



BRIEFING

Business sector proposal to trial an alternative to MIQ

Date:	31 January 2022	Priority:	Medium
Security classification:		Tracking number:	2122-2454

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Chris Hipkins Minister for COVID-19 Response	Indicate your views on the proposal from businesses to trial their own alternative to MIQ	4 February 2022
Hon Ayesha Verrall Associate Minister for Health	Note the contents of this briefing	

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

The following departments/agencies have been consulted

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 Withdrawn |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

This briefing provides you information on our recent engagement with leaders in the business community and seeks your view on the business community developing up a detailed plan for how a privately-run alternative to MIQ could work.

Recommended action

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

- a **Note** that on 20 January 2022, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment held a Business Sector Forum;

Noted

- b **Note** that the purpose of the forum was to present to the business sector a public health update on considerations regarding border settings, work undertaken in late 2021 by the Future Borders Group, lessons from the self-isolation pilot, and to hear from the business community about their experiences (including Sir Ian Taylor's findings from his '151 Trial' which tested some self-isolation monitoring and testing solutions) and views on isolation models;

Noted

- c **Note** that Sir Ian Taylor has since provided us with an initial proposal for a self-isolation pilot;

Noted

- d **Indicate** your views on the proposal from businesses to develop up an alternative to MIQ

Privacy of natural persons

**Acting General Manager, MIQ Policy
MBIE**

31 / 01 / 2022

Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall
Associate Minister for Health

..... / /

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister COVID-19 Response

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These discussions should continue on the basis they may identify possible future contingency etc.

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Background

1. On 20 January 2022, the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment held a Business Sector Forum with business leaders. Attendees included officials and government advisors on COVID-19, and representatives from the business sector. The purpose of the meeting was to:
 - a. Present a public health update on considerations regarding border settings;
 - b. Present the work undertaken in late 2021 by the Future Borders Group and lessons from the self-isolation pilot; and
 - c. Seek views and feedback from the business community on isolation models.
2. The Forum was set up to discuss issues faced by businesses as a result of New Zealand's current border settings and was held under Chatham House rules.

Businesses are seeking certainty post Reconnecting New Zealanders

3. The discussion at the forum focused on the need to provide businesses certainty about the ability to travel globally.
4. Businesses have expressed the importance of being about to travel internationally so that they can compete in the global market emphasising the importance of travel for building key relationships, pitching for performing contracts.
5. As a result, businesses have proposed designing and trialling their own alternative to MIQ – should there continue to be a role for managed isolation in the future. MBIE undertook to test this proposal with Ministers.

Proposed alternative self-isolation by the business sector

6. At the forum, Sir Ian Taylor presented findings of the '151 Trial' which tested some self-isolation monitoring and testing solutions over and above to what was required to comply with the government-run self-isolation pilot. After the forum Sir Ian Taylor provided us with an initial proposal for a self-isolation pilot (**Annex 1**) that would be open to employees of organisations that agree to certain procedures and conditions. The proposal is to work with New Zealand Trade and Enterprise to decide the organisations that would participate in the pilot.
7. The high-level proposal includes new testing technology (alternative to health worker administered PCR tests and Rapid Antigen Tests) and procedures at pre-departure, on arrival and at place of self-isolation. Isolation would be at home of the traveller or at approved hotels.
8. The pilot proposes to use pre-departure testing within 1-2 hours of check-in for a flight. A pre-departure test taken closer to the time of travel would reduce the risk of COVID-19 positive travellers embarking a flight having picked up the virus after a laboratory test. These tests, if accurate and verifiable would be an efficient alternative to PCR-test and Rapid Antigen tests.
9. The pilot also proposes to test travellers on arrival at Customs and to use self-administered saliva PCR tests collected from the place of isolation and tested at a laboratory. The proposal states that the tests could relieve the pressure on the health workforce in New Zealand conducting nasopharyngeal PCR tests.

10. The conditions proposed by Sir Ian Taylor for the pilot are more onerous than those required for self-isolation under the medium risk pathway in the Reconnecting New Zealanders strategy. The pilot is targeted at exploring alternatives to MIQ with restrictive border settings.

Next steps

11. If you are interested in the business community developing a more detailed proposal we will work with the Ministry of Health and other border agencies on the parameters including public health measures that would need to be met by a privately run alternative to MIQ.
12. Our initial thinking is that under restrictive border settings, participants in a business travel self-isolation pilot could be exempt from entering MIQ. We could explore stipulating the standards required including eligibility and then request that the business community work on providing mechanisms to achieve these standards. This could involve technology, testing types and methodologies, and processes.
13. We will liaise with Sir Ian Taylor and the business community to work on a more detailed proposal that would meet the parameters for operationalising a pilot and report back in February 2022 for your consideration.

Annexes

Annex 1: Initial proposal for a self-isolation pilot from Sir Ian Taylor

An independent review of the 151 trial was carried out by EY. This report is available at:

[EY Independent review of the 151 Trial \(PDF, 3.4MB\)](#) – EY

Proposal For Self-Isolation

Moving Forward

Following on from our zoom call last Thursday I have worked with members of the Cross Sector Border Group and consulted with several business leaders and business sector groups, including Brett O'Riley at the EMA, to pull together a pilot programme that can take advantage of the groundwork put in place by both the Business Self-Isolation programme and the 151 Trial.

A lot of the suggested pilot is based on the work we did with our 151 Self-Isolation trial so I would like to provide a little more background on that first.

151 Background

The Ernst & Young Report that was commissioned for our 151 Off the Bench Self-Isolation pilot confirmed that the trial met all protocols that had been set for the MBIE Business Self-Isolation trial under which our trial was conducted.

The report also noted that:

“Additional steps (over and above MBIE required protocols) taken during the trial showed evidence of further risk reduction options that could support stricter protocols if deemed necessary.”

Those risk reduction options included:

- 1: Pre-departure tests (from LAX) taken on the day of departure rather than the 72-hour period set by MBIE.
- 2: Post-arrival PCR test in Auckland, with negative result, provided within 1 hour of arriving at the self-isolation residence.
- 3: Jupyl tracking system ensuring full compliance with self-isolation requirements at the residence. Positional data was captured every 2 minutes, 24 hours a day, and provided, remotely, to an independent monitoring service every 5 minutes. No human intervention was needed to confirm location.

4: A real-time health monitoring system provided by SekiAI that captured 18 key health statistics that were sent remotely to Doc Mayhew for analysis each day.

5: Independent Rako Science saliva PCR tests that were self-administered on days 2, 5 and 7 with results being delivered within 6 hours of them being picked up. I never had to leave self-isolation to undergo these tests.

6: I would note separately that the process that was put in place by customs and immigration for the official MBIE self-isolation programme in Auckland was exemplary and would continue to work for any future business focused travel pilot. The addition of the Lucira 30-minute test to replace the 15-minute RAT test would give a higher level of confidence that the traveller was free of Covid as they left for self-isolation.

The EY Report also concluded that the 151 trial was repeatable and it is on that basis that we are putting forward a proposal that could be in place as soon as we have confirmation that the MOH will accept the results of the independent trials conducted for Lucira and approve it for this trial.

Lucira

Last night the Lucira clinical team followed up on the initial meeting we had arranged through Minister Verral between Dr Ian Town and the Lucira executive team and delivered to Dr Ian Town a comprehensive clinical data package including independent studies from countries who have already approved Lucira for use.

Over the weekend I also had confirmation from the team at Lucira that they could immediately provide up to 20,000 kits should we need them – they have also allocated a further 2,000 free kits for use in Tonga if we can find a way to get them there, but that's a separate issue.

Whilst we could implement this programme staying with the current laboratory based PCR tests, the expediency of being able to capture a PCR equivalent result in under 30 minutes will be the game changer that will help us not only to protect our borders but will be a key element of any self-isolation programme, at least in the near future.

Proposal

1: Through a variety of business groups, initially lead by Brett O'Riley and the team at NZTE that are currently overseeing the MIQ business allocations, we would identify businesses that could immediately take part in this programme. This group could include any currently booked to take up MIQ rooms returning from the Dubai Expo as well as government officials needing to travel. All are groups where compliance would be a non-issue.

2: The organisations/companies chosen for this programme would sign up for the protocols that will be put in place and would accept full responsibility for the compliance of their people involved in the pilot, along with associated costs.

Protocols

1: All participants would be required to give evidence of having tested negative 1-2 hours before checking in for the final leg of their flight homes. Because this is such a controlled group, we are in a position to require this optimal timing to reduce risk prior to boarding a flight. Moving beyond this to a wider group of travellers the timing could be extended but would always be same day of travel.

Lucira has a programme that can record and confirm their tests results and I have introduced them this morning to Greg Foran at Air New Zealand to see if that is something they would be interested in.

For this trial Brett O'Riley has offered to work with Lucira to see how quickly we could implement such a programme here. In the meantime, we need to place a much higher level of trust on the businesses taking part because, as was pointed out in our meeting last week, the businesses involved have a high level of control and oversight on the compliance of their staff.

2: All participants in this programme would be provided with Lucira kits before leaving New Zealand. Brett has offered EMA as the organisation that would enable this process. The costs of the kits would be met by the organisations taking part in the pilot. The Lucira test would be the test approved for pre-boarding.

3: In addition, we would include the Rako Science PCR saliva tests we used in the 151 Trial because they can be self-administered without the need for the

traveller to leave their residence. These tests would be done once in self-isolation. Because the traveller is self-isolating the 6–12-hour time frame in getting the result is much less of a risk factor. We would need to have further discussions on how we might handle cases outside the main centres but obviously, if the Lucira test is approved by MOH then that can still be used to provide a self-administered test without the need for a laboratory.

We also need to keep this in the context that all travellers would be fully vaccinated, with boosters.

4: On the basis that the travellers are fully vaccinated, have tested negative 1-2 hour prior to boarding their flights, have exercised appropriate mask wearing, and hand sanitising on board their flight, have tested negative within 30 minutes of landing (at customs) we would then allow them to return home, or to an approved alternative site such as the Accor or Quest hotel chain who are part of the Cross Sector Border group, or to private accommodation that can be organised by the SeasonNZ group – also part of the Cross Sector Border group.

All are prepared to meet any special requirements that may be needed for this limited number of travellers.

I would note that two of my staff who caught Covid in Sydney during The Ashes first identified it using RAT's we provided, isolated in their rooms in the hotel where the rest of the 150 TV crew were staying and awaited confirmation with a PCR test organised by FOX. They then remained in that hotel for 5 days – still with the rest of the crew - and were cleared 6 days later and returned to work.

Conclusion:

This proposal is intended as a starting document for more detailed discussions but as Mary-Liz mentioned on our call last week we need to be moving fast and iteratively.

This is a proposal that closely mirrors what we did in the 151 Trial and we do have solid evidence to back it up. I carried an app that recorded every key moment of the travel and all of that data was provided in real-time to EY. I would strongly recommend that we include the EY team as part of this extension of the 151 trial.

It is unlikely that we would need to include all of the additional protocols we had in place for the 151 Trial. I think compliance would be a given with the way we engage with businesses involved, but the option is there to include the tracking and health options as part of a wider plan to extend this programme beyond self- managed isolation to managed self-isolation.

As a starter for this I have proposed to the business leaders I have spoken with that we should look to include/sponsor kiwi citizens who have been caught up overseas, particularly those who no longer have visa for the countries they are in and those who have been separated from their children because of the inability to get an MIQ slot. These would be the perfect candidates to expand the initial tests we did with Jupyl and SakiAI.

I look forward to seeing how we can make this happen quickly and provide government with options.

Ian Taylor.