



BRIEFING

Update: Options to mitigate managed isolation capacity constraints in February

Date:	28 January 2022	Priority:	High
Security classification:		Tracking number:	2122-2493

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Chris Hipkins Minister for COVID-19 Response	Agree to options to mitigate managed isolation capacity constraints in February.	1 February 2022

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)			
Name	Position	Telephone	1st contact
Chris Bunny	Joint Head of MIQ	Privacy of natural persons	✓
Privacy of natural persons	Acting General Manager, MIQ Policy		
	Principal Policy Advisor, MIQ 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Withdrawn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



BRIEFING

Update: Options to mitigate managed isolation capacity constraints in February

Date:	28 January 2022	Priority:	High
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Purpose

This briefing provides you with an update on the evolving situation regarding MIQ capacity, sets out actions that have been taken over the last week to alleviate pressure on the MIQ system, and seeks your decision on options to mitigate managed isolation capacity constraints in February.

Recommended action

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

- a **Note** that since advice was put to you on 21 January, the situation regarding MIQ capacity has evolved *and* a number of actions have been taken to increase and more effectively utilise MIQ capacity, including:
 - a. Converting Amohia (Distinction Hamilton) from a Community Quarantine Facility (CQF) to Managed Isolation Facility (MIF), and Jetpark Hamilton from MIF to CQF (freeing up 60 rooms per infill),
 - b. Providing advice (via the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet) on dissuading New Zealand citizens in transit from ending their journey in New Zealand and entering MIQ without a confirmed allocation, and
 - c. Actively managing the return of Afghanistan arrivals and refugees.

Noted
- b **Note** that MIQ capacity remains tight: we are currently operating without contingency, and managed isolation capacity is forecasted to remain critically low on certain days in late January and mid-February.

Noted
- c **Agree** to suspend the Ministerial travel allocation for February (freeing up 20 rooms).

Agree / Disagree
- d **Agree** to reduce the health worker allocation for February (freeing up 50 rooms) – if additional eligible critical health workers seek to enter in February this still remains possible under the relevant Emergency Allocation category.

Agree / Disagree
- e **Agree** to reduce the Construction Sector Accord allocation for February (freeing up 20 rooms).

Agree / Disagree
- f **Agree** to convert the Ibis Ellerslie from a quarantine facility back to a MIF (yielding a capacity gain of 88 rooms).

Agree / Disagree

- g **Note** that if an unexpected concurrent event occurs, or MIFs need to be converted to quarantine facilities, we will require decisions on further options (eg having New Zealand Defence Force personnel exercise their existing exemption from MIQ).

Noted

- h **Agree** that this briefing will be proactively released with appropriate withholdings consistent with the Official Information Act 1982.

Agree Disagree

Privacy of natural persons



Acting General Manager, MIQ Policy

28 / 01 / 22

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

31 / 1 / 2022

Background

1. On 14 January and 21 January, you received advice about severe constraints on managed isolation and quarantine (MIQ) capacity [BR-2122-2293 and BR-2122-2343 refers].
2. This briefing provides you with an update on the evolving situation regarding MIQ capacity, sets out further actions that have been taken over the last week, and seeks your decision on options to manage severe capacity constraints over February.

The situation regarding MIQ capacity is evolving

Actions have been taken to increase, and more efficiently utilise, MIQ capacity

3. Since last week we have taken a number of actions to increase, and more effectively utilise, MIQ capacity.

Converting Amohia (Distinction Hamilton) from Community Quarantine Facility (CQF) to Managed Isolation Facility (MIF) and Jetpark Hamilton from MIF to CQF

4. We are nearing agreement with iwi, hotel owners and staff, and the Waikato District Health Board to:
 - a. Convert the Amohia (Distinction Hamilton) Community Quarantine Facility (CQF) back to a Managed Isolation Facility (MIF), and
 - b. Convert Jetpark Hamilton MIF to a CQF (in doing so, Jetpark Hamilton will become Amohia, rather than Distinction Hamilton).
5. We expect Jetpark Hamilton to be emptied of border arrivals by 1 February, and its conversion from a MIF to a CQF to be complete by 4 February.
6. The Distinction Hamilton will begin to accept border arrivals as soon as it can be converted from a CQF to a MIF. At this stage, we are planning for the first cohort to arrive at on 12 February.
7. We expect that converting a) Distinction Hamilton from a CQF to a MIF and b) Jetpark Hamilton from a MIF to a CQF will result in an overall capacity gain of approximately 60 rooms per infill.

Dissuading New Zealand Citizens from entering the country as transit passengers without confirmed allocations

8. Recently, several New Zealand citizens transiting through New Zealand have refused to board onward travel, and have entered MIQ without confirmed allocations.
9. We have worked with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to provide advice on options for dissuading New Zealand citizens from entering the country as transit passengers (without confirmed allocations) and refusing to board onward travel [DPMC-2021/22-1284 refers].

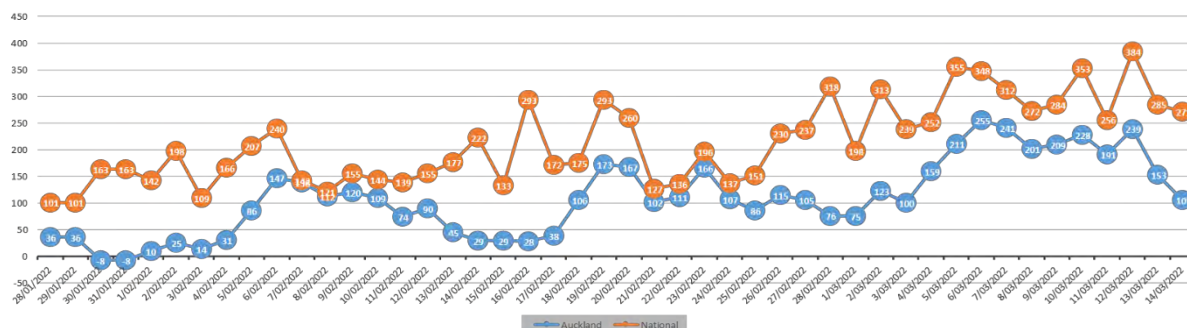
Managing the return of Afghanistan arrivals and refugees

10. Each month, 120 rooms are allocated to Afghanistan arrivals and refugees.
11. We have engaged with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) and Immigration New Zealand (INZ) to better match cancellations with new arrivals to ensure that allocated rooms are utilised more effectively.

Despite these actions, MIQ still faces capacity constraints

- MIQ is currently operating without contingency, and managed isolation capacity is forecasted to remain critically low on certain days in late January and mid-February (see **Figure 1**).

Figure 1: Remaining managed isolation rooms as at 28 January (note: figures do not factor in Distinction Hamilton and Jetpark Hamilton conversions)



- We are seeing a high level of emergency allocations applications, but allocations granted remain manageable without the need to prioritise at this point.
- Once public announcements have been made next week on Reconnecting New Zealanders we may see some travellers choosing to cancel their MIQ vouchers and wait for Steps 1 and 2. However, the extend of this is uncertain.
- In order for MIQ to meet current expected border arrivals, have capacity to continue to grant emergency allocations for eligible applicants, begin to build back contingency, and/or absorb further concurrent events, we need to reduce the expected number of border arrivals in February.

Options to manage capacity constraints in February

- To manage severe MIQ capacity constraints in February, we recommend that you agree to all of the following options, resulting in a capacity gain of 90 rooms:

Suspend the Ministerial travel allocation for February

- Twenty rooms per month are reserved under the Ministerial travel allocation. To date, we have not been notified of any Ministers' intent to use this allocation in February. Suspending this allocation would result in a capacity gain of 20 rooms.

Reduce the health worker allocation for February

- The Ministry of Health (MOH) administers a health worker allocation of 300 rooms per month. This allocation has been underutilised since it was introduced in November 2021 (~64% underutilisation) [BR-2122-2293 refers]. However a number of critical health workers also enter under the relevant Emergency Allocation category. We are working on getting you a better picture of the total number of critical health workers entering each month under both categories.
- MOH has agreed to reduce the health worker allocation for February to 250 rooms. Should you also agree, reducing this allocation would result in a capacity gain of 50 rooms.
- Importantly, eligible critical health workers will continue to be able to enter MIQ under the relevant Emergency Allocation category.

Reduce the Construction Sector Accord allocation for February

21. Sixty rooms per month are reserved under the Construction Accord allocation. This allocation has been underutilised since it was introduced in August 2021 (~63% underutilisation) [BR-2122-2293 refers].
22. Twenty-two construction workers have received confirmed allocations for the first fortnight in February. We recommended reducing the Construction Sector Accord allocation for February from 60 rooms to 40 rooms, allowing a further 18 applications to be approved. Reducing this allocation would result in a capacity gain of 20 rooms.

Convert Ibis Ellerslie from a quarantine facility back to a MIF

23. On 16 January, due to significantly increasing numbers of border arrivals testing positive for COVID-19, and erring on the side of caution, we converted the Ibis Ellerslie from a MIF to a quarantine facility [BR-2122-2293 refers].
24. Current forecasting indicates that converting the Ibis Ellerslie back to a MIF will still provide sufficient quarantine rooms in Auckland until the end of February (albeit with limited ability to accommodate community cases). However, if there was a significant surge in positive border cases, Auckland could reach quarantine capacity.
25. We recommend that you agree to convert the Ibis Ellerslie back from a quarantine facility to a MIF by 4 February. Doing so will yield a capacity gain of 88 rooms.

Further action may be required

26. If an unexpected concurrent event occurs, or MIFs need to be converted to quarantine facilities, we may need to progress advice on the following options, in order of preference:
 - a. Managing the impact of return of 80 New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) personnel and families from Canada on 23 February – options include a) requesting that NZDF personnel exercise their exemption from the requirement to enter MIQ under the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Air Border) Order 2020 (potentially freeing up 30 rooms – noting the exemption applies only to personnel not family members), and b) requesting that NZDF fly directly to Christchurch, to reduce pressure on Auckland MIFs,
 - b. Reducing sports-related allocations (freeing up to 230 rooms),
 - c. Prioritising only New Zealand citizens and their families for MIAS allocations due to flight cancellations or positive PDT results (number of rooms varies depending on multiple factors),
 - d. Cancelling MIAS vouchers for all visa holders who obtained vouchers through the lobby process (freeing up to 993 rooms), or
 - e. Suspending Emergency Allocation categories 3, 4 and/or 5 (freeing up to 400 rooms), or only approving Emergency Allocations categories 3,4 and 5 if capacity allows.

Next steps

27. We are available to discuss these options with you, if desired.