

Office of the Minister for COVID-19 Response  
Social Wellbeing Committee

## Reconnecting New Zealanders to the World: Implementing the Medium-risk Pathway

### Proposal

- 1 This paper seeks Cabinet's agreement to the settings for the medium-risk pathway as part of the plan for Reconnecting New Zealanders, and seeks Cabinet's endorsement to the timing of the Steps for re-opening.

### Relation to Government priorities

- 2 This paper supports the ongoing response to COVID-19 and is part of the Reconnecting New Zealanders strategy.

### Executive summary

- 3 On Monday 15 November 2021, Cabinet agreed to opening up the medium-risk pathway, which will include stay at home (self-isolation) requirements for travellers on arrival. It also endorsed a three-step approach to opening the pathway:
  - 3.1 New Zealanders and other currently eligible travellers to and from Australia from 11.59 pm Sunday 16 January 2022
  - 3.2 New Zealanders and other currently eligible travellers to and from anywhere else by 31 March 2022; and
  - 3.3 fully vaccinated foreign nationals (possibly staged by visa category) by 31 May 2022 [CAB-21-MIN-0474].

### *Timing of medium-risk pathway*

- 4 Cabinet requested that the Minister for COVID-19 Response report back on when Steps 1 and 2 could be implemented. Agencies have confirmed these steps can be operationalised within the agreed timeframes, with Step 2 able to be brought forward to 14 February. Until the Traveller Health Declaration System (THDS) is operational on 31 March, additional support measures will be needed, such as the deployment of Airline Liaison Officers.
- 5 Cabinet also requested that the Minister for COVID-19 Response report back on moving the date forward for Step 3 forward to 30 April 2022. The Minister of Immigration has confirmed that bringing forward the commencement of staged reopening of opening Step 3 to this date is possible.
- 6 The implementation of Step 3 is subject to further advice on staging and phasing decisions of reopening visa categories, taking into account the ongoing need for volume controls on the number of arrivals into New Zealand

to manage health risks and immigration visa processing capacity. Even if volumes of arrivals do not need to be managed for health reasons, given recent decisions on immigration policy and visa processing priorities, reopening of visa processing will need to be staged.

- 7 The Minister of Immigration will report back to the Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministerial Group in December with proposals for staging and phasing the re-opening of visa categories and options for visa processing priorities for reopening the third step.

*Medium-risk pathway requirements*

- 8 I propose the medium-risk pathway requirements include a predeparture test, proof of vaccine status, a passenger declaration about travel history, a day 0/1 test on arrival, a requirement to self-isolate, and a final test before entering the community.
- 9 There are several options for initial in-country testing, including testing on arrival at the airport. Experiences in trialling on-arrival testing indicate that it is unlikely to be operationally viable at scale; other testing options such as testing in the community are easier to manage. The Border Executive Board and the Ministry of Health will report back to the Reconnecting Minister Group by 4 December 2021 on how arrival testing can be operationalised.
- 10 I propose that the Minister for COVID-19 Response, in consultation with the Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministerial Group, is authorised to make decisions on the detailed settings for the medium-risk pathway. Officials will report back to the Ministerial Group in December on detailed settings including impacts, costs, and the use of the higher-risk criteria.
- 11 In addition to the requirements for the medium-risk pathway I propose self-isolation requirements are:
  - 11.1 no limitations or requirements on how people travel from their arrival airport to their location of self-isolation;
  - 11.2 limitations on where people may undertake their self-isolation to avoid sharing facilities with other parties;
  - 11.3 only ordinary household members may be present in the premises while a person is undertaking self-isolation in a home; and
  - 11.4 limited (traveller-initiated) in-premises welfare support for people undertaking their self-isolation.

*Evolving risk context*

- 12 As part of an ongoing requirement to consider the public rationale for border settings against Bill of Rights Act consideration, the Ministry of Health has provided updated public health advice, informed by expert peer review, on the potential risk associated with international travellers entering New Zealand and settings at the border.

- 13 This updated advice indicates a lower relative level of public health risk from internationally travellers generally than was previously the case. It highlights other considerations such as cumulative risk and the need for any change to settings at the border to be managed carefully. The advice supports a transition from current settings to the Reconnecting approach through the phased process outlined in this paper.
- 14 As the risk context evolves, it will be important to keep our settings under review to ensure they are appropriate and proportionate to risk.

## Background

- 15 On Monday 15 November 2021, Cabinet agreed that the first step towards substantial reconnection should involve opening the medium-risk pathway, which will include stay at home (self-isolation) requirements for travellers on arrival.
- 16 Cabinet endorsed the following proposed approach to reconnecting New Zealanders with the world, subject to assessments of public health factors for the risk pathways, social and economic factors, and operational feasibility prior to commencement of each step:
- 16.1 Step 1 – opening the medium-risk pathway to fully vaccinated New Zealand citizens and those residence-class visa holders and other travellers eligible under our current restrictive border settings from Australia from 11.59 pm on 16 January 2022 (provided they have been in Australia or New Zealand for the past 14 days);
  - 16.2 Step 2 – expanding the medium-risk pathway to fully vaccinated New Zealand citizens and those residence-class visa holders and other travellers eligible under our current restrictive border settings, from all but very high-risk countries, by 31 March 2022, with staging if required and with the Minister for COVID-19 Response invited to report back on when Step 2 could be implemented;
  - 16.3 Step 3 – expanding the medium-risk pathway to fully vaccinated foreign nationals (possibly staged by visa category) and subject to further advice on immigration visa processing capacity and advice the ongoing need for volume controls, by 31 May 2022 [CAB-21-MIN-0474].

### **Step 1 can begin at 11.59pm Sunday 16 January 2022**

- 17 Step 1 involves opening the medium-risk pathway to fully vaccinated New Zealand citizens and those residence-class visa holders and other travellers eligible under our current restrictive border settings travelling from Australia (provided they have been in Australia or New Zealand for the past 14 days).
- 18 Border agencies have confirmed that the implementation of checking of pre-departure information for Step 1 will be in place to allow commencement at 11.59pm Sunday 16 January. This timing aligns with Cabinet's recent decision

about the removal of vaccination or testing requirements on the Auckland boundary [CAB-21-Min-0477 refers].

- 19 It is important that advice and decision-making on international border settings needs to be consistent with our domestic level settings and aligned to the Covid-19 Protection Framework, to reduce both health and legal risks. We need to think about our level of domestic and international risk together. Our differentiated approach to the treatment of vaccinated and unvaccinated people will apply to both people entering New Zealand, and those within the country.
- 20 As the THDS will not be in place within the timeframes for Step 1, agencies will work with airlines on implementing checks of passengers' compliance with travel requirements, including vaccination status and pre-departure testing. The availability of both New Zealand's and Australia's international COVID-19 vaccination certificates will support compliance checks. The digital functionality of the THDS will be introduced incrementally from 31 March.
- 21 Airlines are developing digital tools to support compliance checks. s9(2)(b)(ii) [redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted] Immigration New Zealand airline liaison officers (ALOs) will be deployed on the ground in Australia to support pre-departure processes.

**Step 2 can begin at 11.59pm Sunday 13 February 2022**

- 22 Step 2 involves expanding the medium-risk pathway to fully vaccinated New Zealand citizens and those residence-class visa holders and other travellers eligible under our current restrictive border settings travelling from other countries.
- 23 Border agencies have confirmed that the implementation of Step 2 can take place at 11.59pm Sunday 13 February. However, as for Step 1, alternative processes for conducting compliance checks for vaccination and testing status would be required before the THDS is ready on 31 March.
- 24 An interim solution for compliance checking would involve checks being facilitated by a combination of:
- 24.1 Airlines – s9(2)(b)(ii) [redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]
  - 24.2 ALOs – Immigration New Zealand has indicated that ALOs can be deployed at key international airports, including Los Angeles,

<sup>1</sup> s9(2)(b)(ii) [redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]

Singapore, Doha and Dubai, to support airlines with pre-departure checks.

24.3 Customs – arrival compliance checks within the airport.

- 25 Given that a number of ports that ALOs will be stationed are transit points (with travel originating from elsewhere such as Europe), if a traveller is found to be ineligible at one of these ports, they are likely to be turned around part way through their journey and will be required to organise their own travel back to their point of origin causing disruption to the traveller.
- 26 Customs has advised that continuing under current assurance levels (100% checks) for large numbers of travellers could cause significant disruption to passenger processing and infrastructure at airports. Further resourcing at the airport would be required to support an increase in passenger volumes.
- 27 Officials have considered whether the opening of Step 2 should be aligned to the implementation of the THDS, <sup>s9(2)(g)(i)</sup> [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] However, alignment would delay border re-opening for an extended period.

**Step 3 can begin from 30 April 2022**

- 28 Step 3 involves expanding the medium-risk pathway to fully vaccinated foreign nationals. This broad re-opening step is expected to have significant impacts on the number of arrivals into New Zealand, arising from both foreign nationals offshore travelling to New Zealand and from those currently in New Zealand seeking to leave and then return.
- 29 Cabinet requested that the Minister for COVID-19 Response report back on moving the commencement date for Step 3 forward to 30 April, from Cabinet's previous decision to commence Step 3 from 31 May. The Minister of Immigration has confirmed that bringing forward the commencement of a staged opening of Step 3 from 30 April is possible.
- 30 The implementation of this step is subject to further advice on staging and phasing decisions of reopening visa categories, taking into account the ongoing need for volume controls on the number of arrivals into New Zealand to manage health risks and immigration visa processing capacity. Even if volumes of arrivals do not need to be managed for health reasons, given recent immigration policy decisions and decisions on visa processing priorities (such as the 2021 Residence Visa), reopening of visa processing will need to be staged.
- 31 The Minister of Immigration will report back to the Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministerial Group in December with proposals for staging and phasing the re-opening of visa categories and options for visa processing priorities for reopening the third step. One option that will be considered is

<sup>2</sup> Pre-departure tests will all be manually checked in addition to vaccination certificates from countries other than Australia and the EU-DCC countries

opening to Australians first. Officials are preparing advice on lead-in times for decisions.

- 32 The changes that result from Steps One and Two will free up spaces in MIQ. Decisions are still to be taken as to how much MIQ capacity will be retained, but there is an opportunity to provide a number of workers to come to New Zealand to fulfil acute labour shortages in the first quarter of 2022. The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment will provide further advice on how these rooms could be allocated, along with other users, including group allocations for sporting and cultural groups.
- 33 The phasing of Step 3 will need to take into account the domestic and international situation at the time. For example, there may be implications for the domestic health system in dealing with an increased number of COVID-19 hospitalisations along with the 2022 winter flu season, or new variants could emerge that create additional risks.
- 34 The aviation industry is seeking signals that further decisions on Step 3 are coming to stimulate the return of business and tourism related travel. Some airlines are reaching a critical decision point about whether to continue to operate to New Zealand, and clear messaging about the timing of and conditions associated with Step 3 would help avoid the risk of New Zealand continuing to lose air connectivity. They advised that following an initial influx of travellers, ongoing border requirements such as arrival testing and self-isolation could limit the attractiveness of New Zealand as a destination for non New Zealanders.

**The timing of the proposed steps reflects the twin objectives of re-opening and protecting public health**

- 35 The proposed timing of the Steps reflects a careful and evolving consideration of the domestic and international context. This includes increasing vaccination rates, the Delta outbreak, the shift from the Elimination strategy to the Minimisation and Protection strategy, and the COVID-19 Protection Framework. This has involved consideration of public health settings and mitigations to manage potential border risk. In the process, options have been considered including shorter timeframes for Reconnecting, however they were not deemed appropriate within the context and objectives of the overall COVID-19 response.
- 36 Based on these considerations, the timing of the steps has been proposed to support the implementation of the appropriate public health risk mitigations at the border and ensures that pressures on our health system are managed appropriately. This also allows time to make careful decisions in an evolving context, based on emerging and current information.

*Expert advice provided to the Director General of Health supports the phased transition to relaxing border controls set out in the Reconnecting approach*

- 37 Additional expert advice was commissioned by the Director-General of Health on the impact of re-opening borders, risks related to the transition away from tight border controls, and the interactions with the Framework. This advice indicates a lower relative level of public health risk from international travellers than was previously the case, but highlights other key considerations relating to the ongoing need to manage risk at the border and the importance of ensuring health system readiness and adequate public health measures as a pre-requisite for change.
- 38 In particular, this advice highlighted the increased public health risk associated with an increased number of international arrivals. The advice also highlighted concerns about the potential for a widespread 'seeding' effect, where there is a significant impact if new cases emerge in areas where there is currently no or low levels of transmission, if appropriate mitigations were not in place. This could have a significant impact on local health systems as well as national testing, case follow-up and contact tracing capacity.
- 39 Based on the Public Health Risk Assessment, and consideration of cumulative risk, expert advice is that there is a rationale to transition to Reconnecting New Zealanders and move away from Managed Isolation as the default setting, in line with the Reconnecting New Zealanders timeframes.
- 40 The managed transition process allows for:
- 40.1 Managing the risk within Auckland ahead of the implementation of the removal of the Auckland boundary;
  - 40.2 Managing cumulative risk as the country shifts to the Framework and works to implement the Reconnecting New Zealanders approach which will see much greater numbers of travellers entering the country, and supports the effective implementation of the new settings proposed under Reconnecting New Zealanders;
  - 40.3 Mitigates the risk of seeding in communities where there is no (or low levels of) community transmission;
  - 40.4 Supports ongoing health system readiness at a time when there is likely to be greater pressure due to the shift to the COVID-19 Protection Framework.

*The timing of the Steps also takes into account operational considerations*

- 41 The timeframes proposed as part of Reconnecting New Zealand take into consideration operational and other implications, to ensure a carefully managed and safe transition. These include:

- 41.1 the time required to strengthen testing capacity, including consideration of airport testing and implementation of rapid antigen testing for people in self-isolation;
  - 41.2 the time required to implement validation of testing and vaccination status, being developed as part of the THDS, and the capacity to use a manual declaration process as an interim step; and
  - 41.3 implementing large scale self-isolation, particularly if there are compliance and monitoring systems that need to be developed.
- 42 Given the need to implement changes to carefully manage the public health risk for border returnees, the Ministry of Health considers that there will be operational and potential public health risks if changes to border settings are progressed ahead of the Reconnecting New Zealanders timeframes that have been endorsed by Cabinet.
- 43 It will be important to continue keeping our border settings under review to ensure they are appropriate and proportionate to risk. Officials will provide further advice on a review schedule of border measures, such as arrival testing and self-isolation, as part of the report back to the Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministerial Group by the Border Executive Board and Ministry of Health in December.

#### Requirements for the medium-risk pathway

- 44 The medium-risk pathway aims to ensure that there are suitable risk mitigations in place for travellers in line with our minimisation and protection strategy, while also enabling an increasing number of travellers to enter New Zealand. A stepped transition will aim to maintain this balance and to ensure that the risk-mitigation measures in place domestically under the Framework can support the increased risk at the border.
- 45 The public health requirements for the medium-risk pathway provide layers of protection to mitigate the risk of arrivals at the border seeding additional COVID-19 cases in the community. I propose the following requirements for the medium-risk pathway:
- 45.1 a negative polymerase chain reaction (PCR), Loop-mediated Isothermal Amplification (LAMP), or antigen pre-departure test within 72 hours prior to boarding;
  - 45.2 acceptable evidence of being “fully vaccinated” with an approved vaccine<sup>3</sup>;
  - 45.3 declaration of all required information (using Nau Mai Rā), including contact details (provided prior to boarding for contact tracing purposes) and that they have not been in a VHR country in the past 14 days;

Pre-departure testing requirements currently apply until 31 July 2022. The Government has indicated that pre-departure testing requirements may be removed before this date.

<sup>3</sup> Where unvaccinated children under 17 are travelling with adults who are eligible for the medium-risk pathway, they will enter on the same entry pathway as their adult guardians.



- 45.4 a seven-day self-isolation requirement;
- 45.5 a day 0/1 test on arrival; and
- 45.6 a day 5/6 test prior to release from self-isolation – either a RAT provided to travellers at the airport and self-administered in their self-isolation location or a PCR test administered by a community testing centre (noting that there could be a delay in the delivery of PCR results due to the increase in testing and lab processing demand).
- 46 Health officials note that self-administered tests are less reliable than observed or assisted RAT, although there would likely be a high level of compliance with their appropriate use.
- 47 I consider the arrival test, and the verification of the result of the day 5/6 test prior to leaving self-isolation to be important components of the system. By assessing the traveller's COVID-19 status on their entry to New Zealand, and on their entry to the community, we can manage their risk in a manner consistent with the New Zealand population. There will need to be a mechanism to allow test results to be confirmed for an individual. Further advice on how this will be administered for people who do not have an NHI number will be provided as part of the report back by the Border Executive Board and the Ministry of Health in December.
- 48 I acknowledge that agencies have raised significant concerns about the operational viability of an arrival test at the airport (see paragraphs 65-71). However, I consider if these can be adequately addressed, we should introduce this requirement. The Border Executive Board and the Ministry of Health will report back to the Reconnecting Minister Group by 4 December 2021 on how arrival testing can be operationalised. I expect the implementation of arrival testing and its effectiveness to be reviewed prior to subsequent reopening steps. Officials will advise the timing of this review process in this December report-back. The Ministry of Health, in consultation with the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE), will also provide further advice on how travellers who test positive will be managed.
- 49 I propose the Minister for COVID-19 Response, in consultation with the Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministerial Group, is delegated authority to make decisions on the detailed settings for the medium-risk pathway. The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet will report back to the Ministerial Group in December on detailed settings including impacts, costs, and the criteria for considering higher-risk countries.
- 50 I propose that, initially, those who do not meet the requirements for the medium-risk pathway, but are still permitted to enter New Zealand under current border settings, will continue to enter MIQ upon arrival. This will include unvaccinated New Zealand citizens, those who do not meet the vaccination standards, and those from VHR countries. Officials are doing further work on the use of the VHR criteria as part of the medium-risk pathway, and further advice will be provided to the Reconnecting New

Zealanders Ministerial Group on what may constitute a higher-risk classification as part of the December report-back.

- 51 Should the public health advice about the requirements for self-isolation or the other public health settings change, there may need to be further changes to the settings for the risk-based pathway. The requirements will be kept under review, and further decisions would be sought if any changes are needed.

### **Public health advice from the Ministry of Health on the requirements of the medium-risk pathway**

#### *Pre-departure testing can help to keep risk offshore*

- 52 A negative pre-departure test prior to boarding provides a key layer of protection by detecting and holding risk offshore. It is recommended that the current standards for pre-departure testing are maintained and that travellers are required to have a negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours of their first international departure. This can be a PCR, LAMP, or antigen test. Current pre-departure testing exemptions, such as for children under two years old or travellers from some Pacific QFT countries and Antarctica, would continue to apply.
- 53 Provided pre-departure testing requirements are in place, public health advice is that mixed flights (with both vaccinated and unvaccinated travellers) do not pose an additional risk.

#### *Testing requirements for travellers entering through the medium-risk pathway*

- 54 Public health advice is that initial testing can provide an additional layer of assurance for international travellers when entering New Zealand. It is likely that there is a greater risk for people in the community (at least in Auckland) becoming infected if they are a close contact of a community case than there is from being infected by a returning traveller who is fully vaccinated and has had a PDT. This has implications as to where the discretionary testing should be targeted.
- 55 There are three key options for testing requirements on arrival:
- 55.1 RAT at the airport – RAT tests take approximately 15 minutes to read from the points of collection<sup>4</sup> with an administration component to handing out the test and providing the result. Public health advice is that RAT on arrival is most effective for people that are highly infectious.
  - 55.2 PCR on arrival – PCR testing on arrival has been considered, which could involve setting up a mobile testing centre outside an airport terminal. These results would not be able to be processed while the traveller is at the airport.

<sup>4</sup> The end-to-end time for this process is likely to be longer than this, particularly at a larger scale. The Self-Isolation pilot which tested 10-15 people per flight had an outlier of 45 minutes.

- 55.3 Day 0/1 RAT or PCR test in self-isolation - Day 0/1 PCR testing is currently being used in MIQ and remains a reliable option. This could be an alternative to a test at the airport, and could be done as a test at the start of the home isolation/quarantine period. A RAT could be provided at the airport and self-administered on day 0/1. This approach is being taken by a range of other international jurisdictions.
- 56 In addition, a day 5/6 test (either PCR or RAT) which is either self-administered or collected at a community testing centre, would further mitigate the risk of travellers entering the community and seeding additional COVID-19 cases. Release from self-isolation would be dependent on a negative test.
- 57 The public health recommendation is that testing requirements for returnees who are self-isolating should be the same as for close contacts of community cases. This includes a day 0/1 test and day 5/6 test. This will ensure consistency but may mean that PCR testing resources are diverted from community where they are currently needed more.
- 58 Within these the initial settings, the default test would be a PCR. Acknowledging that there will be a delay in the delivery of results due to the increase in testing and lab processing demand, as we move forward, transitioning to more usage of RAT may be appropriate. However, RAT is not always as effective when self-administered.

*Vaccinated and unvaccinated travellers may be able to self-isolate over the medium to long term*

- 59 Public health advice is that the risk posed by both vaccinated and unvaccinated returnees can be managed not just through short-stay MIQ, but also through other measures, including self-isolation and testing. The Ministry of Health considers that the COVID-19 Vaccination Certificate (CVC) requirements will provide a buffer for the risks presented by unvaccinated returnees, who would be limited in their access to many domestic locations without a CVC.
- 60 The Ministry has also considered the option of allowing only fully vaccinated returnees to enter through the medium-risk pathway (and requiring unvaccinated travellers to enter MIQ). While this option would reduce any infection-risk presented by unvaccinated returnees (which current evidence shows is around three times higher than from a vaccinated individual), it is unlikely that continuing to require unvaccinated travellers to enter MIQ will be proportionate to this level of risk over the medium to long term.

### **Further work is underway to operationalise self-isolation at scale**

- 61 Given the higher risk profile posed by unvaccinated travellers<sup>5</sup>, further consideration is being given to the system-wide public health and operational

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<sup>5</sup> Current evidence indicates that vaccinated travellers protect the community twice. First, unvaccinated people are up to ten times more likely to be infected than recently vaccinated people if they are exposed before departure. And if they are infected, they are up to three times as likely to transmit to another person than those who are vaccinated.

implications of allowing unvaccinated travellers to enter self-isolation rather than MIQ. Permitting unvaccinated travellers to self-isolate would be a significant change from our current settings, i.e. MIQ by default for all travellers, and could generate concern in the community. It is also not aligned to the substantial differences in settings under the CPF that are predicated on vaccination status.

- 62 I propose that initially, the vaccination requirements for the medium-risk pathway (which have been endorsed by Cabinet) are maintained and that options for allowing unvaccinated travellers to enter New Zealand without MIQ should not be considered until the issues identified by the Ministry of Health are fully worked through. If, as a result of further public health analysis and legal advice, the public health advice indicates that the use of MIQ may no longer be proportionate to the level of risk presented by unvaccinated New Zealand citizens, further consideration would need to be given to the settings for the medium-risk pathway.
- 63 It is important that the requirements for the medium-risk pathway are proportionate to the level of risk posed by individual travellers and the cumulative risk of allowing a higher volume of travellers to enter through the medium-risk pathway. This will be subject to ongoing analysis and review, with experience of both the Framework and the medium-risk pathway, and the evolution of virus risk and other factors.
- 64 Further consideration would also need to be given to the role of compliance checking of health information by airlines and border agencies, as this would have limited value if both vaccinated and unvaccinated travellers were able to enter self-isolation.

#### **Operational concerns about travellers needing to await test results before leaving the airport**

- 65 Officials have considered, s9(2)(ba)(i) whether a RAT at the airport could be required for all travellers entering through the medium-risk pathway. This option is not considered viable as it would have significant implications for passenger processing and flow-on impacts for the number of flights airports could facilitate, if test results are to be provided before a traveller leaves the airport.
- 66 Officials have proposed an alternative option: to hand out RAT self-testing kits on arrival at the airport for travellers to self-administer while in self-isolation, with limited testing capacity at the airport for sample tests, such as for higher risk travellers. Further work is needed on how the RAT result would be recorded and linked to a traveller, especially if they do not have a New Zealand NHI number.
- 67 A requirement for testing and to obtain a result at the airport would limit the ability to process passengers and would therefore have a knock-on implication for flight scheduling. The operational complexities to implementing large-scale RAT testing include:

67.1 There is limited space and infrastructure at the airports available to support travellers to take a test and wait for the result; facilitating this would require repurposing of large sections of the airports, which would be expensive and require lead in time for work to be completed. Due to the relative size of airports, this may limit RAT testing to Auckland and Christchurch airports, with Wellington and Queenstown airports unlikely to be able to meet requirements.

67.2 s9(2)(f)(iv) [Redacted]

67.4 Significant implications for the time it would take for people to exit the airport terminal. Auckland Airport estimates that it would take at least 90 minutes to process around 200 passengers, including manual checking of PDT and vaccination status and RAT testing. Generally, flights arrive in tight groups (early morning, mid-afternoon and late evening). There is the risk that passengers could be held on aircraft on the tarmac while other flights are processed.

67.5 Implications for flight scheduling – the estimated additional processing time set out above would significantly limit flight schedules to only 12 flights arriving in a 24-hour period. This would be unworkable, given the estimated number of arrivals under the reopening steps and would reduce the viability of New Zealand as a destination.

67.6 Significant implications for health and border agency resourcing to facilitate the testing – the additional workforce required to administer RATs at the airport would need to be recruited or diverted from other parts of the response system which may impact regional health system capacity, a factor considered in Framework settings. Further work would also be required to determine which workforces could facilitate testing on arrival.

68 Once New Zealanders can travel without being required to enter MIQ the numbers of people per flight and the numbers of flights arriving will increase significantly. Auckland Airport has reported that facilitating RAT tests for even the very small number of participants as part of the self-isolation trial has proved challenging and is not scalable at any level<sup>6</sup>.

69 There is likely to be capacity to conduct RAT on arrival for a limited number of individuals that might present a higher risk, e.g. symptomatic passengers and

<sup>6</sup> The data so far from the trial shows 16 RAT tests to date over 3 weeks; processing time of 14 mins per traveller on average; outlier – one took 45 mins; 14 out of the 16 had tech issues; 1/16 has been positive result. This was followed up by PCR. Result not known.

unvaccinated New Zealanders, but this will depend on the number of anticipated unvaccinated arrivals.

- 70 Officials have also considered other options for administering RAT testing on arrival, such as setting up a mobile testing station outside the terminal. However, this would also have significant implications for passenger wait time and congestion at airports and is not considered workable.
- 71 Where RAT is available at airports overseas, it is primarily on an optional basis. China and Indonesia are the only two jurisdictions officials are aware of that require all arrivals to undergo a test at the airport, s6(a) [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Most jurisdictions that mandate a test on arrival require it to be conducted within a certain time of arrival (usually up to 48 hours) at a community testing station.

### **Self-isolation requirements will be based on a high-trust approach**

- 72 In order to facilitate a large and increasing number of travellers entering through the medium-risk pathway, a high-trust approach will need to be taken to self-isolation requirements. Such an approach is appropriate, given the other layers of protection currently in place, e.g. pre-departure testing, which means that border arrivals carry a relatively low public health risk (with less than a one percent risk of testing positive for COVID-19).
- 73 In addition to the requirements for the medium-risk pathway outlined above, we propose the following features for self-isolation:
- 73.1 **Place of self-isolation** – I propose placing only minor limitations or requirements on where people may undertake their self-isolation. We consider the approach currently taken for self-isolation, following release from the shortened seven-day MIQ stay, is strengthened for large-scale self-isolation. I propose that people should not be able to self-isolate in a shared accommodation venue that requires use of facilities (e.g. bathrooms and/or kitchens) that are shared with someone that the returnee does not know (e.g. hostels, boarding houses). This may have implications for some people (e.g. international students or backpackers), particularly those arriving under Step 3.
- 73.2 **Travel to self-isolation** – I propose there are no restrictions on how travellers get from the airport to the premises where they will self-isolate. This is consistent with the approach taken for self-isolation following release from seven-day MIQ.
- 73.3 **Other people present during self-isolation** – I propose limitations or requirements on who may be present in the premises while a person is undertaking self-isolation at home should relate only to visitors (including tradespeople) not ordinary household members. This is consistent with the approach taken for self-isolation following release from seven-day MIQ.

73.4 **Welfare support** – I propose that large-scale self-isolation will not include any active support for, or monitoring of, the welfare needs of travellers during their self-isolation period. Supporting such measures at the scale required will pose a significant workforce impact, which is likely to be disproportionate to any reduction in public health risk. Further consideration will be given to directing travellers towards resources that they can access through existing community services (e.g. Healthline). This is consistent with the approach for travellers self-isolating under short-stay MIQ.

74 MBIE and the Ministry of Health will provide further advice on whether the test at the end of the self-isolation period can be linked to the traveller to allow them to be “signed out” of self-isolation, along with further advice on compliance and monitoring. They will also report back to the Minister for COVID-19 Response with separate advice on self-isolation for groups.

#### **Officials also have considered options for compliance monitoring**

75 Monitoring people in self-isolation provides some confidence that the risk to public health posed is being managed appropriately. There are limited options for monitoring travellers entering self-isolation under the medium-risk pathway. These options are cost and resource intensive and unlikely to be proportionate to the level of risk posed by travellers. Random phone calls would be the easiest option to administer at pace but would be resource intensive and would provide a low level of assurance.

76 At present, we do not monitor positive COVID-19 cases self-isolating in the community. Monitoring border arrivals, when positive community cases (and their close contacts) self-isolating in the community are not monitored, may be perceived as inequitable and disproportionate.

*There are limited options for compliance monitoring of travellers entering self-isolation*

77 Officials have considered options for compliance monitoring border arrivals in self-isolation, based on the experience of other jurisdictions and the Self-Isolation Pilot:

77.1 Electronic monitoring using an ankle bracelet or a wearable Bluetooth device – this option would provide a high level of assurance, as it would monitor the geolocation of the person wearing the bracelet at all times. However, it would require significant ‘hands-on’ effort to fit and prepare technology and is not feasible at scale.

77.2 Electronic monitoring via smartphone app – this option would provide a medium level of assurance, as a border arrival’s location would likely only be verified at the time of a ‘ping’ to their phone. Significant resource would need to be invested in following up on non-responses, and this option is unlikely to be feasible at scale.

77.3 Random phone calls and/or spot checks – this option provides a low level of assurance, as there would be no certainty a border arrival is where they say they are, nor that they have remained in their place of self-isolation, except when spot checks are made. Whilst this option is likely easiest to pursue at pace, it would be resource-intensive.

78 All compliance monitoring options (beyond spot-checks) require that people have phone and/or internet connectivity and possess a suitable device. These requirements cannot be assumed of border arrivals. In the Self-Isolation Pilot, participants have had to update software on their smartphones to complete compliance monitoring, and even within 50km of international airports there have been issues related to cellular coverage.

*Phone-based checks could be facilitated but have significant resourcing and cost implications*

79 Officials from MBIE have considered how compliance monitoring using phone-based checks could be operationalised, extrapolating from the Self-Isolation Pilot.

80 The Pilot uses technology s9(2)(b)(ii) to conduct 3 x daily phone-based monitoring checks on participants. These checks s9(2)(b)(ii) require participants to share their geolocation and turn on their video to verify their address and identity. Participants are only monitored at the time of the call. s9(2)(b)(ii) completes 'spot checks' where participants do not respond to monitoring calls.

81 For illustrative purposes, the table below sets out the approximate cost and workforce required to compliance monitor projected border arrivals under a combination of Steps 1 and 2, and Step 3, assuming Self-Isolation Pilot settings. Officials have also modelled the level of monitoring a limited (50 FTE) workforce could provide, assuming Pilot settings, by Step 3:

|  |              |  |  |  |
|--|--------------|--|--|--|
|  | s9(2)(b)(ii) |  |  |  |
|  |              |  |  |  |
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|  |              |  |  |  |
|  |              |  |  |  |

82 While these costs could be reduced by conducting calls only (i.e. not leveraging a geolocation function), or fewer of them, there is no current workforce that could be stood-up by 16 January to perform this compliance

<sup>7</sup> In practice, this would likely result in less than a quarter of travellers receiving just one phone call during their stay.



monitoring function, or to establish the underlying systems to support the compliance monitoring regime. Phone-based checks would provide very limited assurance that people are complying with self-isolation requirements.

s9(2)(f)(iv) [Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

**Next Steps**

85 The BEB and the Ministry of Health will report back to the Reconnecting Ministerial Group by 4 December on how arrival testing could be operationalised, including workforce responsibility. This report-back will also cover other operational issues including further advice on a review schedule of border measures.

86 The Ministry of Health, in consultation with MBIE, will provide further advice on how travellers who test positive will be managed. They will provide further information on whether the test at the end of the self-isolation period is able to be linked to the traveller to allow them to be “signed out” of self-isolation, along with further information on compliance and monitoring. They will also report back to the Minister for COVID-19 Response with separate advice on self-isolation for groups.

87 The Minister of Immigration will report back to Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministerial Group with proposals for a staged and phased re-opening via categories and options for visa processing priorities for Step 3 of border reopening in December 2021.

88 DPMC officials will report back to the Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministerial Group in December on the use of the higher-risk criteria and on the impacts and costs of the medium-risk pathway, supported by information from operational agencies on detailed settings and requirements

89 MBIE will update the Minister for COVID-19 Response on the proposed approach to those holding existing MIAS vouchers for dates after the Steps commence, options on how increased MIQ availability could be allocated and on self-isolation for groups.

90 Some international tourism will be possible under step three as outlined in this paper, but this will be limited due to the continuing isolation

requirements. Ministers will continue to monitor and review the settings to identify when it will be safe and appropriate to reduced requirements. The BEB and Ministry of Health report back will include a schedule to review measures and the December report back by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (in paragraph 89) will set out the factors that Ministers should consider when reviewing these settings.

**Financial Implications**

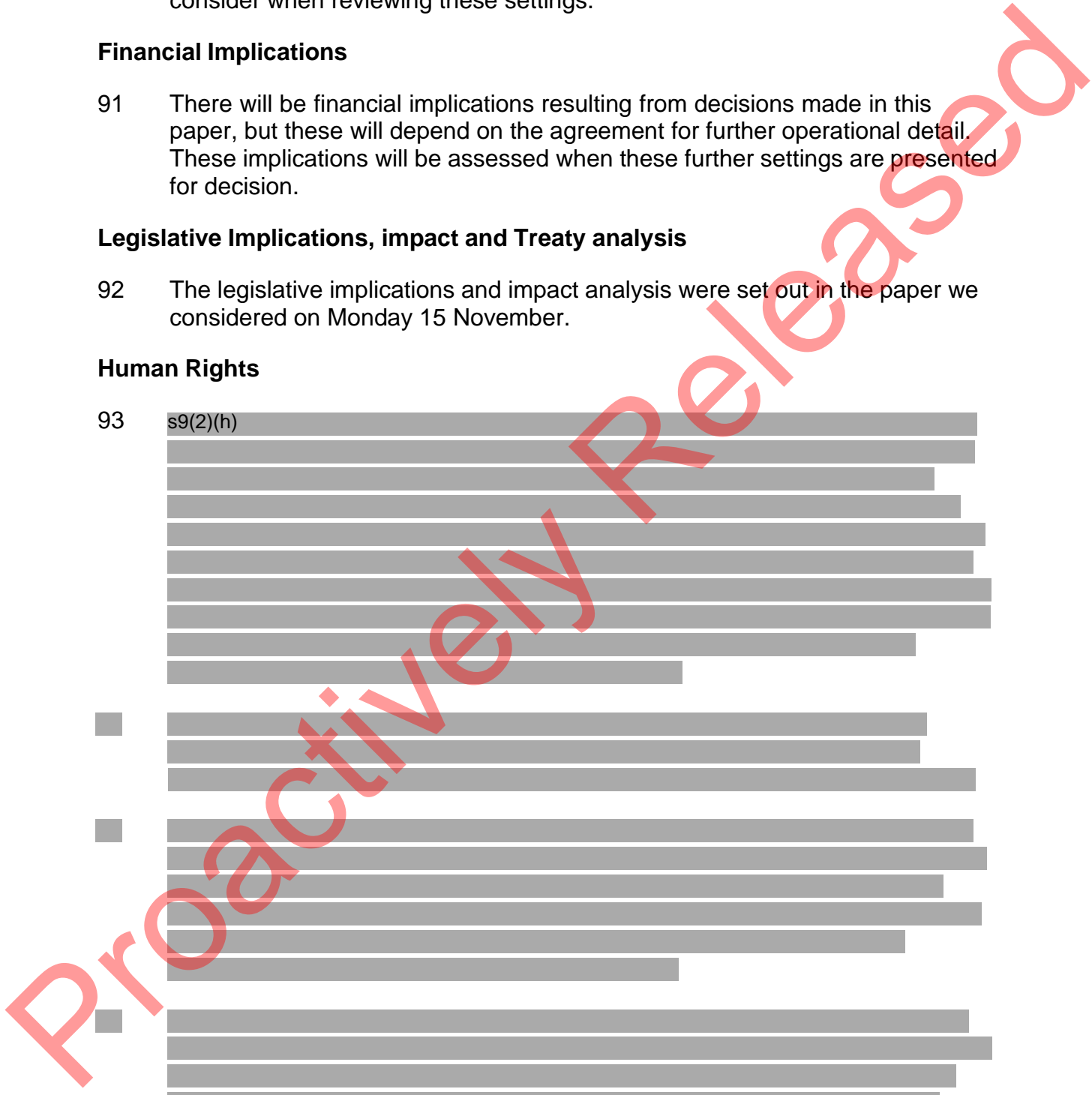
91 There will be financial implications resulting from decisions made in this paper, but these will depend on the agreement for further operational detail. These implications will be assessed when these further settings are presented for decision.

**Legislative Implications, impact and Treaty analysis**

92 The legislative implications and impact analysis were set out in the paper we considered on Monday 15 November.

**Human Rights**

93 s9(2)(h) [Redacted text block containing multiple paragraphs of greyed-out content]



s9(2)(h)

## Consultation

- 97 This paper was prepared by the COVID-19 Group in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. The Ministry of Health reviewed the paper and provided specific input, including public health advice. Crown Law advised on the Bill of Rights implications.
- 98 The following agencies were also consulted on the paper: the New Zealand Customs Service (Customs), Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Primary Industries, Business, Innovation and Employment, Transport and the Treasury.

## Communications and Proactive Release

- 99 Engagement with Māori needs to be undertaken throughout our approach to reconnecting given the Crown's responsibilities under Te Tiriti and the impacts opening our borders will have on Māori.
- 100 I intend to proactively release this paper and its associated minute with any appropriate redaction where information would have been withheld under the Official Information Act 1982.

## Recommendations

The Minister for COVID-19 Response recommends that Cabinet:

### *Timing of implementing the medium risk pathway*

- 1 note that on 15 November 2021 Cabinet endorsed a phased approach to opening the medium-risk pathway, including that Step 1 of the reconnecting approach occurs at 11:59pm 16 January 2022 and that Step 2 occurs no later than 11.59pm 31 March 2022 [CAB-20-MIN-0474];
- 2 note that Cabinet invited the Minister for COVID-19 Response to report back on when Step 1 and Step 2 could be implemented;
- 3 note that officials confirm that Step 1 can be implemented to commence at 11:59pm 16 January 2022, prior to the Traveller Health Declaration System (THDS) being in place, with checking undertaken by airlines and Airline Liaison Officers (ALO) at check-in, and by Customs on arrival;
- 4 note that officials confirm that Step 2 can be implemented to commence at 11.59pm 13 February 2022, prior to the THDS being in place, under similar checking processes to Step 1, with ALOs being deployed to key ports;
- 5 note that continuing under current assurance levels (100% checks) could cause disruption to passenger processing and infrastructure at airports and

that further resourcing at the airport may be required to support an increase in passenger volumes;

- 6 endorse the timing of Step 2 being brought forward to 11.59pm 13 February 2022, subject to assessments of public health factors for the risk pathways, social and economic factors and operational feasibility prior to the commencement of the step;
- 7 note that Step 3 can commence from 30 April 2022, subject to further advice on staging and phasing opening by visa category being provided to the Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministerial Group in December 2021;
- 8 note that the aviation industry is seeking clear signals that further decisions on Step 3 are coming, as some airlines are reaching critical decision points about whether to continue to operate to New Zealand;
- 9 note that the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment will provide advice to the Minister for COVID-19 Response on how capacity in MIQ could be utilised to support meeting skills shortages and for other users, including group allocations.
- 10 note that expert advice provided to the Director General of Health supports the phased transition to relaxing border controls set out in the Reconnecting approach, given the need to manage cumulative public health risk, ensure appropriate systems are in place at the border, and to avoid undue pressures on the health system;
- 11 note that further decisions will be sought if changes to previously agreed settings or timing are indicated by public health advice as the risk context evolves;

*Medium risk pathway requirements*

- 12 agree the following broad requirements for the medium-risk pathway:
  - 12.1 a negative polymerase chain reaction (PCR), Loop-mediated Isothermal Amplification (LAMP), or antigen pre-departure test within 72 hours prior to boarding;
  - 12.2 acceptable evidence of being “fully vaccinated” with an approved vaccine;
  - 12.3 declaration of all required information (using Nau Mai Rā), including contact details (provided prior to boarding for contact tracing purposes) and that the individual has not been in a very high-risk country in the past 14 days;
  - 12.4 a seven-day self-isolation requirement;
  - 12.5 a day 0/1 test on arrival; and
  - 12.6 a day 5/6 test prior to release from self-isolation;

- 13 note that, under the reconnecting approach, airlines may carry both vaccinated travellers and unvaccinated New Zealand citizens, however some airlines including Air New Zealand and QANTAS will have a 'no jab, no fly' policy;
- 14 note that by assessing the traveller's COVID-19 status on their entry to New Zealand, and on their entry to the community, we can manage their risk in a manner consistent with the New Zealand population;
- 15 note that testing with results at the airport for all travellers has significant operational challenges and flow-on implications at the scale needed once traveller numbers increase on the commencement of Step 1;
- 16 note that a RAT could be administered at airports for some individual travellers with a higher-risk profile, including those who develop COVID-19 symptoms while travelling;
- 17 direct the Border Executive Board and Ministry of Health to report back by 4 December to the Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministerial Group on how Day 0/1 arrival testing could be operationalised and other outstanding operational issues, including when measures should be reviewed;
- 18 note that the public health advice from the Ministry of Health is that continuing to require unvaccinated travellers to enter MIQ may not be proportionate to this level of public health risk over the medium to long term;
- 19 note that self-isolation requirements can only be implemented on a high trust basis, given the number of travellers expected under the medium-risk pathway;
- 20 agree that large-scale self-isolation should be designed with the following features:
- 20.1 no limitations or requirements on how people travel from their arrival airport to their location of self-isolation;
  - 20.2 limitations on where people may undertake their self-isolation to avoid sharing facilities with other parties
  - 20.3 only ordinary household members may be present in the premises while a person is undertaking self-isolation
  - 20.4 limited (traveller-initiated) in-premises welfare support for people undertaking their self-isolation, focused on highlighting existing community services to travellers
- 21 authorise the Minister for COVID-19 Response, in consultation with the Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministerial Group, to make decisions on the detailed settings for the medium-risk pathway, including any potential requirements for active monitoring or enforcement of traveller compliance with self-isolation requirements; and

- 22 note that officials will report back to the Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministerial Group in December on detailed settings for the medium-risk pathway including impacts, costs, and the use of the very high-risk criteria.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Chris Hipkins  
Minister for COVID-19 Response



# Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee

## Minute of Decision

*This document contains information for the New Zealand Cabinet. It must be treated in confidence and handled in accordance with any security classification, or other endorsement. The information can only be released, including under the Official Information Act 1982, by persons with the appropriate authority.*

### Reconnecting New Zealanders to the World: Implementing the Medium-risk Pathway

Portfolio                      COVID-19 Response

On 24 November 2021, the Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee, having been authorised by Cabinet to have Power to Act [CAB-21-MIN-0498]:

#### Timing of implementing the medium-risk pathway

- 1        **noted** that on 15 November 2021 Cabinet:
  - 1.1        endorsed a phased approach to opening the medium-risk pathway, including that Step 1 of the reconnecting approach occurs at 11:59pm 16 January 2022 and that Step 2 occurs no later than 11.59pm 31 March 2022;
  - 1.2        invited the Minister for COVID-19 Response to report back on when Step 1 and Step 2 could be implemented;  
[CAB-20-MIN-0474];
- 2        **noted** that officials confirm that Step 1 can be implemented to commence at 11:59pm 16 January 2022, prior to the Traveller Health Declaration System (THDS) being in place, with checking undertaken by airlines and Airline Liaison Officers (ALO) at check-in, and by Customs on arrival;
- 3        **noted** that officials confirm that Step 2 can be implemented to commence at 11.59pm 13 February 2022, prior to the THDS being in place, under similar checking processes to Step 1, with ALOs being deployed to key ports;
- 4        **noted** that continuing under current assurance levels (100 percent checks) could cause disruption to passenger processing and infrastructure at airports and that further resourcing at the airport may be required to support an increase in passenger volumes;
- 5        **endorsed** the timing of Step 2 being brought forward to 11.59pm 13 February 2022, subject to assessments of public health factors for the risk pathways, social and economic factors and operational feasibility prior to the commencement of the step;
- 6        **noted** that Step 3 can commence from 30 April 2022, subject to further advice on staging and phasing opening by visa category being provided to the Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministerial Group in December 2021;

- 7 **noted** that the aviation industry is seeking clear signals that further decisions on Step 3 are coming, as some airlines are reaching critical decision points about whether to continue to operate to New Zealand;
- 8 **noted** that the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment will provide advice to the Minister for COVID-19 Response on how capacity in MIQ could be utilised to support meeting skills shortages and for other users, including group allocations.
- 9 **noted** that expert advice provided to the Director General of Health supports the phased transition to relaxing border controls set out in the Reconnecting approach, given the need to manage cumulative public health risk, ensure appropriate systems are in place at the border, and to avoid undue pressures on the health system;
- 10 **noted** that further decisions will be sought if changes to previously agreed settings or timing are indicated by public health advice as the risk context evolves;

### Medium-risk pathway requirements

- 11 **agreed** the following broad requirements for the medium-risk pathway:
- 11.1 a negative polymerase chain reaction (PCR), Loop-mediated Isothermal Amplification (LAMP), or antigen pre-departure test within 72 hours prior to boarding;
  - 11.2 acceptable evidence of being “fully vaccinated” with an approved vaccine;
  - 11.3 declaration of all required information (using Nau Mai Rā), including contact details (provided prior to boarding for contact tracing purposes) and that the individual has not been in a very high-risk country in the past 14 days;
  - 11.4 a seven-day self-isolation requirement;
  - 11.5 a day 0/1 test on arrival; and
  - 11.6 a day 5/6 test prior to release from self-isolation;
- 12 **noted** that, under the reconnecting approach, airlines may carry both vaccinated travellers and unvaccinated New Zealand citizens, however some airlines including Air New Zealand and QANTAS will have a ‘no jab, no fly’ policy;
- 13 **noted** that by assessing the traveller’s COVID-19 status on their entry to New Zealand, and on their entry to the community, we can manage their risk in a manner consistent with the New Zealand population;
- 14 **noted** that testing with results at the airport for all travellers has significant operational challenges and flow-on implications at the scale needed once traveller numbers increase on the commencement of Step 1;
- 15 **noted** that a rapid antigen test (RAT) could be administered at airports for some individual travellers with a higher-risk profile, including those who develop COVID-19 symptoms while travelling;
- 16 **directed** the Border Executive Board and Ministry of Health to report back by 4 December 2021 to the Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministerial Group on how Day 0/1 arrival testing could be operationalised and other outstanding operational issues, including when measures should be reviewed;



- 17 **noted** that the public health advice from the Ministry of Health is that continuing to require unvaccinated travellers to enter MIQ may not be proportionate to this level of public health risk over the medium to long term, and therefore transition to self-isolation is considered appropriate;
- 18 **noted** that self-isolation requirements can only be implemented on a high trust basis, given the number of travellers expected under the medium-risk pathway;
- 19 **agreed** that large-scale self-isolation should be designed with the following features:
- 19.1 no limitations or requirements on how people travel from their arrival airport to their location of self-isolation;
  - 19.2 limitations on where people may undertake their self-isolation to avoid sharing facilities with other parties
  - 19.3 only ordinary household members may be present in the premises while a person is undertaking self-isolation
  - 19.4 limited (traveller-initiated) in-premises welfare support for people undertaking their self-isolation, focused on highlighting existing community services to travellers
- 20 **authorised** the Minister for COVID-19 Response, in consultation with the Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministerial Group, to make decisions on the detailed settings for the medium-risk pathway, including any potential requirements for active monitoring or enforcement of traveller compliance with self-isolation requirements; and
- 21 **noted** that officials will report back to the Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministerial Group in December 2021 on detailed settings for the medium-risk pathway including impacts, costs, and the use of the very high-risk criteria.

Rachel Clarke  
Committee Secretary

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**Present:**

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern  
Hon Grant Robertson  
Hon Kelvin Davis  
Hon Carmel Sepuloni (Chair)  
Hon Chris Hipkins  
Hon Andrew Little  
Hon Poto Williams  
Hon Kris Faafoi  
Hon Peeni Henare  
Hon Willie Jackson  
Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall  
Hon Aupito William Sio  
Hon Meka Whaitiri  
Hon Priyanca Radhakrishnan

**Officials present from:**

Office of the Prime Minister  
Office of the Chair  
Officials Committee for SWC



# Cabinet

## Minute of Decision

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### Reconnecting New Zealanders to the World: Implementing the Medium-risk Pathway

Portfolio                      COVID-19 Response

On 22 November 2021, Cabinet:

- 1        **referred** the submission attached to CAB-21-SUB-0498, *Reconnecting New Zealanders to the World: Implementing the Medium-risk Pathway*, to the Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee (SWC) for consideration at its meeting on 24 November 2021, with a revised paper if required;
- 2        **noted** that on 15 November 2021 Cabinet endorsed a date of by 31 May 2022 for Step 3 of the medium-risk pathway (expanding the medium-risk pathway to fully vaccinated foreign nationals) [CAB-21-MIN-0474];
- 3        **invited** the Minister for COVID-19 Response to provide further advice for SWC on 24 November 2021 on moving the date for Step 3 forward to 30 April 2022;
- 4        **authorised** SWC to have Power to Act at its meeting on 24 November 2021 to take decisions on the submission.

Martin Bell  
for Secretary of the Cabinet