



Proactive Release

The following document has been proactively released by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), on behalf of Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister for COVID-19 Response:

Reconnecting New Zealanders Further changes to international border settings

The following documents have been included in this release:

Title of paper: Reconnecting New Zealanders: Further Changes to International Border Settings (SWC-22-SUB-0033 refers)

Title of minute: Reconnecting New Zealanders: Further Changes to International Border Settings (SWC-22-MIN-0033 refers)

Title of minute: Reconnecting New Zealanders: Further Changes to International Border Settings (CAB-22-MIN-0072 refers)

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IN CONFIDENCE



Background information:

Circumstances of paper being considered by Cabinet - Timeline for related decisions:

- 27 February: Report from the Strategic COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group sent to Associate Minister for COVID-19 Response.
- 28 February: Officials finalise briefing for Ministers' consideration and matter considered by Cabinet as an "additional item". Cabinet agreed:
 - fully vaccinated international arrivals to New Zealand will no longer be required to self-isolate on arrival or be in MIQ;
 - Ministers with Power to Act take decisions on unvaccinated travellers and any additional mitigations needed in place of MIQ; and
 - removing these requirements applies to all New Zealand citizens and residents and other eligible travellers under current border settings only, and that all previous decisions regarding when non-citizens and non-residents can enter still stand [CAB-22-MIN-0050].
- Week of 28 February: Subsequent Cabinet paper drafted and Ministerial consultation commences.
- 9 March: Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee (SWC) referred a subsequent submission under SWC-22-SUB-0033 to Cabinet for further consideration.
- 14 March: Cabinet [CAB-22-MIN-0072]:
 - noted that minimum COVID-19 vaccination requirements for entry to New Zealand by air will continue to apply to arrivals unless they are New Zealand citizens or otherwise exempt;
 - agreed that eligible international arrivals to New Zealand who do not meet the definition of 'fully vaccinated' will no longer be required to undertake Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ), and that this requirement will be replaced with a testing pathway in line with the settings for 'fully vaccinated' arrivals at the air border, as recommended by the Director-General of Health in the context of the current outbreak, and with high domestic COVID-19 vaccination rates;
 - agreed to bring forward reopening to: Australian citizens and permanent residents arriving from anywhere in the world to align with Step 3, from 11.59 pm Tuesday 12 April 2022; and visa-waiver travellers and existing holders of valid visitor visas (both onshore and offshore) to commence from 11.59 pm Sunday 1 May 2022; and
 - the Prime Minister advised in her post-Cabinet press conference that further announcements would be made on RNZ reopening dates on Wednesday 16 March.
- 16 March: the Prime Minister announces the 14 March Cabinet decisions.

In Confidence

Office of the Minister for COVID-19 Response

Cabinet

Reconnecting New Zealanders: Further changes to international border settings

Proposal

- 1 This paper seeks agreement to updated border settings for arrivals who do not meet the 'fully vaccinated' definition, including the removal of the requirement to enter Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ). It also seeks decisions on the timing for reopening of the border for Australians, visa-waiver travellers, and existing holders of valid visitor visas, previously agreed for Step 4 (by July).

Relation to government priorities

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

Executive Summary

- 3 On 28 February 2022, in light of reduced relative risk from the border, Cabinet agreed to remove the self-isolation requirement for 'fully vaccinated'¹ international arrivals and to bring forward Step 2 to commence from 11.59pm Friday 4 March. As a result, all 'fully vaccinated' New Zealanders and other eligible travellers under current immigration settings can enter New Zealand without self-isolation or quarantine.
- 4 We now need to review the approach to arrivals who do not meet the definition of 'fully vaccinated'. Updated public health advice from the Ministry of Health is that there is no longer a significant difference in risk posed to the community by arrivals who do not meet the definition of 'fully vaccinated' against COVID-19 relative to those that do. I therefore recommend removing the MIQ requirement and seek agreement to its replacement with either a testing pathway in line with the settings for 'fully vaccinated' arrivals, or a short self-isolation pathway until a negative day 3 self-administered RAT result is returned.
- 5 In considering these options, we need to balance the effectiveness of the settings in mitigating risk, the proportionality of the requirements, and operational considerations. Removing the MIQ requirement will impact the decommissioning of MIQ facilities, which we are considering in a separate paper today.
- 6 The first option is recommended by the Director-General of Health on the basis that, in the context of the current outbreak, and with a highly vaccinated domestic

¹ 'Fully vaccinated' refers to those vaccinated with either: 1) a complete course of any combination of the Medsafe or WHO EUL approved vaccines; or 2) a complete course of any other government-approved vaccine and 1 dose of Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Moderna or Janssen; or a single dose of any other government-approved vaccine and 1 dose of Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Moderna or Janssen.

population, there is no significant difference in risk posed to the New Zealand community by arrivals who do not meet the definition of ‘fully vaccinated’ relative to those who do. The second option includes an additional measure of self-isolation until returning a negative RAT result. However, this is not supported by the Ministry of Health’s public health advice, s9(2)(h)

I am also advised by border agencies that it would be operationally difficult to enforce.

- 7 Under either option, non-New Zealand citizens arriving by air will continue to be required to meet minimum vaccination requirements unless they are exempt. s9(2)

(f)(iv)

- 8 I also seek decisions on the timing for reopening to Australians, visa-waiver travellers, and existing holders of valid visitor visas. I consider the following options strike a balance between the benefits of earlier reopening to these categories and a precautionary approach to health system capacity:

8.1 Option 1: Reopening to Australian citizens and permanent residents arriving from anywhere in the world, visa-waiver travellers and existing holders of valid visitor visas **by July** (Status Quo)

8.2 Option 2: Reopening to Australian citizens and permanent residents arriving from anywhere in the world, visa-waiver travellers and existing holders of valid visitor visas **to align with Step 3, from 11.59pm Tuesday 12 April**

8.3 Option 3: Reopening to:

8.3.1 Australian citizens and permanent residents arriving from anywhere in the world **to align with Step 3, from 11.59pm Tuesday 12 April**

8.3.2 visa-waiver travellers and existing holders of valid visitor visas, **from 11.59pm Sunday 1 May**

8.4 Option 4: Reopening to Australian citizens and permanent residents arriving from anywhere in the world, visa-waiver travellers and existing holders of valid visitor visas **from 11.59pm Sunday 1 May.**

- 9 Given the evolving risk context, we will need to continue reviewing border settings. I have asked officials to consider border settings before Step 3, with a report-back to Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministers in the week of 21 March for further decisions.

Background

- 10 On 28 February 2022, Cabinet considered updated health advice on border settings for fully vaccinated arrivals and agreed that fully vaccinated international arrivals to New Zealand will no longer be required to self-isolate on arrival or be in MIQ, with the following timings:

- 10.1 for New Zealanders and other travellers under current immigration settings arriving from Australia – from 11.59pm Wednesday 2 March (Step 1);
 - 10.2 for New Zealanders and other travellers under current immigration settings arriving from other countries – no later than 11.59pm Friday 4 March (brought forward from Step 2, 11.59pm Sunday 13 March); and
 - 10.3 for other travellers not currently eligible to enter under immigration settings – in accordance with previous decisions on the timing of Steps, with further advice to be provided on the timing of Steps 3 and 4 [CAB-22-MIN-0050].
- 11 Cabinet also noted advice from the Director-General of Health that continuing to require unvaccinated New Zealand citizens to enter MIQ is no longer justified on the basis of reducing outbreak size or containing transmission, but there are risks with this approach so further consideration is needed.

Requirements for arrivals who do not meet the ‘fully vaccinated’ definition

- 12 Under existing settings, arrivals who do not meet the definition of ‘fully vaccinated’ are required to enter MIQ for a seven-day period. Arrivals who do not meet this definition may include:
- 12.1 **unvaccinated arrivals** (limited to New Zealand citizens and other groups who are exempt from the minimum vaccination requirements for entry to New Zealand by air, such as those aged 16 years and under, refugees, people evacuated from Afghanistan, and those who have a certificate from a health practitioner confirming they cannot be vaccinated against COVID-19 due to medical reasons); and
 - 12.2 **minimally vaccinated arrivals**² (those who meet the minimum vaccination requirements for entry to New Zealand by air but who do not meet the definition of ‘fully vaccinated’).
- 13 I have considered updated advice from the Ministry of Health on the approach to these arrivals. It states there is no strong public health rationale to manage arrivals who are not ‘fully vaccinated’ differently from those who are by requiring them to enter MIQ. The advice is informed by the assessment that detaining these arrivals in MIQ would have minimal impact on reducing the current outbreak or containing transmission. Unvaccinated people have a higher risk of hospitalisation, but the risk of that is the same whether they are in MIQ or the community.
- 14 The advice is also informed by the expected scale of the risk. Most arrivals are currently required to obtain a negative pre-departure test prior to boarding, which includes either a RAT or LAMP test within 24 hours or a PCR test within 48 hours of

² Policy settings in place since 1 November 2021 require non-New Zealand citizens arriving by air to have a complete primary course (or a combination of) any of the COVID-19 vaccines that have been approved by at least one government health authority or approval authority. These are known as the ‘minimum vaccination requirements’. Requirements to meet the definition of ‘fully vaccinated’ are tighter, based on WHO EUL approved vaccines which are required to have an efficacy of 50% or above.

departure.³ Volumes of unvaccinated arrivals are limited by the minimum vaccination requirements for non-New Zealand citizens arriving by air, which would continue to be in place. Additionally, some airlines currently require vaccination as a condition of carriage.⁴ The proportion of minimally vaccinated arrivals is also expected to be relatively low, given that the vaccine types approved for the definition of ‘fully vaccinated’ are widely used internationally.

Proposal to remove the MIQ requirement

- 15 Having considered the updated advice on the approach to arrivals who are not ‘fully vaccinated’, I seek agreement to the removal of the MIQ requirement and its replacement with either:
- 15.1 a testing pathway in line with the settings for ‘fully vaccinated’ arrivals at the air border (**recommended by the Director-General of Health**); or
 - 15.2 a short self-isolation pathway until a negative day 3 self-administered RAT result is returned.
- 16 The first option is recommended by the Director-General of Health and would reflect the public health advice that, in the context of the current outbreak and the nature of the Omicron variant, there is no significant difference in the risk posed to the New Zealand community by arrivals who do not meet the definition of ‘fully vaccinated’ that would justify the need for a period of self-isolation or MIQ. This option would also be easier to operationalise.
- 17 The second option would build in the additional measure of self-isolation until testing negative, but public health advice is that self-isolation is not necessary due to the relative risk level posed by these arrivals, and not recommended, as it would be a disproportionate response. s9(2)(h) [REDACTED] I am also advised by border agencies that it would be difficult to operationalise and enforce this option as arriving passengers would need to either self-identify or be identified through an additional process that would require manual verification until the go-live date of the New Zealand Traveller Declaration (NZTD).
- 18 Under either option, minimum COVID-19 vaccination requirements will remain in place for non-New Zealand citizens entering by air. This will continue to limit volumes of unvaccinated arrivals, as minimum vaccination requirements will apply to arrivals, unless they are New Zealand citizens or otherwise exempt.

19 s9(2)(f)(iv) [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

³ Travellers that are not required to obtain a PDT include those from low-risk Pacific countries and those travelling from countries that are exempt from PDT requirements (where New Zealand’s PDT standard is not available).

⁴ Of the 13 airlines currently servicing New Zealand, 6 require passengers to be fully vaccinated to travel (Air NZ, Fiji Airways, China Southern, China Eastern, Virgin Australia and Jetstar). The 7 airlines that do not have a policy but will adhere to any entry restrictions for passengers imposed by New Zealand are Cathay Pacific, Latam, Qantas, Emirates, Singapore Airways, Qatar Airways and Malaysian Airways.

Qantas was listed within the wrong category, it should be within the ‘require vaccination’ category

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

[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

22 The Ministry of Health and the Strategic Covid-19 Public Health Advisory Group (SPHAG) also recommends encouraging and supporting access for those who are not ‘fully vaccinated’ against COVID-19 to be vaccinated soon after arrival in New Zealand.

Implementation of settings for arrivals who do not meet the ‘fully vaccinated’ definition

23 Lead-in times will be required for amending the relevant Orders and for border agencies to adapt their processes ahead of the new settings coming into effect:

23.1 For Option 1 (testing pathway in line with the settings for ‘fully vaccinated’ arrivals): Border agencies have advised that 5 working days would be required following a decision from Cabinet to issue updated guidance to frontline officers and airlines/airports, and to ensure the appropriate processes are in place.

23.2 For Option 2 (short self-isolation pathway until a negative day 3 self-administered RAT result is returned): Border agencies have advised that Option 2 would be challenging to implement from an operational perspective and would require a 2-week lead-in time. While airlines would be expected to check vaccination status for non-New Zealand citizens prior to their arrival, Customs expects it will also need to check vaccination status on arrival, as this will determine whether travellers should follow the testing pathway or self-isolate. Any process to check vaccination status on arrival would be fully manual, if implemented before the New Zealand Traveller Declaration, and would increase complexity for Customs Officers.⁵

24 MBIE officials have advised that a transitional provision of 24 hours would be needed to ensure that arrivals do not have to be released at 11.59pm on the date that the requirement is removed.

25 It is expected that all arrivals would be able to exit MIQ facilities on the date they become eligible for release. However, there may be some groups or individuals that

⁵ The current Omicron outbreak is also currently impacting border agencies, with Customs already operating with a 20% reduction in frontline personnel due to infection and self-isolation.

would be unable to do so, owing to their groups' size, or the difficulty of arranging accommodation or transport at relatively short notice. The Chief Executive of MBIE can allow a traveller to stay for their scheduled 7-day stay, if already in MIQ when the change is implemented. A proposal to temporarily extend this provision to cover other eventualities is outlined at paragraphs 32 – 35 below. If Option 2 is agreed, it is expected that more arrivals may need to make use of this provision.

- 26 PCO has advised that it can have the relevant Orders ready for signing so as to align with the above timeframes.
- 27 Under both options, there will also be significant communications requirements from border agencies and through Unite Against COVID-19 channels to avoid confusion among travellers and other stakeholders.

New Zealand Traveller Declaration (NZTD)

- 28 I am advised that the proposal to remove isolation requirements for New Zealand citizens and other eligible travellers has implications for the provision of vaccination evidence for New Zealand citizens through the NZTD. In particular, there may no longer be justification for collecting vaccination information if it is not required to allocate travellers to a particular pathway. If this is the case, the NZTD will need to be able to identify the appropriate information to require for New Zealand citizens (separate from other travellers) in time for the go-live date for the NZTD of 31 March. The implications are being worked through and officials will provide further advice to me about this.
- 29 The NZTD is a key tool in supporting the reopening of our borders in a safe and deliberate way through risk assessment. I am advised that any changes to dates, health rules and entry pathways into New Zealand may put the go-live date at risk and would need to be assessed by the programme.

Implications for MIQ

- 30 Following the implementation of Steps 1 and 2 from 11.59pm Sunday 27 February and 11.59pm Friday 4 March, demand for MIQ has dropped by approximately 95 percent. Subject to decisions today, demand is expected to reduce to almost zero. For travellers at the air border, an MIQ requirement would apply only to travellers from Very High Risk (VHR) jurisdictions, but there are currently no jurisdictions in this category. Ministry of Health officials are reviewing the future application of this category and will provide further advice to me.
- 31 The approach to decommissioning facilities and the future of the MIQ network is set out in the paper 'Options for Accelerating MIQ Network Transition' for consideration by Cabinet today. I have announced that 28 of the current 32 facilities will leave the MIQ network by 30 June 2022.

Ability to authorise people to enter to MIQ

- 32 In the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Air Border) Order 2021, there is a provision which allows MBIE to authorise people otherwise required to self-isolate to

come into MIQ instead. This clause was not replicated to apply to travellers that are not required to isolate.

- 33 I propose that this provision is updated to apply to anyone that is otherwise not required to go to MIQ. The provision is intended to be temporary and for MBIE to allow specific groups of travellers to voluntarily come into MIQ, while further arrangements are made to accommodate those groups. These groups include Afghanistan returnees and refugees, who use MIQ prior to moving to resettlement centres, and Pacific Island maritime crew, who use MIQ prior to travelling to Pacific countries. I understand it would take time for other non-MIQ solutions to be set up.
- 34 Without a provision in the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Air Border) Order 2021, MBIE can only allow people into MIQ using individual contracting arrangements. These complex contracts will be cumbersome to set up and administer and may be difficult for some travellers to understand.
- 35 MBIE is considering the ongoing role of MIQ for Afghanistan returnees and refugees, and Pacific Island crews, and will provide me with further advice in the week of 14 March.

Future changes in risk

- 36 The Ministry of Health will continue to monitor the risk associated with international arrivals, including those who are unvaccinated. In the event that the risk profile of arrivals increases such that additional risk mitigations are recommended by public health, consideration would be given to reinstating measures, subject to assessment of economic and social factors, and operational considerations such as lead-in times. The rationale for any tightening of measures would need to be communicated clearly to support compliance and social licence
- 37 The Ministry of Health advises that reinstatement of an MIQ requirement would be unlikely and recommended only in the event of a significant change in public health risk, such as a new COVID-19 variant being more significantly vaccine resistant, more transmissible and more virulent. The pace at which an MIQ requirement could be reinstated would depend on timing and workforce availability. If requirements were reinstated prior to 30 June 2022, facilities may be available but time would be required to re-scale the workforce. If requirements were reinstated after facilities have been released to market, re-scaling would require significant time and renegotiation with hotels.
- 38 In addition, reinstatement of an MIQ requirement would be highly disruptive, including to the aviation sector.
- 39 A self-isolation requirement could be implemented at shorter notice, but some lead-in time would be required for the necessary amendments to Orders and to ensure processes at the border (including any changes to testing requirements) are in place.

Updating the timing of the Steps

- 40 In light of the early commencement of Step 2 for New Zealand citizens, permanent residents and other currently eligible travellers, I have considered whether reopening

further categories could be brought forward. Immigration system considerations for early commencement of Steps 1 – 5 are summarised in Appendix 1.

41 No changes are proposed for the timing of the remainder of Step 2, which includes opening visa applications for critical workers earning 1.5 times the median wage and Working Holiday Scheme visas from 11.59pm Sunday 13 March.

42 In addition, I do not propose any changes to the timing of Step 3 from 11.59pm Tuesday 12 April, which currently includes class exceptions for 5,000 students and up to 250 Pacific Manaaki scholars [CAB-22-MIN-008], along with existing holders of valid work and student visas (both onshore and offshore) [CAB-22-MIN-008 and CAB-22-MIN-0018]. This timing allows for a short interval between the NZTD's go-live date of Thursday 31 March and an anticipated boost in international travellers.

Consideration can be given to bringing forward categories of travellers in Step 4

43 Step 4 (by July) currently includes the following categories:

43.1 Australian citizens and permanent residents arriving from anywhere in the world⁶;

43.2 visa-waiver travellers;

43.3 existing holders of valid visitor visas (both onshore and offshore).

44 Consideration can be given to bringing forward the above categories, to enable earlier realisation of social and economic benefits from reopening. This needs to be balanced against potential impacts on the trajectory of the Omicron outbreak and health system capacity.

Outbreak trajectory and health system capacity

45 The visa categories included in Step 4, in particular Australians and visa-waiver travellers, comprise a significant volume of arrivals. It is difficult to estimate the increase in traveller volumes to New Zealand from opening these categories, due to the significant impact that COVID-19 has had on international aviation patterns and people's ability to travel across international borders.

46 Border agencies have previously estimated that reopening to the proposed categories could result in 13,000 Australians and 23,000 visa-waiver travellers arriving weekly, based on 65 percent of annual arrivals in 2019.⁷ In addition, there are around 570,000 individuals offshore with valid visitor visas who could enter. However, a number of comparable countries are seeing significantly lower recovery of short-term travel volumes after relaxing border settings, and information from the aviation industry

⁶ For the avoidance of doubt, travellers from Australia who need a visa will not be eligible to enter New Zealand until the visa category they wish to enter under opens for offshore applications, unless they are travelling with a partner who is a New Zealand citizen. This means Australia cannot be used as a 'backdoor' entry point for visa-required travellers who otherwise would not be permitted to enter New Zealand.

⁷ Estimates have not been updated to account for the removal of self-isolation requirement for fully vaccinated arrivals, owing to the high degree of uncertainty around overall volumes.

suggests actual and projected bookings are initially much lower than 65% on key routes.⁸

47 Officials have provided an illustrative indication of the anticipated weekly arrivals and estimated imported COVID-19 cases for Australians and visa-waiver travellers, using different scenarios for volumes. These estimates have been based on the percentage of positive COVID-19 cases of arrivals over the 3 months to 1 March 2022, when applied to scenarios based on 2019 traveller volumes.⁹

Volume of international arrivals at 2019 levels	Visa-waiver travellers		Australians	
	Arrivals (per week)	New cases from arrivals (per week)	Arrivals (per week)	New cases from arrivals (per week)
65%	23,000	718	13,000	360
45%	15,930	498	9,000	249
25%	8,850	276	5,000	138
15%	5,310	166	3,000	83

48 During the seven days to 7 March 2022, New Zealand recorded 123,164 new cases, averaging 17,595 new cases per day. If the above illustrative scenarios are applied to this data from our domestic outbreak, the weekly addition to new case numbers is estimated at 0.9% (or 1,078 cases) at the upper bound and at 0.2% (or 249 cases) at the lower bound.

49 Public Health advice from the Ministry of Health cautions against bringing forward significant volumes of travellers until we are past the Omicron peak, to avoid any potential additional strain on health system capacity. While we cannot be certain about the trajectory of the outbreak, the latest COVID-19 Modelling Aotearoa modelling suggests that the current outbreak is predicted to peak in March, therefore bringing forward these categories to Step 3 at the earliest (i.e. from 11.59pm Tuesday 12 April) is likely to align with current estimates of the downside of the Omicron peak.

50 Feedback from the National Iwi Chairs Forum Pandemic Response Group (PRG) has highlighted that communities would need to prepare for increased numbers of visitors. Uncertainty around potential volumes of travellers makes it difficult for communities

⁸ s6(b)(i) [Redacted]
 [Redacted]
 Airline sources advise that at present there is currently significant variation across routes, s6(b)(i) [Redacted]
 [Redacted] s6(a)
 [Redacted]
 [Redacted]

⁹ The percentage applied to visa waiver countries uses the average weighted percentage of cases from the top 3 origins of travellers from visa-waiver countries (US, UK and Germany), excluding airline hubs.

to manage their own risk, and it will be important to ensure communities are provided with the information they need as it becomes available.

Economic and social wellbeing considerations

- 51 By bringing forward the reopening of the border to Australians and visa-waiver travellers and currently onshore and offshore holders of valid visitor visas, we will realise the benefits to livelihoods, social connections, and family reunification with friends and whānau earlier than previously anticipated.
- 52 Increased passenger travel will deliver increased airfreight connectivity which will benefit the high-value export sector by both increasing capacity and lowering freight rates. It will also enable a faster exit from government support provided through the Maintaining International Air Connectivity (MIAC) scheme.
- 53 MBIE Tourism officials expect an earlier reopening of the border to Australians and visitors from visa-waiver countries would deliver immediate benefits to the tourism industry and the regions that have been hardest hit by the lack of international visitors, such as Auckland and Queenstown. It would help alleviate the current pressure that the tourism industry is experiencing, as a result of the domestic tourism summer and shoulder seasons having been cut short due to the impact of Omicron.
- 54 Nearly all New Zealand's pre-COVID major visitor markets would be covered by an earlier reopening, apart from China and India (which are visa-required markets). The impact on the Australian market would likely be the most immediate as bringing reopening from Australia forward could enable Australian visitors to travel to New Zealand during the autumn school holidays winter ski season. I am also advised that we would expect to see earlier benefits for the events (sports, cultural and business) sector, due to Australians in these fields gaining earlier entry.
- 55 The international tourism industry operates to long lead times. An earlier reopening to Australians and visa-waiver travellers would provide the international industry with more time and confidence to support the return of visitors to New Zealand for the 2022/23 peak tourism season, and could minimise the loss of market share to competitor destinations which have already reopened e.g. Australia.

Options to bring forward categories from Step 4

- 56 While we cannot be certain about the trajectory of the outbreak, I consider that the following options strike an appropriate balance between the benefits of earlier reopening to these categories and a precautionary approach to health system capacity, including testing:
- 56.1 Option 1: Reopening to Australian citizens and permanent residents arriving from anywhere in the world; visa-waiver travellers and existing holders of valid visitor visas (both onshore and offshore) **by July** (Status Quo)
- 56.2 Option 2: Reopening to Australian citizens and permanent residents arriving from anywhere in the world, visa-waiver travellers and existing holders of valid visitor visas (both onshore and offshore) **to align with Step 3, from 11.59pm Tuesday 12 April;**

- 56.3 Option 3: Reopening to:
 - 56.3.1 Australian citizens and permanent residents arriving from anywhere in the world **to align with Step 3, from 11.59pm Tuesday 12 April;**
 - 56.3.2 visa-waiver travellers and existing holders of valid visitor visas (both onshore and offshore), **from 11.59pm Sunday 1 May**
- 56.4 Option 4: Reopening to Australian citizens and permanent residents arriving from anywhere in the world, visa-waiver travellers and existing holders of valid visitor visas (both onshore and offshore) **from 11.59pm Sunday 1 May.**

Implementation considerations

- 57 I am advised the above options are feasible for the immigration system without significant impacts on other visa processing. For operational reasons, existing onshore and offshore visitor visas need to be reopened at the same time as visa-waiver travel. The Ministry for Primary Industries has also advised that the options are operationally feasible.
- 58 Customs has advised that opening the border to these categories from 12 April (the earliest proposed date) is feasible, and that the NZTD will be available to facilitate the processing of these travellers. Earlier dates would create risks to successful implementation of NZTD and associated processes and systems. In addition, the Omicron outbreak is currently impacting the border workforce. As COVID-19 cases increase, this is likely to affect the processing capacity and impact processing times, especially with increased volumes of travellers.

59 s9(2)(b)(ii)
[Redacted]

Accredited Employer Work Visa

- 60 Cabinet's previously agreed Steps also provided for Step 4 to include opening the Accredited Employer Work Visa (AEWV) to normal offshore visa processing from 4 July. I am advised that it is not possible to bring forward the AEWV, as this is a new category with a critical implementation path.
- 61 Border exceptions (including the 1.5 times the median wage bright-line test for skilled workers and class exceptions) will remain in place to enable employers to access workers (alongside Working Holiday Schemes) until the AEWV opens.

Cabinet subsequently agreed to reopen all work visas on 4 July 2022, in line with the Accredited Employee Work Visa (AEWV), followed by visitor visas and student visas on 31 July 2022 [CAB-22-MIN-0139]. This decision was announced by Ministers on 11 May 2022.

Reopening all visa-required travel

- 62 The agreed timing for Step 5 is from October. This will enable entry for other international travellers, such as visitors from non-visa-waiver countries and students.
s9(2)(f)(iv)
[Redacted]

s9(2)(f)(iv)

Other matters

Approach to monitoring and compliance with testing

- 63 Fully vaccinated arrivals are currently provided with three RATs (including one spare) at the airport and are required to self-administer these tests on day 0/1 and days 5/6 and upload the positive or negative result. If an arrival tests positive, they are required to take a PCR test in the community to allow for whole genome sequencing.
- 64 I propose a high-trust model of monitoring and compliance, as it will not be possible to take a more active enforcement role, given the volume of people expected to enter New Zealand. This means continuing with a light-touch monitoring role, with two automated email reminders sent for each test requesting travellers provide the Ministry their test results either via a system link or leaving a message on an 0800 message service. Messaging to travellers before, during and after travel will focus on 'doing the right thing' with regards to testing to protect our communities and our health care system.
- 65 If a light-touch model is agreed, an amendment to the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Isolation and Quarantine and Other Matters) Order 2021 will be made to remove the current infringement offence for failing to report test results. If necessary, intentional breaches could be prosecuted through the Act.
- 66 Work is underway by the Ministry of Health to review COVID-19 testing requirements at the border, including the ongoing use of PCR testing and whole genomic sequencing (WGS) as a surveillance tool for detecting new variants entering New Zealand. As travel volumes will increase, and as there is limited lab capacity, the review will include the principles for prioritising WGS for certain groups, including border cases, community cases, hospitalisation cases, and deaths. The use of wastewater as a tool to monitor for variants is also being developed by ESR. Further advice on this and on the overall surveillance strategy will be included in a report back to the Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministerial Group during the week of 21 March.
- 67 In addition, the Ministry of Health advises there is very good international surveillance of circulating COVID-19 variants. It is highly likely that we would be alerted to a new variant of concern before it is detected in a traveller to New Zealand, However, as we observed with Omicron, the lead time between first identification globally to observing in New Zealand may be short.

Aligning settings at the maritime border

- 68 Officials consider that the requirements for maritime arrivals should be updated to ensure greater alignment with the Reconnecting New Zealanders settings at the air border.

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

[Redacted]

International law considerations [Legally privileged]

71 s9(2)(h) [Redacted]

Continuing to review border settings

72 In a short period of time New Zealand has transitioned from being one of the last countries retaining a *keep it out* approach to a highly vaccinated country with COVID-19 spreading widely in the community. This changing dynamic has required our Reconnecting New Zealanders approach to adapt and I anticipate further adjustments will be needed as the domestic and international COVID-19 situation continues to evolve.

73 To this end I have directed officials to provide a further review of border settings ahead of Step 3, with report-backs to Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministers during the week of 21 March for further decisions. I anticipate that this advice will cover a range of matters, including:

73.1 **Testing requirements:** including the capacity of Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) supplies to keep up with increased international arrivals; whether PCR testing requirements for positive border COVID-19 cases remains the best use of our testing capacity; our approach to WGS surveillance testing for new variants; and the timing of post-arrival tests to ensure consistency with latest research on incubation periods;

73.2 **Low-Risk Pacific Pathway:** options for the future in light of recent changes to wider border settings and the spread of Omicron in the Pacific, including

how to further support Pacific resilience and reconnecting, s9(2)(f)
(iv)

73.3 **Very High Risk (VHR)**: reviewing the VHR jurisdiction classification, including a review of jurisdictional risk and the management of arrivals from VHR jurisdictions;

73.4 **Maritime border** – aligning relevant testing and isolation settings at the maritime border with the reconnecting approach at the air border.

74 We also have interests in ensuring people can travel without significant restrictions or presenting significant public health risk to New Zealand to advance our broader international and trade interests and avoid negative relationship consequences. s9(2)(f)
(iv)

Next steps

75 Subject to Cabinet’s agreement:

75.1 I will sign Orders to amend the Air Border Order and the Isolation and Quarantine Order to give effect to the decisions in this paper on border settings.

75.2 The Minister of Immigration will certify immigration instructions to implement bringing forward the proposed categories, if agreed, and take any detailed policy decisions to give effect to the immigration changes set out here and agreed by Cabinet.

75.3 MFAT will engage with affected governments, to confidentially notify them; and officials will notify airlines and airports, in confidence, of Cabinet’s decisions ahead of the public announcement;

75.4 The Prime Minister will announce the decisions in this paper.

75.5 s9(2)(f)(iv)

75.6 Officials will report back to Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministers during the week of 21 March on:

75.6.1 Testing requirements (pre-departure and testing requirements post arrival);

75.6.2 Low-Risk Pacific Pathway;

75.6.3 Very High Risk (VHR) jurisdictions;

75.6.4 s9(2)(f)(iv)

75.6.5 Aligning the relevant settings at the maritime border.

75.7 DPMC, in consultation with the Ministry of Health and border agencies, will report back to the Minister for COVID-19 Response with further advice on enduring measures beyond Phase Three, by the end of March 2022.

Financial Implications

76 Subject to decisions today, expenditure on MIQ and the Maintaining International Air Connectivity (MIAC) scheme will reduce:

76.1 International arrivals who do not meet the definition of ‘fully vaccinated’ will no longer be required to enter MIQ. This will further reduce demand for MIQ, which has already dropped by approximately 95%. The financial implications of decommissioning MIQ facilities are set out in the paper ‘Options for Accelerating MIQ Network Transition’ that will be considered by Cabinet today.

76.2 On 2 March 2022 the Cabinet Economic Development Committee (DEV) agreed to a conditions-focussed exit of the Maintaining International Air Connectivity (MIAC) scheme and to extend current MIAC contracts for all markets to 31 March 2023, with contracts to be actively managed to end support as passengers return. Subject to decisions today, airlines will have more certainty about the timing of the return of meaningful passenger numbers, which is likely to result in an earlier exit from routes under the scheme than was previously the case. This may ultimately result in fiscal savings.

Legislative Implications

77 Following our decisions today, amendments will be made to the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Air Border) Order 2021, and the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Isolation and Quarantine and Other Matters) Order 2021.

78 Following the Ministry of Health’s consultation with MFAT and border agencies, the Director-General of Health will amend the minimum COVID-19 vaccination requirements for non-New Zealand citizens arriving by air to align with the definition of ‘fully vaccinated’ by notice in the Gazette, in line with the delegated authority under the COVID-19 Public Health (Air Border) Order 2021.

79 The Minister of Immigration will certify immigration instructions to implement bringing forward the proposed categories and take any detailed policy decisions to give effect to the immigration changes set out here and agreed by Cabinet. No changes to Immigration Regulations or to COVID-19 Orders are required to bring forward these categories.

Impact Analysis

Regulatory Impact Statement

80 The Treasury's Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA) Team has determined that the proposals to amend border settings for unvaccinated and minimally vaccinated travellers and to bring forward the dates of re-opening are exempt from the requirement to provide a Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS). This is on the grounds that the proposals are intended to mitigate the short-term impacts of the COVID-19 emergency, and implementation of the policies is required urgently to be effective (making a complete, robust and timely RIS unfeasible). The speed with which these proposals were prepared increases the risk of unanticipated consequences and implementation challenges.

Population Implications

81 The general population implications of Reconnecting New Zealanders were set out in the paper 'Reconnecting New Zealanders: Commencing Phased Reopening of the International Border' considered by Cabinet on 1 February. Since then, the domestic COVID-19 situation has changed materially. Consequently, this section is focused on the updated population impacts of the specific recommendations contained in this paper in the context of the current outbreak.

82 The Ministry of Health advises that in the context of the current outbreak, and with high COVID-19 vaccination rates, there is no significant difference in the risk posed to the New Zealand community by arrivals who do not meet the definition of 'fully vaccinated'. Consequently, the material risk posed by these individuals is unchanged whether they are in MIQ or the community.

83 New Zealand is one of the most highly vaccinated countries in the world with 95.1 percent of people aged twelve and over having received both a primary and secondary dose and 71.7 percent of eligible people having received a booster. However, of the 942,210 currently eligible people not yet boosted, the rates of Māori (60.1 percent of eligible boosted) and Pacific peoples (58.6 percent of eligible boosted) are disproportionately high. The percentage of our ethnic communities not yet boosted is also disproportionately high.

84 The COVID-19 Care in the Community model has been designed to support a range of vulnerable population groups, including Māori, Pacific and the disabled community.

85 The approach in this paper reflects public health advice about the level of risk from the border and the ability to manage that risk. However, it will be important to continue monitoring this, as this could change over time, depending on several factors such as ongoing levels of immunity in the population or new variants associated with increased transmission, immune escape and/or severity. Ongoing assessment of the risk and the effectiveness of the protections in place will therefore be needed, as will an ability to adapt to a changing situation if required.

86 Benefits and opportunities from bringing forward reopening to Australians, visa-waiver travellers, and existing valid visitor holders are outlined in the section of this paper on updating the timing of Reconnecting Steps.

Human Rights [Legally privileged]

87 s9(2)(h) [Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Te Tiriti O Waitangi Analysis

90 Consideration has been given to the implications for Māori and the findings and recommendations in the Tribunal report. As part of the Crown’s consideration of easing international border settings, the impact on the health and wellbeing of Māori needs to be taken into account. COVID-19 is already having a disproportionate effect on Māori due to a range of factors, including underlying health conditions and lower COVID-19 vaccination rates.

91 There will be many Māori who support reconnecting with Australia as it provides greater social advantages due to the large population of Māori living in Australia. However, this could put a strain on already stretched resources and services in Māori and rural communities. Careful consideration needs to be given to where the current funding and resources are directed to support these communities.

92 During ongoing discussions with the National Iwi Chairs Forum Pandemic Response Group (PRG) and Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, members of the PRG were primarily concerned about new variants coming across the border and the

resourcing of and capability of Māori providers (both health and social services) to respond. PRG members noted that communities would need to prepare for increased numbers of visitors and that they may need support to do so. They also noted labour market pressures which made October look late for full reopening.

- 93 PRG members also expressed concerns about international arrivals returning to rural communities with limited access and resourcing. To date resourcing is being supported by the \$120 million Māori Communities COVID-19 Fund announced in October, and the recent \$140 million boost to support Māori and Pacific households throughout New Zealand. The Group stressed that the latest round of funding needed to be dispersed to those who need it most. Work is underway to ensure that funding is allocated to communities with limited access to resourcing, including rural communities.
- 94 During discussions, PRG members have asked about the intended approach to travellers who do not meet the ‘fully vaccinated’ definition. Officials indicated it was being considered and that the health advice at that stage was there was likely to be marginal impact. Further engagement will be undertaken as part of the Ministry of Health’s consultation on tightening the minimum vaccination requirements at the air border.

Consultation

- 95 This paper was prepared by the COVID-19 Group in DPMC. The Ministry of Health reviewed the paper and provided specific input, including public health advice and the views and recommendations of the Director-General. MBIE (Immigration, MIQ and Tourism) also provided specific input, and Customs, the Ministry of Transport, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade contributed to the advice in this paper. Crown Law advised on the Bill of Rights.
- 96 The following agencies were also consulted on the paper: the Border Executive Board, Ministries of Education, Ethnic Communities, Justice, Pacific Peoples, Primary Industries, Social Development, Te Arawhiti, Te Puni Kōkiri, and the Treasury.

Communications and proactive release

- 97 I propose that, subject to Cabinet’s agreement, the Prime Minister will announce changes to requirements and timings. With agreement from Cabinet, officials will confidentially notify airlines and airports ahead of the public announcement, as is the usual process, to enable them additional time to prepare for the expected surge in public interest.
- 98 MFAT will engage with relevant governments, including in the Pacific, to notify them of Cabinet decisions ahead of any announcements.
- 99 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:

- 1 note that on 28 February 2022 Cabinet [CAB-22-MIN-0050]:
 - 1.1 noted that advice from the Strategic COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group is that it would now be appropriate to drop the requirement for self-isolation of fully vaccinated travellers after they arrive in New Zealand, subject to some monitoring conditions;
 - 1.2 agreed that fully vaccinated international arrivals to New Zealand will no longer be required to self-isolate on arrival or be in MIQ;
 - 1.3 noted that officials will provide further advice, including health advice on measures for unvaccinated travellers, testing requirements for travellers, and the timing of Step 3 and Step 4 of the medium-risk pathway;

Arrivals who do not meet the fully vaccinated definition

- 2 note that, in the context of the current outbreak, and with high domestic COVID-19 vaccination rates, the Ministry of Health has advised that there is no longer a significant difference in risk posed to the community by arrivals who do not meet the definition of 'fully vaccinated' relative to those that do;
- 3 agree that international arrivals to New Zealand who do not meet the definition of 'fully vaccinated' will no longer be required to undertake Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ), and that this requirement will be replaced with:

EITHER

- 3.1 Option 1 - a testing pathway in line with the settings for 'fully vaccinated' arrivals at the air border (**recommended by the Director-General of Health**);

OR

- 3.2 Option 2 - a short self-isolation pathway until returning a negative day 3 self-administered rapid antigen test;

- 4 note that Option 2 is not supported by the Ministry of Health's public health advice and would be difficult to operationalise and enforce;
- 5 note that Customs officials will provide further advice to the Minister of COVID-19 Response on the implications of updated requirements for the New Zealand Traveller Declaration;
- 6 note that minimum COVID-19 vaccination requirements for entry to New Zealand by air will continue to apply to arrivals unless they are New Zealand citizens or otherwise exempt;

- 7 s9(2)(f)(iv)

[Redacted]

s9(2)(f)(iv)

Reopening to Australians, visa-waiver travellers and existing holders of valid visitor visas

- 8 note that Cabinet previously agreed to reopen to Australia (Australian citizens, permanent residents, and other foreign nationals in Australia), and visitors from visa-waiver countries as part of Step 4 by July 2022 [CAB-22-MIN-008 refers];
- 9 note that visa-required ‘other foreign nationals in Australia’ will be ineligible to enter New Zealand from Australia until the visa category they wish to enter under opens for offshore applications;
- 10 note that Cabinet also subsequently agreed that existing valid visitor visa holders will be able to travel to New Zealand in line with Step 4, including those currently offshore [CAB-22-MIN-0018];
- 11 note that officials have identified four options for the timing of reopening to Australians, visa-waiver travellers, and existing holders of valid visitor visas;
- 12 note that Ministry of Health advice cautions against reopening to significant additional volumes before the expected Omicron peak, which modelling suggests will be in March 2022;
- 13 agree to

EITHER:

- 13.1 Option 1: Reopen to Australian citizens and permanent residents arriving from anywhere in the world; visa-waiver travellers and existing holders of valid visitor visas (both onshore and offshore) **by July 2022** (Status Quo);

OR

- 13.2 Option 2: Bring forward reopening to Australian citizens and permanent residents arriving from anywhere in the world, visa-waiver travellers and existing holders of valid visitor visas (both onshore and offshore) **to align with Step 3, from 11.59pm Tuesday 12 April 2022;**

OR

- 13.3 Option 3:

- 13.3.1 Bring forward reopening to Australian citizens and permanent residents arriving from anywhere in the world **to align with Step 3, from 11.59pm Tuesday 12 April 2022;**

AND

- 13.3.2 Bring forward reopening to visa-waiver travellers and existing holders of valid visitor visas (both onshore and offshore) to commence **from 11.59pm Sunday 1 May 2022;**

OR

- 13.4 Option 4: Bring forward reopening to Australian citizens and permanent residents arriving from anywhere in the world, visa-waiver travellers and existing holders of valid visitor visas (both onshore and offshore) to commence **from 11.59pm Sunday 1 May;**
- 14 note that any future decisions concerning the timing of reopening to visa-required categories currently agreed for Step 5 (from October) would require significant lead-in times, owing to the need to amend regulations and reprioritise immigration processing resources;

Other matters

- 15 agree there will be a light-touch approach to monitoring and compliance with rapid antigen testing for arrivals with no active enforcement, owing to the expected volumes of travellers;
- 16 authorise the Chief Executive of MBIE to allow arrivals by air to enter MIQ even if they are not required to do so;

Reviewing border settings

- 17 direct officials to report back to Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministers during the week of 21 March 2022 on:
- 17.1 Testing requirements (pre-departure and testing requirements post-arrival);
- 17.2 Low-Risk Pacific Pathway;
- 17.3 Very High Risk (VHR) jurisdictions;
- 17.4 s9(2)(f)(iv) [REDACTED]
- 17.5 Maritime border settings;
- 18 direct DPMC, in consultation with the Ministry of Health and border agencies, to report back to the Minister for COVID-19 Response with further advice on enduring measures beyond Phase Three of the Omicron response, by the end of March 2022;
- 19 authorise Reconnecting Ministers to take further decisions on COVID-19 testing and vaccination requirements for international arrivals, the approach to the Low-Risk Pacific Pathway, s9(2)(f)(iv) [REDACTED] and settings beyond Phase Three of the Omicron Response;

Communications

- 20 agree that the Prime Minister will announce the decisions in this paper;
- 21 agree that officials can notify airlines and airports, in confidence, of Cabinet's decisions once these have been taken and ahead of the public announcement in recommendation 20;
- 22 agree that MFAT can engage with affected governments, to confidentially notify them ahead of public announcements;

Legislative Implications

- 23 note that amendments to the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Air Border) Order 2021 and the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Isolation and Quarantine and Other Matters) Order 2021 will be prepared for the Minister for COVID-19 Response, to give effect to Cabinet's decisions;
- 24 s9(2)(f)(iv) [Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
- 25 note that the Minister of Immigration will certify amendments to immigration instructions to implement the Steps and the agreed categories at the appropriate time.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Chris Hipkins

Minister for COVID-19 Response

Appendix 1: Immigration system considerations for early commencement of Steps 2 – 5

Reconnecting New Zealanders Steps	Step 2 13 March 2022	Step 3* 12 April 2022	Step 4 4 July 2022	Step 5 October 2022
Other critical worker (1.5x)	Agreed		Phased out as AEWV is implemented	
Working Holiday Scheme visas	Agreed			
Australians (citizens and permanent residents)	<i>Not feasible</i>	Proposed	Agreed	
Visa-waiver travellers, and existing visitor visa holders	<i>Not feasible</i>	Proposed	Agreed	
Accredited Employer Work Visa	<i>Not feasible</i>	<i>Not feasible</i>	Agreed	
Visitor visas	<i>Not feasible</i>	High levels of visa processing trade-offs required †	Moderate levels of visa processing trade-offs required	Agreed
Business as usual immigration settings (e.g. student visas, specific purpose and event visas.	<i>Not feasible</i>	High levels of visa processing trade-offs required †	Moderate levels of visa processing trade-offs required	Agreed

* Step 3 comprises: a new international student border class exception for up to 5,000 students for entry for semester two; a class exception for up to 250 Pacific Manaaki scholars, to be nominated by MFAT’s Manaaki New Zealand Scholarship Programme; and existing holders of valid work and student visas (both onshore and offshore). Workforce class exceptions and other border exceptions will remain in place where needed until wider visa processing resumes, to ensure continued access to New Zealand.

† Any future proposal to bring forward categories from Step 5 to Step 3 would require Cabinet decisions by 14 March 2022, owing to the lead-in time needed to amend regulations and reprioritise immigration processing resources.



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: Further Changes to International Border Settings

Portfolio **COVID-19 Response**

On 9 March 2022, the Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee **referred** the submission under SWC-22-SUB-0033 to Cabinet on 14 March 2022 for further consideration.:

Rachel Clarke
Committee Secretary

Present:

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern
Hon Grant Robertson
Hon Kelvin Davis
Hon Dr Megan Woods
Hon Chris Hipkins
Hon Carmel Sepuloni (Chair)
Hon Andrew Little
Hon Poto Williams
Hon Stuart Nash
Hon Kris Faafoi
Hon Peeni Henare
Hon Willie Jackson
Hon Jan Tinetti
Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall
Hon Aupito Williams 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: Further Changes to International Border Settings

Portfolio COVID-19 Response

On 14 March 2022, following reference from the Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee, Cabinet:

- 1 **noted** that on 28 February 2022 Cabinet:
 - 1.1 noted that advice from the Strategic COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group is that it would now be appropriate to drop the requirement for self-isolation of fully vaccinated travellers after they arrive in New Zealand, subject to some monitoring conditions;
 - 1.2 agreed that fully vaccinated international arrivals to New Zealand will no longer be required to self-isolate on arrival or be in MIQ;
 - 1.3 noted that officials would provide further advice, including health advice on measures for unvaccinated travellers, testing requirements for travellers, and the timing of Step 3 and Step 4 of the medium-risk pathway;

[CAB-22-MIN-0050]

Arrivals who do not meet the fully vaccinated definition

- 2 **noted** that minimum COVID-19 vaccination requirements for entry to New Zealand by air will continue to apply to arrivals unless they are New Zealand citizens or otherwise exempt;
- 3 **agreed** that eligible international arrivals to New Zealand who do not meet the definition of 'fully vaccinated' will no longer be required to undertake Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ), and that this requirement will be replaced with a testing pathway in line with the settings for 'fully vaccinated' arrivals at the air border, as recommended by the Director-General of Health in the context of the current outbreak, and with high domestic COVID-19 vaccination rates;
- 4 **noted** that Customs officials will provide further advice to the Minister for COVID-19 Response on the implications of updated requirements for the New Zealand Traveller Declaration;

5 s9(2)(f)(iv)

Reopening to Australians, visa-waiver travellers and existing holders of valid visitor visas

6 **noted** that in February 2022, Cabinet agreed to reopen to Australia (Australian citizens, permanent residents, and other foreign nationals in Australia), and visitors from visa-waiver countries as part of Step 4 by July 2022 [CAB-22-MIN-0008];

7 **noted** that visa-required 'other foreign nationals in Australia' will be ineligible to enter New Zealand from Australia until the visa category they wish to enter under opens for offshore applications;

8 **noted** that in February 2022, Cabinet agreed that existing valid visitor visa holders will be able to travel to New Zealand in line with Step 4, including those currently offshore [CAB-22-MIN-0018];

9 **noted** that Ministry of Health advice cautions against reopening to significant additional volumes before the expected Omicron peak, which modelling suggests will be in March 2022;

10 **agreed** to bring forward reopening to:

10.1 Australian citizens and permanent residents arriving from anywhere in the world to align with Step 3, from 11.59 pm Tuesday 12 April 2022; and

10.2 visa-waiver travellers and existing holders of valid visitor visas (both onshore and offshore) to commence from 11.59 pm Sunday 1 May 2022;

11 **noted** that any future decisions concerning the timing of reopening to visa-required categories currently agreed for Step 5 (from October) would require significant lead-in times, owing to the need to amend regulations and reprioritise immigration processing resources;

Other matters

12 **agreed** that there will be a light-touch approach to monitoring and compliance with rapid antigen testing for arrivals with no active enforcement, owing to the expected volumes of travellers;

13 **authorised** the Chief Executive of the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment to allow arrivals by air to enter MIQ even if they are not required to do so;

Reviewing border settings

14 **directed** officials to report back to the Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministerial Group during the week of 21 March 2022 on:

14.1 testing requirements (pre-departure and testing requirements post-arrival);

14.2 Low-Risk Pacific Pathway;

14.3 Very High Risk (VHR) jurisdictions;

14.4 s9(2)(f)(iv)

14.5 maritime border settings;

- 15 **directed** the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, in consultation with the Ministry of Health and border agencies, to report back to the Minister for COVID-19 Response by 31 March 2022 with further advice on enduring measures beyond Phase Three of the Omicron response;
- 16 **authorised** the Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministerial Group to take further decisions on COVID-19 testing and vaccination requirements for international arrivals, the approach to the Low-Risk Pacific Pathway, s9(2)(f)(iv) and settings beyond Phase Three of the Omicron Response;

Communications

- 17 **agreed** that the Prime Minister will announce the above decisions;
- 18 **agreed** that officials can notify airlines and airports, in confidence, of the above decisions ahead of public announcements;
- 19 **agreed** that MFAT can engage with affected governments, to confidentially notify them ahead of public announcements;

Legislative Implications

- 20 **noted** that amendments to the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Air Border) Order 2021 and the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Isolation and Quarantine and Other Matters) Order 2021 will be prepared for the Minister for COVID-19 Response, to give effect to the above decisions;
- 21 s9(2)(f)(iv)
- 22 **noted** that the Minister of Immigration will certify amendments to immigration instructions to implement the Steps and the agreed categories at the appropriate time.

Michael Webster
Secretary of the Cabinet