



# BRIEFING

## Update on progress of self-isolation pilot.

<b>Date:</b>	16 November 2021	<b>Priority:</b>	High
<b>Security classification:</b>		<b>Tracking number:</b>	2122-1853

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Chris Hipkins <b>Minister for Covid1-19 response</b>	Note the progress on the self-isolation pilot and early observations  Forward this briefing to Reconnecting NZ Ministerial Group	16 November 2021

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

The following departments/agencies have been consulted
Ministry of Health

**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 Withdrawn           |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**



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### Purpose

To update the Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministerial Group on the early progress of the self-isolation pilot

### Recommended action

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

- a **Note** that despite tight timeframes, and the evolving pandemic the pilot has progressed largely to plan *Noted*
- b **Note** that numbers are lower than the original cap (150) with 82 participants expected to complete self-isolation by 18 December. *Noted*
- c **Note** that requirements for self-isolation and the tight timeframes created barriers to participation for some.
- d **Note** the observed barriers to scaling up components of the self-isolation system related to the manual registration processes, the requirements for self-isolation, the physical constraints at the airport border, and workforce constraints. *Noted*
- e **Forward** this briefing to the Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministerial Group  Agree /  Disagree
- f **Agree** that this briefing is proactively released with any appropriate withholdings under the Official Information Act 1982.  Agree /  Disagree

Christina Sophocleous-Jones  
**GM Self-Isolation Pilot**  
MIQ, MBIE

16/11/2021

Hon Chris Hipkins  
**Minister for Covid-19 response**

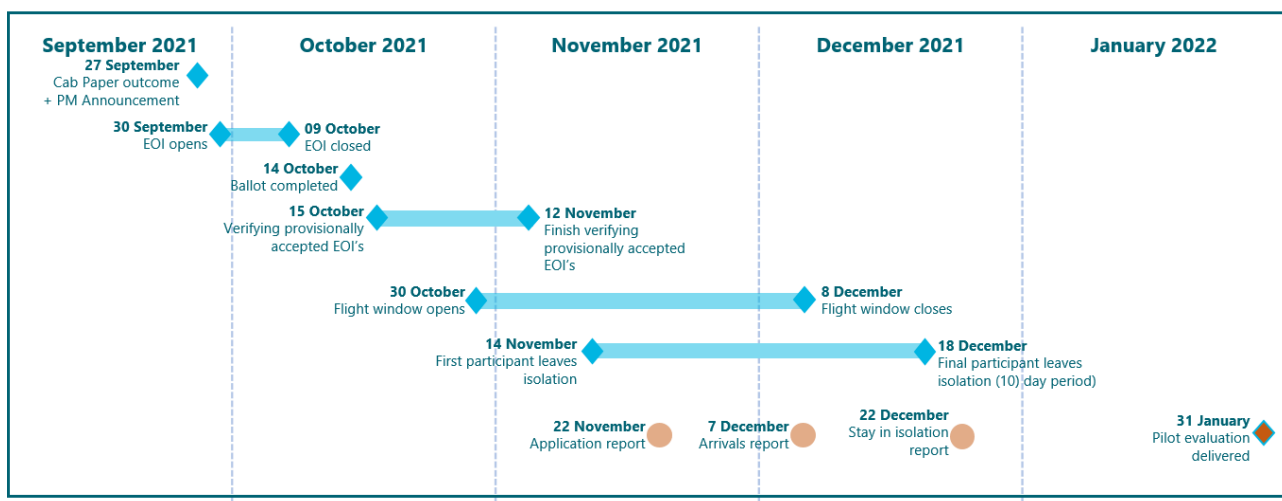
24 / 11 / 2021

## Background

1. The Self-Isolation Pilot was set up to test some of the 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.
2. The pilot was approved by Cabinet on 27 September 2021 [CAB-21-MIN-0386].
3. The key parameters of the Pilot are:
  - a. Participant numbers were limited to a maximum of 150 business travellers
  - b. Participants are required to isolate alone or with their travelling party (maximum of 3), within a 50kms by road of their port of arrival (Auckland or Christchurch). (Note for Auckland the self-isolation address must also be within Auckland Council boundaries).
  - c. The place of isolation needs to meet the requirements laid out by the Ministry of Health (including no shared ventilation, separate entrance and outdoor area, and suitable internet connection).
  - d. Participants were required to be double vaccinated in New Zealand with Pfizer and to have a negative pre-departure COVID-19 test no more than 72 hours before their return flight.
  - e. Participants are monitored for compliance with the self-isolation requirements, have daily health checks, and are regularly tested for COVID-19 tests.
  - f. The period of isolation corresponded to the concurrent MIQ requirements for international travellers – noting that this changed during the course of the pilot from 14 days to 10 days on 14 November.

## Pilot progress and timeframe

4. The first arrivals entered managed self-isolation on 1 November and last participant is due on 8 December and is expected to leave managed isolation on 18 December.
5. Key dates are shown in the figure below.

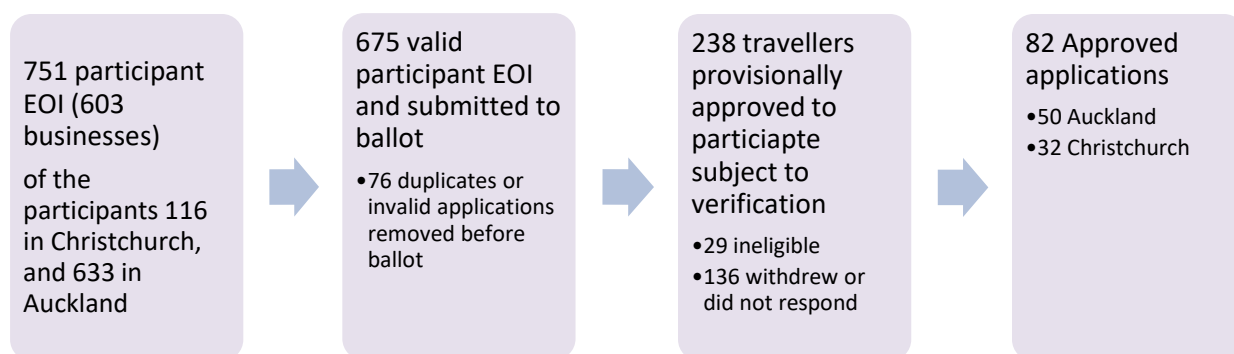


## Despite tight timeframes, and the evolving pandemic the pilot has progressed largely to plan

6. The pilot was developed at pace and subject to changes in settings to ensure that the length of self-isolation mirrors concurrent MIQ settings. The length of self-isolation reduced from 14 days to 10 days on 14 November to align with the changes to length of stay in MIQ (+3 days self-isolation).
7. Late changes to the parameters meant that design decisions were only finalised days before the first participants arrived and processes were largely untested prior to roll out of the pilot. In particular protocols for health checks and monitoring, could not be finalised until the critical decision about the length of self-isolation was settled. The pilot is adapting protocols to address issues as they arise.

## Participant numbers are less than anticipated

8. Valid expressions of interest were received for 674 participants to take part in the pilot. Provisional acceptance into the Pilot was offered to 188 employers (238 participants) selected in a random ballot. Of these 84 withdrew and 52 did not progress. Eighty-two participants who progressed with their Expressions of Interest were verified as meeting the eligibility criteria and approved to participate in the Pilot.



9. Up until Sunday 14 November, 19 participants had entered self-isolation, of whom seven had completed their stays. 23 participants are due to arrive during the week from 15 to 21 November.

## Early observations

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10. In advance of the evaluation reports, the following observations are tentative.

### Barriers to participation

11. At this point direct feedback from participant surveys is too sparse to report, however we are able to glean from enquiries and early withdrawal data some common themes:
  - a. The tight timeframes for applying together with the narrow window for travel meant that some businesses did not proceed because they could not align business meetings and travel dates with the pilot timeframes
  - b. The lack of direct flights from Australia to Christchurch, together with the requirement to isolate close to the port of arrival limited participation by businesses outside Auckland.
  - c. Requirements that meant that returnees needed to isolate alone or with their travelling companions, posed additional costs and barriers for some participants who submitted an EOI on the expectation they could isolate with family.

- d. For some participants what they perceived as constantly changing rules or settings meant they did not have confidence that they wouldn't be caught out by further changes. This includes both missing out on easier options and being caught offshore.

### **Barriers to scale**

12. The pilot, due to its size, relies heavily on manual processes which are not scalable to accommodate many travellers; the following processes will not be possible for high volumes of travellers without automation:
  - a. Verification that a person qualified and met the requirements to self-isolate in advance of their travel, including vaccination status.
  - b. Verification of the place of isolation, and that it meets the minimum requirements.
  - c. Pre-flight approval to enter the country and go into self-isolation is needed to ensure only people who qualify for self-isolation or have places in MIQ (or an exemption to MIQ) are allowed onto flights. For the pilot this was achieved by manually issuing a special "self-isolation" MIAS voucher. MIAS, as it is currently configured, does not accommodate any process for approval of a self-isolation pathway.
13. Health checks have proven more labour-intensive than expected. The process has been that Healthline emails participants at 8 am, participants are required to respond by noon. Where no response is received the person is phoned up to three times. If no contact is made a contracted security firm visits the location. Changes have been made to clarify the requirements for participants and follow-up of non-responders has been transferred from Healthline to project staff due to the higher-than-expected volumes. The checking of non-responders is unlikely to be scale-able if even a small percentage of people require follow up. The efficacy and scalability of the health checks will be addressed in the pilot evaluation.
14. The airport arrival processes have run relatively smoothly, however airports are limited in their ability to accommodate, at scale, any process that creates delays in people transiting through the border. The early experience at Auckland airport was that health checks involving a Rapid Antigen Test took 15-minutes when there is no queuing for the check. The capacity to scale this up is limited by both space and workforce capacity.

### **The pilot evaluation will provide more complete consideration of the pilot outcomes**

15. We will report back findings from the evaluation at four points:

22 November 2021	Lessons from the SI pilot application processes
7 December 2021	Early learning about the border and arrivals processes
22 December 2022	Early insights into adherence to protocols, and participant experience in Self-Isolation
31 January 2022	Summary evaluation report