot [CAB-21-MIN-0386] It was agreed that the report back on the self-isolation pilot will cover:

1. The border system and processes,
2. The delivery of services in self-isolation,
3. Monitoring, compliance and enforcement,
4. The participant experience, and
5. The experience of other stakeholders

The evaluation is focussing primarily on aspects of scalability and participant experience of the components of the self-isolation pilot, which are:

1. The requirements to be met for self-isolation (e.g. plans and accommodation)
2. The process for applying and approving self-isolation
3. Management of self-isolation at the border and transport to self-isolation
4. Testing and the identification of COVID positive cases at any point.
5. Monitoring of adherence to self-isolation protocols by returnees.
6. Response to health and other critical needs during self-isolation.
7. Safe provision of essential services during self-isolation.

Scope of this report

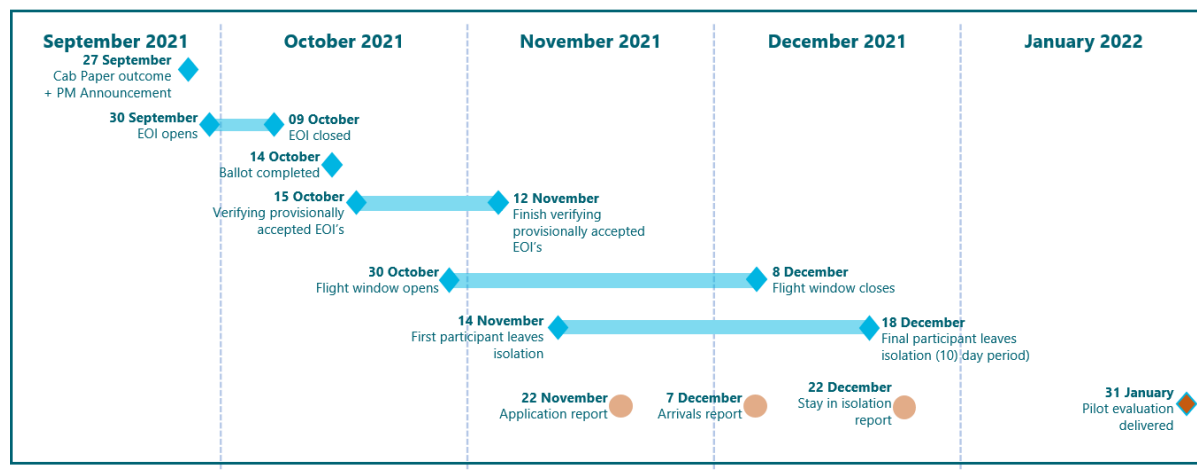
In order to ensure that insights from the pilot are able to inform policy settings for future self-isolation options in a timely way we are providing three interim reports; this first report provides insights into the application processes used to select participants in the pilot.

Approach

This report provides rapid insights into the requirements for managing applications for the pilot, including the verification of the data supplied by applicants. We draw on feedback from people who withdrew from the pilot as well as staff experience and key metrics collected through the operations.

At this point we are unable to provide a participant viewpoint, but these will be incorporated in later reports based on survey responses while in self-isolation.

Timeline and outline of processes

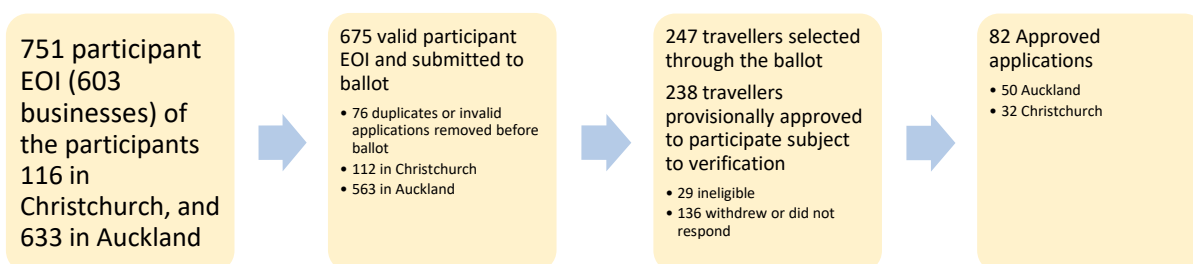


A two-step application process was used to select participants for the pilot.

Businesses were asked to submit expressions of interest (EOI) in the pilot via an online portal. Businesses self-declared that they met the eligibility criteria for the pilot before they were eligible to submit an EOI. EOIs were reviewed by project staff to remove ineligible and duplicate applications. The valid EOIs were submitted to a ballot. Successful EOIs were invited to submit a full application, with documentation for verification.

Outcomes

Numbers presented here are current as at 19 November and may change as the pilot progresses due to participants withdrawing after being approved.



603 businesses submitted Expressions of Interest, covering 749 participants - 116 in Christchurch and 633 in Auckland. Two additional participants were included outside the ballot process.

76 duplicate or invalid EOI were identified by the project team, leaving 675 potential participants to be submitted to the ballot process.

247 travellers were balloted in tranches and after further validation checks, 188 business applications, (238 travellers) were invited to participate and asked to supply additional information for verification

Of the balloted participants:

- 82 travellers were approved, with 32 (39%) returning to Christchurch and 50 returning to Auckland (61%)
- 84 withdrew and 56 did not progress their application.
- 29 were ineligible.

There was substantially more demand for places in Auckland (563 EOIs) than Christchurch (116 EOIs), but due to the need to spread participants between the two ports of arrival the proportion of EOIs resulting in approval to travel was much higher in Christchurch (29%) than Auckland (9%). Although population size will have affected demand for places on the pilot, the difference in demand for places on the pilot is likely to have at least in part been due to the limited number of flights to Christchurch, with only four flights per week from Singapore.

Approved travellers were issued a voucher to enable them to travel to New Zealand. While it was not intended that they would enter MIQ, there was contingency for them to enter MIQ if necessary.

A high rate of withdrawal and non-progression

After being provisionally selected through the ballot, 84 travellers withdrew from the pilot while an additional 56 did not proceed with their applications.

Reasons for withdrawal were recorded for 63 businesses (94 people). The most common reasons given for withdrawal related to difficulties in aligning flights or business meetings within the constraints of the pilot; including being unable to fly directly to Christchurch (10 businesses/20 people) and being unable to align the timing of business meetings and flights to the period of the pilot (13 businesses/15 people).

Changed circumstances were given as the reason for withdrawal by 10 businesses (14 people) and difficulties complying with the conditions were cited by a further 10 businesses (14 people).

Five businesses withdrew because they had successfully secured a voucher in MIQ, suggesting the pilot was an opportunity for travel, rather than because self-isolation was preferred.

104 EOIs were selected through the ballot where participants planned to travel to Australia only, of these 24 were for self-isolation in Christchurch. None of the 24 proceeded - 3 submitted ineligible applications and 21 withdrew or did not respond to the invitation to proceed. This illustrates that the EOI process – which was based on a self-declaration - was not able to prevent all ineligible travel, but also that some participants agreed to the conditions in the EOI when in fact they could not comply with the conditions. It was at the point of providing verification that these travellers dropped out of the process.

Tight timeframes for organising travel limited participation in the pilot.

These reasons suggest that the tight timeframes to apply for the pilot and organise travel and business meetings meant that a number of businesses submitted an EOI in advance of firming up either their travel plans or considering the practicalities of the self-isolation rules. This resulted in a high number of withdrawals and considerable additional administration, which delayed confirming the final participants, and additional personnel costs due to the necessarily manual nature of the processes used.

The requirement that prevented participants travelling domestically to get to their place of self-isolation meant that businesses nominating to self-isolate in Christchurch were limited by the few international flights scheduled into Christchurch (none from Australia and only from Singapore).

The EOI process did not prevent applications from non-eligible travellers

Information supplied at the time of submission of the EOI was used for initial assessment of whether the EOI met the requirements for participation in terms of, traveller identity, dates of travel, travel not to very high-risk countries, reasons for travel and location of proposed place of self-isolation on return. The traveller at this point was asked to make a declaration that they could meet the requirements for self-isolation and participation.

Only duplicate EOIs and EOIs with missing or clearly ineligible reasons for travel were removed before the ballot. If an application was provisionally selected in the ballot a manual eligibility check was attempted including a phone call before the approved EOIs were emailed and invited to participate subject to verification of their eligibility and approval of their self-isolation plan.

Once a self-isolation plan was provided, the verification process included:

- Cross-checking the information supplied with the EOI – including who was travelling, countries visited, dates of travel and purpose of travel
- Confirmation of citizenship through passport or verification of visa status with Immigration
- If isolating in their own home, or rented accommodation, travellers were asked to confirm via email they would be isolating alone.
- Verification of vaccination status was undertaken by the Ministry of Health, who were provided with the identity details of participants.
- Checking that the place of isolation was within the geographical boundaries of the pilot - a manual check using Google Maps.
- Checking that the place of isolation was a stand-alone building with separate entrance, and not an apartment building – this check was limited to an online Google assessment of the building. In cases where this was unclear email confirmation was requested.
- Checking with Spark that the place of isolation had cell-phone coverage
- Participants were required to submit documentary evidence of their itinerary to show countries of travel and transit.

These checks were done manually; an application with complete documentation took an hour of staff time to complete, however the minimum elapsed time was 24 hours due to the need to check vaccination status. Most applications took much longer to process because missing details needed to be followed up and/or information that was inconsistent with what was supplied in the EOI had to be clarified.

A wider roll-out would require automated registration processes

The pilot is operating in an environment where self-isolation is an exception for travellers entering New Zealand, and the requirements for self-isolation are tightly specified by Cabinet. In a wider roll out with large volumes of travellers it will be necessary to ensure a timely process that provides certainty to applicants planning their travel.

A manual two-stage process such as that used in the pilot would be impractical because it is resource intensive and delays in decisions are likely to be unacceptable. Instead for most travellers, verifying essential information would need to occur at the point of registering for self-isolation, if registration is a requirement. This would require automation of necessary verification checks with manual processes only for non-standard applications.

The settings for MIQ and self-isolation will affect the need for verification of information when registering for self-isolation. The table below compares the details requiring verification in the pilot and those that may require verification in a wider roll out of self-isolation.

Details requiring verification for Self-Isolation pilot	Verification requirements for wider Self-Isolation roll out
Identity, citizenship and visa information – to confirm who was travelling and provide documentation that would unambiguously identify the traveller so they can cross the border without an MIQ voucher, and to link to vaccination record.	Identity Information is needed to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify self-isolating travellers at the border so they can be separated from those going to MIQ, and • to support verification of details such as vaccination status or visa status that may be relevant to whether a person can self-isolate • for follow up of self-isolating travellers if they are to be monitored in any way.
Vaccination status – a requirement for participation in the pilot. Done manually by the Ministry of Health.	Vaccination status would only be required for New Zealanders as other visa holders need to be vaccinated to come to New Zealand. Vaccination status will only be required if it is a factor that determines whether a New Zealander able to self-isolate or if it affects monitoring or other checks during self-isolation.
Travel information – to confirm eligibility for pilot, based on places visited and dates of travel	Travel information (flights and countries visited in recent weeks) – may be needed to manage arrival numbers and to confirm eligibility for self-isolation if this is a criterion for eligibility for self-isolation.
Address of place of self-isolation – to check place fits criteria for pilot, and to provide monitoring, COVID tests and other supports if required	Address of place of self-isolation, a valid address may be needed depending on the requirements for monitoring.
Contact information – a valid email and phone number required to administer pilot.	Contact information - a valid email and phone number required for communication and administration purposes.

Data sharing between agencies

The pilot required information sharing across multiple agencies for successful implementation. This was enabled by participants providing consent for their data to be shared for the purposes of the pilot and its evaluation. Data sharing was primarily done manually through exchange of files. Processes were put in place to ensure personal data was securely held. A privacy impact assessment was reviewed by the Privacy Commissioner and updated regularly to document issues and decisions.

The following data collection and sharing of personal information occurred during the application processes:

1. Applicants provided personal details to the MIQ project team during the EOI processes
2. Balloted individuals provided documentation to the MIQ project team to verify key details of their applications (Images of passports, copies of itineraries, details of places of self-isolation)
3. MIQ project team provided to the Ministry of Health the list of applicants to check vaccination status. Ministry of Health provided confirmation of vaccination status to the MIQ project team.
4. Immigration New Zealand data was used to confirm the visa status of non-New Zealand citizens.

Automated application and verification would introduce system requirements, which are outside the scope of this report. However, the need for data sharing across multiple agencies was not insubstantial. Processes involving data sharing contributed substantially to the timeframes for processing applications. Furthermore, manual processes pose non-trivial data security risks. These aspects need further exploration before roll-out of any application process for self-isolation.