

Office of the Minister for COVID-19 Response

Cabinet

COVID-19 RESPONSE: 23 AUGUST REVIEW OF ALERT LEVEL SETTINGS

Proposal

- 1 This paper seeks Cabinet agreement to maintain Alert Level 4 across the whole of New Zealand until at least 11.59pm Sunday, 29 August 2021.
- 2 Alert Level settings will be reviewed by Cabinet again on Friday 27 August.

Relationship with Government priorities

- 3 This paper concerns the Government's response to COVID-19.

Summary

- 4 The first detected case was a 58-year old, unvaccinated male from Devonport. He presented to his GP on Monday 16 August and tested positive on Tuesday 17 August. At 11.59pm, Tuesday 17 August, all New Zealand moved to Alert Level 4 [CAB-21-MIN-0324 refers]. On Friday 20 August, Cabinet agreed to keep all New Zealand at Alert Level 4 until at least 11.59pm, Tuesday 24 August [CAB-21-MIN-0330 refers].
- 5 There are 107 cases as at 09.00am, Monday 23 August. With Alert Level 4 in place from 11.59pm, Tuesday 17 August, the number of new cases that were infectious while in the community should begin to decrease over the coming days. With each additional day, new cases should also create fewer locations of interest and contacts.
- 6 The Director-General of Health's interim advice, as of Sunday 22 August, is that we cannot yet rule out wider community transmission, given there are still outstanding individual and wastewater testing results, contact tracing, and case information, and the still evolving outbreak with increasing cases every day. Additionally, some high-risk locations of interest, such as the University ball, churches, and healthcare facilities, are likely to have been attended by people who have since travelled across New Zealand. Given we have had only two days of lockdown since the travel window ceased, the Director-General considers it prudent to allow at least seven days to elapse to assess if the approach has been effective at preventing spread.
- 7 Therefore, I recommend that Cabinet agrees to extend Alert Level 4 settings for the whole of New Zealand until 11.59pm Sunday, 29 August, in line with the Director-General of Health's interim advice. Cabinet will review Alert Level settings next on Friday 27 August, by which time seven days will have passed since the 48-hour window in which people could travel home had ceased. This next decision point also allows for sufficient time to safely implement a boundary between parts of New Zealand at different Alert Levels, if required.
- 8 Communications over the coming days should emphasise the need for anyone with symptoms throughout New Zealand to get tested. This testing data will

provide us with assurance that we do not have COVID-19 cases outside of Auckland and Wellington. This is particularly important for anyone who has been in Auckland in the past two weeks, is now elsewhere in New Zealand, and now has symptoms.

- 9 This paper also sets out considerations relevant to a future decision to de-escalate Alert Level settings, regarding the placement of and permitted movements through any boundary between areas of higher and lower Alert Levels. When Cabinet next reviews Alert Levels, we will consider whether a move down Alert Levels is possible. For example, if there are still no cases in the South Island, or if any cases detected have been in isolation throughout their infectious period, the South Island moving to Alert Level 3 could be an option.
- 10 It is important that sufficient time is allowed to implement an Alert Level boundary so that it is effective and achieved its purpose – to restrict movement to prevent the transmission of the virus. The Director-General of Health’s advice is that this would take 24-48 hours. This is supported by operational agencies such as Police. The relative simplicity of a North Island-South Island boundary means this would be quicker to implement.

How we make Alert Level decisions

- 11 Cabinet has previously agreed to use eight factors to guide decisions on the appropriate Alert Level settings for New Zealand:
- 11.1 the Director-General of Health’s satisfaction on four health matters:
 - 11.1.1 the source of the case(s) or outbreak (noting new variants of concern), and the number and geographical distribution of clusters;
 - 11.1.2 the length of time the virus has been in the community and the potential for undetected transmission (i.e. between the source and the case);
 - 11.1.3 the containment of the case(s) and/or cluster(s), including consideration of the potential for undetected community transmission occurring in New Zealand or in quarantine-free travel countries;
 - 12 the capacity and capability of our public health systems, including our surveillance and contact tracing systems;
 - 13 evidence of the effects of the measures on the economy and society more broadly;
 - 14 evidence of the impacts of the measures for at risk populations in particular;
 - 15 public attitudes towards the measures and the extent to which people and businesses understand, accept, and abide by them; and

- 15.1 our ability to operationalise the restrictions, including satisfactory implementation planning [CAB-20-MIN-0199; CAB-20-MIN-0387 refer].
- 16 In line with our resurgence response plan, in determining what measures and controls should be in place after the immediate response phase, we are particularly interested in:
- 16.1 the connection of cases to a known source at the border;
- 16.2 the number of cases and close contacts; and
- 16.3 the geographic spread of cases, including across regions.

The current response

- 17 At 11.59pm, Tuesday 17 August, all New Zealand moved to Alert Level 4 [CAB-21-MIN-0324 refers]. On Friday 20 August, Cabinet agreed to keep all New Zealand at Alert Level 4 until at least 11.59pm, Tuesday 24 August [CAB-21-MIN-0330 refers]. These settings are being reviewed today, on Monday 23 August.

Situation report

- 18 The first detected case was a 58-year old, unvaccinated male from Devonport. He presented to his GP on Monday 16 August and tested positive on Tuesday 17 August. Since then, there have been 106 additional cases detected, for a total of 107 confirmed cases, as of 09.00am on Monday 23 August 2021.
- 19 With Alert Level 4 in place from 11.59pm Tuesday 17 August, and an assumed average incubation time of two to four days, the number of new cases that were infectious while in the community should begin to decrease over the coming days.
- 20 However, we are not yet seeing the effects of the Alert Level 4 restrictions in the case data. Most of the 107 cases identified so far represent transmission that occurred prior to detection; very few cases are determined to have been in isolation for the entirety of their infectious period. With each additional day, new cases reported that are deemed to have been infectious in the community should have relatively fewer locations of interest and contacts due to Alert Level 4 restrictions.
- 21 Pacific peoples are disproportionately represented in this outbreak, numbering 70 of the 107 cases as of 09.00am, Monday 23 August. New Zealand's Pacific communities are especially vulnerable to COVID-19. Our Pacific population is highly urbanised, face financial challenges, and many are living in damp, cold and overcrowded housing conditions which increases the risk of transmission of infectious diseases. These factors – challenging in normal circumstances – are significantly amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, as apparent in the Auckland August 2020 outbreak.
- 22 Updated modelling from Te Pūnaha Matatini suggests that it is likely that there were around 100 cases in the community at the point of detection (17 August), with a range from around 40 to over 200. This is based on what we know about

the likely origins of the cluster, recent community testing rates and wastewater surveillance. This is consistent with daily case numbers since Tuesday. The modelling cannot tell us whether recent case numbers represent an optimistic “high-detection, low-spread”, or a pessimistic “low-detection, high-spread” scenario. Modelling from ARPHS also suggests that the number of cases detected each day is still likely to increase in the near-term.

- 23 Analysis of movement data derived from transaction records suggests that in the week prior to initial detection, it is likely that there were over 100,000 visits to Auckland from people in other locations, and over 100,000 Aucklanders who travelled to other regions. The movement data indicate the potential risk of transmission is roughly equivalent from Auckland to Wellington, Hamilton, Tauranga, Christchurch, Queenstown and the Coromandel. We know that cases travelled to the Coromandel and others have returned to Wellington.
- 24 Our response to this Delta outbreak is informed by learning from overseas experience, particularly where we are seeing successful outcomes:
- 24.1 Australian states have experienced hugely different outcomes based on how quickly they introduced restrictions. Authorities in Queensland and Victoria have demonstrated that even with significant transmission pre-detection, early and stringent intervention can act to limit case numbers.
- 24.2 However, the current situation in Victoria highlights the risks of relaxing restrictions too soon. Authorities chose to relax restrictions after 12 days, as cases reduced to 10 per day. They are now returning to a state-wide lockdown following concurrent days with over 50 new cases recorded.
- 24.3 Countries such as Singapore and China demonstrate that aggressive and effective test, trace, isolate and quarantine measures, alongside stringent non-pharmaceutical interventions can control outbreaks of Delta, avoiding exponential growth in new cases.¹

Director-General of Health’s interim assessment against the health factors

Source of the case(s)/outbreak

- 25 The source investigation has suggested a link to an MIQ case on 7 August, but there may be unidentified intermediaries in the chain of transmission. Of the 107 community cases identified (as of 09.00am Monday 23 August), 61 cases are epidemiologically linked to the initial cluster. A further 46 cases are currently unlinked with investigations for a link ongoing.
- 26 100% of workers at Auckland Crowne Plaza and Jet Park are compliant with the vaccination requirements. For workers across both facilities who had not been swabbed in the preceding 48 hours and were asked to be re-swabbed, by 22 August there were five outstanding, three of whom had been swabbed but

¹ Taiwan’s recent large outbreak began in late April, driven by cases of the Alpha variant. Taiwan detected cases infected with the Delta variant by the end of June, while the response to the previous outbreak was continuing. Taiwanese authorities are now in a similar position to Singaporean counterparts, with a continuing low level of cases but not exponential growth.

their details were yet to be registered. More detailed information is in Appendix One.

Length of time the virus has been in the community

- 27 The initial detection in the cluster was a positive result on 17 August. This suggests that the virus was circulating in the community for a period of at least ten days prior to detection.

Potential for undetected community transmission

- 28 There is still not sufficient information to be confident there is no transmission elsewhere in New Zealand, including community and wastewater testing data. There are over 13,000 contacts and over 300 locations of interest, including a number of high-risk locations such as the University Ball, churches and healthcare facilities, after which contacts are expected to have travelled across New Zealand.
- 29 Cases have since been identified in Wellington. A number of known close contacts have since travelled across New Zealand and it is likely that there are additional unknown close and casual contacts who have recently left Auckland. Of the more than 6,500 contacts whose locations have been confirmed, over 100 have South Island addresses, of which 79 are Close + or Close contacts.

Health system capacity including surveillance and contact tracing systems

- 30 The health system is responding well to the current outbreak. Hospital occupancy is around 74 percent on average, while intensive care occupancy is just over 50 percent.
- 31 Contact tracers have identified over 13,000 contacts, of which over 6,500 have been formally followed up and are self-isolating, and around a third have returned an initial test result. Contacts from high-exposure, large events and essential workers have been prioritised. Work is underway to contact the remaining contacts, with many of these only recently identified.
- 32 In the last week, more than 127,000 tests have been processed, equivalent to almost three percent of the New Zealand population. From receipt of a swab at a laboratory to notification of a positive results, 84% are notified of a positive test result within 24 hours. Testing rates have been highest across the Auckland region: DHBs have delivered their highest ever numbers of test results in recent days, in some cases for well over 1 percent of their populations per day. Within these numbers, testing rates for Pacific peoples are significantly higher than the national average. Appendix 1 contains comprehensive information on testing rates by DHB and ethnicity, and in relation to identified contacts.
- 33 However, on Sunday, 22 August there were a large number of tests still to be processed. The vast majority of these will be cleared by the end today. Labs across the country have enacted their surge plans and are processing tests from the Auckland region. Urgent processing is focussing on necessary testing only.

- 34 ESR is now testing wastewater at 41 sites around the country, covering 3.7 million New Zealanders.
- 35 There are good stocks of PPE, with at least a month's reserves to meet pandemic demand. In addition, the Ministry of Health continues to confirm orders and receive shipments of more PPE every week. This week the Ministry is expecting to receive supplies of two million N95/P2 particulate respirators and 50,000 face shields. The current burn rate is sitting within medium pandemic usage.
- 36 The Ministry's National PPE and Critical Medical Supply Chain team is reviewing DHB stock on hand for renal consumables and ventilator consumables. Letters of expedition have been furnished to all suppliers where consumables are in short supply.

Director-General's conclusions²

- 37 The following conclusions informed the Director-General's recommendations:
- 37.1 the dispersal of individuals across the country in the lead up to the implementation of Alert Level 4 and that we should wait at least seven days from the end of the 48 hour period in which people could travel home (11.59pm Thursday, 19 August) before considering lowering Alert Levels;
- 37.2 the growing number of locations of interest and significant potential they offer for the further spread of the virus; and
- 37.3 the significant number of outstanding individual testing results (following unprecedented testing rates) and wastewater testing results.

Proposal

- 38 On the basis of information available on Sunday 22 August, the Director-General of Health's interim public health advice is that all New Zealand stays in Level 4 until 11.59pm Friday 27 August with a further public health risk assessment on Thursday 26 August, and that Auckland is likely to remain at Alert Level 4 for longer. The Director-General notes that it takes 24-48 hours to safely implement a regional boundary for Auckland, in addition to the recommended period at Alert Level 4. This means that in effect, all of New Zealand would need to remain at Alert Level 4 until at least 11.59pm Saturday 28 August.
- 39 I consider that an extension of Alert Level 4 for all New Zealand is an appropriate measure in response to the level of public health risk, including the risk of transmission throughout the country. I therefore recommend extending Alert Level 4 settings for all New Zealand until 11.59pm Sunday 29 August, with the next Cabinet review on Friday 27 August. This timeframe allows implementation of any Alert Level change involving a regional boundary, should Cabinet choose

² The Director-General of Health's conclusion is based on information available as of late Sunday, 22 August. Case/contact data in this paper reflects the latest figures as at 9am Monday, 23 August.

to do so, in accordance with the Director-General's advice re allowing sufficient time from review by Cabinet.

Assessment of the proposed measures/options against the non-health factors

40 I have assessed the proposal to remain at Alert Level 4 against the non-health factors agreed by Cabinet, as set out below. My assessment gives me no reason to question the proposal to remain at Alert Level 4. However, I am concerned about increasing mental health impacts and the toll on front line workforces including Police and supermarket workers. Reports of non-compliance are also worrying and is something I will report on in more detail in future Alert Level review papers. Although there is a significant financial cost of being at Alert Level 4, it remains clear that that a strong health response is the best economic response. Social licence appears to remain strong but is something we will continue to monitor closely. Although there is a disproportionate impact upon at risk communities from being at Alert Level 4, they are also very vulnerable if they contract COVID-19.

Economic impacts from Alert Levels

41 The Treasury's assessment of the economic impacts of different Alert Level settings was provided in the Alert Level review Cabinet Paper of Friday 20 August 2021. Domestic and international economic data since the emergence of the pandemic continues to back our strategy that a strong public health response has been the best economic response.

Impacts on at risk populations

42 The impacts of Alert Level 4 will amplify as the period we remain in Alert Level 4 lengthens. Although higher Alert Levels assist in preventing community transmission in more vulnerable communities, they disproportionately impact some groups, especially those living in Auckland. The impacts on at risk populations are set out in Appendix 2, and include:

- 42.1 restrictions on earning and movement (which can intensify income and poverty inequities);
- 42.2 support for essential workers (including childcare arrangements, support to adhere with public health advice and get vaccinated);
- 42.3 inequitable access to testing sites and to essential services;
- 42.4 increasing the digital divide and access to key information; and increased anxiety.
- 42.5 Tailored communication and engagement are important across all groups.

Public attitudes and compliance

43 Social licence remains crucial to a successful COVID-19 response through the maintenance of public trust. Our messaging will be informed by the sentiment we

are seeing through our channels, insights reports, and pulse check research. Research indicates that most people are happy or okay about the shift to Alert Level 4, and even those who are unhappy mostly recognise that it is the right thing to do. We have seen a significant shift from neutrality and joy in July, to negative emotions in August. South Islanders are significantly more likely to feel disgust (23%) than the total sample (7%).

- 44 The Unite Against COVID-19 social medial channels have reached 4.8 million people through Facebook and 1.2 million on Instagram. Most questions received on these channels in the past three days relate to: rules around travel and permitted services, rules around exercising, vaccine concerns including appointments being cancelled, does the vaccine work against the Delta variant, how to get tested if you don't have a car, and complaints about the wait to get test results. People are starting to show frustration with breaches and people not complying with Alert Level rules.
- 45 Campaign messaging continues to focus on ensuring people and business have the key information they need to conform to the Alert Level 4 requirements. Vaccination messaging continues to be integrated into the campaign. Extension of Alert Level 4 will drive the campaign to focus on financial support, wellbeing as well as continued health behaviours and compliance.
- 46 Police continues to deal with some disorderly behaviour at some vaccination sites, testing stations and supermarkets which they expect to continue during Alert Level 4 restrictions. Public locations such as beaches and parks continue to see a large number of visitors, particularly during fine weather. Since 5pm Friday 20 August, Police have received a total of 4,487 online breach notifications, with 1,439 relating to breaches in Tāmaki Makaurau. Trend analysis of compliance data highlights parties are an ongoing issue. There have been continued reports of protests, however, several protest leaders have advised their followers of their intention not to attend protests planned during AL4. This is likely due to notable arrests and messaging regarding hesitancy around the protest.
- 47 Police expect to see an increase in mental health related calls for service from individuals struggling with the current lockdown, particularly if the Alert Level remains in place. UAC social channels report a number of people raising mental health issues (three instances serious enough to pass onto Police).

Ability to operationalise the proposals in this paper

- 48 There is growing concern across the system regarding the impact on operations due to workforce issues. Agencies and businesses are experiencing significant and increasing challenges due to staff having to isolate when identified as a close contact (e.g. NZ Police, NZDF, Fire and Emergency NZ, supermarket staff, distribution centres). Many perform front line roles that cannot be done from home, while isolating.
- 49 Other system-wide considerations regarding an extension of a nationwide Alert Level 4 include:

- 49.1 The likelihood of an increasing trend in compliance issues and resulting impacts on a constrained workforce has been raised by NZ Police. The volume of complaints entering the compliance workstream, led by NZ Police is significant. Agencies are currently triaging complaints and addressing the highest risk issues. It may negatively impact social licence if the public do not see complaints being addressed. NZ Police have prioritised reviewing the options for this workforce.
- 49.2 The Ministry of Transport has highlighted issues with supply chain, where exports that are not permitted at Alert Level 4 are unable to be packed and shipped. Additionally, not all containers are re-circulated into the system, causing exporters to miss bookings. This creates a potential for a backlog of cargo, adding to congestion pressures as time at Alert Level 4 continues.
- 49.3 Digital access for individuals, where issues with access to online services will get more pronounced for those who have poor connectivity (such as rural environments) and those without internet access.

Economic support measures

- 50 Appendix 3 sets out the economic supports that are currently available.
- 51 The Ministry of Social Development (MSD) in collaboration with other social agencies and NEMA/CDEM Groups advise they are continuing to monitor the social impacts of any change in Alert Levels, and will advise regarding any additional support that might be required for people and communities.

Considerations for a future move of part of the country to Alert Level 3

- 52 While moving some parts of New Zealand to Alert Level 3 at this time was considered, I do not recommend this option in light of the public health risk discussed above.
- 53 The key differences between Alert Level 4 and Alert Level 3 are that at Alert Level 3:
 - 53.1 everyone can go to work;
 - 53.2 all retail and takeaways can operate with contactless pick up;
 - 53.3 schools are open for years 1-10;
 - 53.4 controlled gatherings of 10 people are permitted for weddings, civil unions, funeral and tangihanga;
 - 53.5 there is some additional personal movement allowed – e.g. relocation of homes and visiting someone in residential disability care; and
 - 53.6 bubbles can be extended for the purposes of keeping connections with family and whānau, caregiving or preventing isolated people from being alone, and bubbles can be two or more houses.

- 54 Based on these differences, I consider that a shift to Alert Level 3 would create an unacceptable risk of further community transmission across New Zealand at the current time.
- 55 However, in preparation for a possible move down Alert Levels in the future, it is timely to consider how we could keep move the rest of the country to Alert Level 3 if we were confident community transmission was contained beyond Auckland.
- 56 We have never before had part of the country at Alert Level 4 and other parts at a lower Alert Level. Officials are rapidly undertaking policy work on how to establish an Alert Level 4/3 boundary, in particular what movement would be permitted across it. They are due to report to me later this week.
- 57 In December 2020 I reported to Cabinet on how we would establish an Alert Level 3/2 boundary and how we would decide what movement would be permitted across it. I propose that if we needed to quickly establish an Alert Level 4/3 boundary in the context of the current outbreak – and I note that this is not being proposed in this paper today – we would adopt the policy framework for Alert Level 3/2 boundaries. Below I set out details of how this would work.

Policy framework for establishing Alert Level 4/3 boundaries

- 58 I consider that an Alert Level 4/3 boundary could be established using the Alert Level 3/2 boundary framework that was noted by Cabinet in December [CBC-20-MIN-0122 refers].
- 59 Officials developed the following principles for determining Alert Level 3/2 that I consider are appropriate for Alert Level 4/3 boundaries:
- 59.1 Boundaries are appropriate and proportionate to support a public health response to COVID-19 that prevents and limits the spread of COVID-19 (primary consideration).
 - 59.2 Boundaries minimise the need for people to travel between areas at different Alert Levels to go to work, a place of learning, or to receive medical treatment.
 - 59.3 Boundaries are practical and safe to implement and enforce.
 - 59.4 Boundaries minimise economic disruption to business and supply chains – e.g. ensuring businesses can continue to operate if safe to do so.
 - 59.5 Boundaries minimise equity impacts – e.g. access to life critical services such as food.
- 60 The fundamental public health premise is that under both Alert Level 3 and Alert Level 4, unless it is essential to do otherwise, people should stay home. People within an Alert Level 4 boundary are at greater risk of contracting COVID-19, so boundary crossings should be strictly limited.

- 61 As noted in the first principle, the public health considerations are the primary consideration – the purpose of an Alert Level boundary is to restrict movement to prevent transmission of the virus. However, in light of the higher public health risk that justifies being at Alert Level 4, it is appropriate to put even more weight on public health considerations. This means that my starting point is that an Alert Level 4/3 boundary should have stricter controls of movement across it than for an Alert Level 3/2 boundary.

Permitted movement across an Alert Level boundary

- 62 Agencies have undertaken a significant amount of work on what movement should be permitted across Alert Level boundaries. This work is informed by the experience of boundaries when Auckland was at Alert Level 3 in August 2020 and February 2021, and in particular has focussed on primary industries. Currently, officials are proposing the following categories of movement would be allowed across an Alert Level 4/3 boundary:

- 62.1 care of children and others (could be limited to either a shared caregiver situation or to urgent care for a child or care and support for a person in a critical or terminal condition where no one in the Alert Level area can provide the care or support);
- 62.2 accessing health services with an appointment (including a vaccine appointment);
- 62.3 accessing judicial institutions if required or permitted;
- 62.4 leaving or relocating home on court order;
- 62.5 emergencies;
- 62.6 going home after isolation or quarantine (or arrival);
- 62.7 caring for pets or other animals (for which a breach of the Animal Welfare Act 1991 would otherwise result) and the travel between Alert Levels is necessary to enable care to be provided; and
- 62.8 working for certain specified categories of businesses or services (including freight).

- 63 All these categories need to be analysed closely to ensure they are appropriately defined to reflect the public health risk that justifies travel to and from an Alert Level 4 region and are subject to Ministerial approval.

- 64 In terms of “certain specified categories businesses and services”, the framework that Cabinet considered outlined three categories for which movement of workers across a boundary could be allowed [CBC-20-MIN-0122 refers]:

- 64.1 Category 1 – movement that would be permitted under all circumstances, e.g. border services, emergency services, healthcare workers and all freight;

- 64.2 Category 2 – movement that could be permitted but for which a decision would be required when a boundary is established, e.g. production and supply of food and beverage (for example, agriculture, horticulture, fishing, and aquaculture), veterinary and animal health services, and union representatives (Category 2 businesses agreed by Cabinet are outlined in Appendix 4); and
- 64.3 Category 3 – all other movement allowed by specific exemption issued by the Director-General of Health.
- 65 I consider that if an Alert level 4/3 boundary needed to be implemented as part of the current response, movement should initially be restricted to Category 1. In addition, in determining the location of the boundary, officials would identify key factories and processing plants that are operating as Alert Level 4 businesses and services and either specifically permit in the Order their workers to cross the boundary to get to work, or agree that this be done through applying for an exemption from the Director-General of Health. Restricting movement in this way will minimise the risk of the virus spreading as any movement at all has the potential to increase the current risk of transmission.
- 66 Category 1 movement would allow freight and life critical services to continue to operate but may disrupt some supply chains. However, this movement across the boundary would be more limited than the “essential personal movement” currently permitted at Alert Level 4 across the country which enables people to leave their place of residence where they are otherwise required to stay.
- 67 I also note that people who are permitted to cross an Alert Level boundary from an Alert Level 4 area to an area at Alert Level 3 would be encouraged to observe Alert Level 4 restrictions while in the Alert Level 3 area.
- 68 Officials are doing further work on what movement should be permitted across an Alert Level 4/3 boundary, including what businesses and services should be included in Category 2, if any. Particular consideration will be given to how the production, processing and supply of food and beverage (as well as associated supply chain and sector compliance activity) could be safely facilitated. Any decision about permitted categories of movement would have to be proportionate to the level of risk and informed by public health advice at the time an Alert Level boundary is established.

Provisions for transit through the Alert Level 4 area

- 69 Another consideration is what provision would be made for people to transit the Alert Level 4 area in addition to the movement permitted into and out of the Alert Level 4 area above. Previously, when Auckland was at Alert Level 3 and the rest of the country at Alert Level 2, people could transit for the purpose of going to or returning from work or going to the person’s principal home or place of residence. In addition, the Director-General of Health granted exemptions for compassionate travel.
- 70 Transit creates some enforcement challenges and risks for the adjoining Alert Level 3 areas as it is not possible to prevent stops within the Alert Level 4 area

(for example a person stopping for food or other purposes). Officials will provide advice on whether these same provisions should be adopted in relation to an Alert Level 4/3 boundary.

Business Travel Documents

- 71 Business Travel Documents (BTD) were previously issued by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) to support Police enforcement of the Alert Level 3/2 boundaries and could also be used for an Alert Level 4/3 boundary. Through it, documents are issued that can be used as evidence of a person's right to travel across the boundary, being a worker for a permitted business or service. This system significantly increases the efficient management of vehicles through checkpoints.
- 72 The system is a high trust model, largely relying on individuals' applications reflecting a permitted reason to travel. No proof was required of applicants' right to travel, however, MBIE sampled applications to assess the legitimacy of applicants.
- 73 The use of the BTD system would be different in administering an Alert Level 4/3 boundary. An Alert Level 4/3 boundary requires strict controls on movement and greater scrutiny of people crossing the boundary compared to a 3/2 boundary where there is a greater focus on supporting efficient movement. It is important that there are clear communications to stakeholders that the bar for permitted movement is high, many applications would not result in a BTD being issued (as they do not meet the criteria) and the processing time could be significantly longer.
- 74 If the permissions for travel across a boundary are already known, the system can be stood up very quickly (within an hour). However, it will take longer to activate if there are substantive changes (approximately 6 hours from when MBIE receive an actionable draft Alert Level Order). There is an advantage in allowing lead in time as businesses and services can pre-register and receive documents ahead of the boundary coming into effect. This lead in time would also minimise delays at the boundary and would help to prevent travellers from crossing the boundary without a legitimate reason.
- 75 MBIE are doing work on how they would manage each of the permitted categories to travel – importantly what is automatically issued and what is issued manually. For example, MBIE consider that Category 1 businesses and services (such as freight) are likely to be auto-approvals, whereas any Category 2 businesses and services that are permitted would likely be manually assessed to ensure that the travel is allowed by the Order.
- 76 With previous Alert Level 3/2 boundaries sector agencies advised what was within the bounds of permitted categories in the Order – e.g. animal welfare applications were sent to MPI to manually assess against the permissions in the Order. A manual approach would require significant resources across agencies in order to assess and process business travel document requests. It would also mean slower processing (where auto-approval of permitted categories meant very quick turnaround of applications).

- 77 Businesses and services that are not permitted to travel across the boundary can seek an exemption from the Director-General of Health through the Business Travel Register. The decision on these exemptions is still made by the Director-General based on advice from the relevant sector agency.

Other exemptions

- 78 Experience tells us that creating an Alert Level boundary results in a large number of exemption requests being made to the Director-General; many of which do not meet the purpose of the Act and the Order.
- 79 In the light of numerous requests related to exemptions from Alert Level 4 requirements during the current response, officials have considered whether there is a need to expand permitted activities or to extend or limit the scope of exemptions. Many of the requests covered activities already permitted under the Alert Level Order and therefore could be undertaken without an exemption. To reduce unnecessary requests, there will be clearer public-facing communications about permitted activities. Agencies are also working on an improved process for responding to requests and will continue to review the situation. A lower number of requests should mean more rapid consideration of requests for an exemption.
- 80 There may be a need for additional provisions to strengthen the policy intent of the exemption-making power, e.g. there must be express regard to the need to limit unnecessary movement. If necessary, this will be addressed as part of the consideration of permitted activities and exemptions in relation to movement across Alert Level boundaries.

Options for an Alert Level 4/3 boundary

- 81 Applying the principles outlined above, officials are developing options for Alert Level 4/3 boundaries in case they are needed. Two options are:
- 81.1 Alert Level 4 for the North Island and Alert Level 3 for the South Island and the Chatham Islands; and
- 81.2 Alert Level 4 for Auckland (using the boundary last used when Auckland was at Alert Level 3 in February 2021) and Alert Level 3 for the remainder of New Zealand.
- 82 When Cabinet next reviews Alert Levels, if there are still no cases in the South Island or if any cases detected have been in isolation throughout their infectious period, we will consider whether the South Island could move Alert Level 3.
- 83 Allowing sufficient time to effectively implement an Alert Level boundary is important to ensure its effectiveness in restricting movement to prevent transmission. This concern is reflected in the Director-General of Health's view that 24-48 hours is required. A boundary between the North Island and South Island would be the most straightforward for Police to implement and enforce and would be easily communicated. This would mean it could possibly be operationalised quicker than the 24-48 hours noted by the Director-General. I note also there would be fewer businesses and services needing to travel

between the islands and requiring BTDs. This would mean standing up that system could be quicker and there would be fewer requests for documents.

- 84 Officials have consulted iwi about possible Alert Level boundaries around Auckland. Northland iwi are firmly of the view Northland should stay at Alert Level 4 along with Auckland. They believe there are clear social, economic and cultural reasons to do so. They advised iwi Māori will manaaki (care for) their people, provided the Alert Level settings enable them to do so. Northern iwi are seeking a partnership role with Police to assist with ensuring whānau are safe, in particular for stopping movement.
- 85 Auckland iwi are very concerned with protection of their people and will establish checkpoints if they feel the Alert Level boundaries do not provide sufficient protection.
- 86 All iwi are seeking assurance that boundaries will not prevent whānau from accessing vaccination and testing, or from providing necessary support, e.g. food and access to face coverings.
- 87 There is already a great deal of concern from iwi about holiday makers heading north and presenting a risk to virus spread. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there were as many as 2000 attempted to cross into Northland in the first 48 hours of being at Alert Level 4. Concern that there will still be movement, both north and into the Coromandel, including within an Alert Level boundary, which puts iwi at risk from spread of the virus. Iwi requested that checkpoints be set up at key areas while in Alert Level 4 (not just with a boundary change). This would address the risk of people travelling to holiday homes in Northland and Coromandel.

Implementation of an Alert Level 4/3 boundary

- 88 Implementing and enforcing a lengthy boundary across several parts of the North Island would be more challenging for Police, who will need to redirect resources to establish the necessary checkpoints.
- 89 This points to the need to have a reasonable lead in time between a decision to establish an Alert Level 4/3 boundary and it coming into effect. Agencies consider a minimum of 48 hours is workable. This will enable sufficient time for Police and Waka Kotahi to establish and resource checkpoints, engagement with iwi and other affected regional stakeholders, MBIE to prepare the BTD system, and public communications material to be prepared. I note that the Director-General also considers it would take 24-48 hours to safely implement a boundary.

Financial Implications

- 90 On 18 August 2021, Delegated Ministers agreed to activate both the Resurgence Support Payment (RSPAUG21) and Wage Subsidy Scheme (WSSAUG21). The table below provides a high-level estimate for the costs of the schemes under two Alert Level scenarios. Keeping Alert Level 4 restrictions

96 s9(2)(h) [Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Population impacts

100 Population impacts are discussed in paragraphs 42 and Appendix 2.

Consultation

101 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 and text, including advice on the course of the outbreak, the public health response, and the views and recommendations of the Director-General of Health. The Crown Law Office advised on the NZBORA implications.

102 The Treasury, Te Puni Kōkiri, Ministries of Social Development and Pacific Peoples, the Office for Disability Issues and the Office of Ethnic Communities have provided input into relevant parts of the paper. The Ministry for Primary Industries, MBIE, Ministry of Transport, and NZ Police reviewed the section of the paper on Alert Level 4/3 boundaries.

Communications and Proactive Release

103 The Prime Minister will communicate the decisions set out in this paper after Cabinet agreement. I intend to proactively release this paper after Cabinet consideration subject to redaction as appropriate under the Official Information Act 1982.

Recommendations

The Minister for COVID-19 Response recommends that Cabinet:

- 1 note that since 17 August 2021, 107 community cases of COVID-19 have been identified in New Zealand (as of 09.00am Monday 23 August) and that the whole of New Zealand has been at Alert Level 4 since 11.59pm on Tuesday 17 August;
- 2 note that on Friday 20 August 2021, Cabinet agreed to maintain the whole of New Zealand at Alert Level 4 until at least 11.59pm on Tuesday 24 August [CAB-21-MIN-0330 refers];
- 3 note that there is still insufficient information available to be confident there is no transmission elsewhere in New Zealand (including community and wastewater testing data);

Alert Levels

- 4 note that based on the most recent public health risk assessment, the Director-General of Health's interim public health advice is that:
 - 4.1 all New Zealand stays at Alert Level 4 until 11.59pm Friday 27 August, with a further public health risk assessment on Thursday 26 August;
 - 4.2 that it is likely Auckland will remain at Alert Level 4 for some time longer; and
 - 4.3 it takes 24-48 hours to safely implement a regional boundary for Auckland, in addition to the recommended period at Alert Level 4; and this means that in effect, all of New Zealand would need to remain at Alert Level 4 until at least 11.59pm Saturday 28 August.
- 5 agree to extend Alert Level 4 settings for all New Zealand until 11.59pm Sunday, 29 August, with a review by Cabinet on Friday 27 August;
- 6 note that this timeframe would:
 - 6.1 allow time to implement of any Alert Level change involving a regional boundary, should Cabinet choose to do so, in accordance with the Director-General's advice re allowing 24-48 hours from the time of Cabinet's decision, and
 - 6.2 would be seven days since the 48-hour window ended in which people could return home following our move to Alert Level 4 at 11.59pm on Tuesday, 17 August;

Alert Level boundary and permitted movement

- 7 note that officials are completing work on how an Alert Level 4/3 boundary would be established and what categories of travel would be permitted across the boundary and will report to me later this week;

- 8 note my view that applying the policy framework Cabinet considered in December 2020 for Alert Level 3/2 boundaries to Alert Level 4/3 boundaries is appropriate, subject to confirming precisely what categories of movement would be permitted across the boundary;
- 9 note my view that categories of permitted movement should be more restrictive for an Alert Level 4/3 boundary than an Alert Level 3/2 boundary;
- 10 note that officials advise that a period of 48 hours from the decision to establish a 4/3 Alert Level boundary until it comes into effect is required to effectively operationalise it;

Other matters

- 11 agree that Cabinet's decision today will be communicated by the Prime Minister.

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

Appendix 1 – Key Surveillance and Contact Tracing Data

Table 1.1 – Testing rates by ethnicity since 8 August,

Test Report Date	Maori	Pacific	Asian	Other	Unknown	Total
2021-08-08	160	148	264	747	110	1,429
2021-08-09	264	274	386	1,265	134	2,323
2021-08-10	606	494	729	2,972	129	4,930
2021-08-11	604	649	946	3,065	273	5,537
2021-08-12	529	553	765	2,697	152	4,696
2021-08-13	475	396	620	2,464	141	4,096
2021-08-14	374	380	585	1,827	158	3,324
2021-08-15	193	217	320	965	71	1,766
2021-08-16	193	236	359	1,036	91	1,915
2021-08-17	603	629	1,017	3,246	247	5,742
2021-08-18	1,140	940	1,783	6,777	287	10,927
2021-08-19	3,041	1,873	3,686	17,909	350	26,859
2021-08-20	4,732	4,201	6,543	23,506	558	39,540
2021-08-21	4,378	4,140	7,016	20,910	473	36,917
Total	17,292	15,130	25,019	89,386	3,174	150,001
Rate of tests per 1000	22.2	47.3	32.6	28.9	N/A	30.2

Table 1.2 – Tests processed by DHB facility, rates per 1,000 population, at 1730 Sunday

DHB of Residence	17 August	18 August	19 August	20 August	21 August	22 August
Auckland	2.0	4.7	8.4	14.9	14.0	5.7
Bay of Plenty	0.8	1.3	4.5	7.0	3.8	2.9
Canterbury	1.1	1.4	5.0	6.4	3.9	2.4
Capital and Coast	1.2	2.1	6.3	6.3	10.0	3.3
Counties Manukau	1.7	2.9	4.4	9.0	7.3	3.1
Hawke's Bay	0.3	1.2	3.3	4.1	3.4	2.2
Hutt Valley	0.8	1.5	3.7	4.2	6.0	1.6
Lakes	0.8	1.2	3.7	6.7	4.8	2.1
MidCentral	0.7	2.1	4.9	5.5	3.4	0.6
Nelson Marlborough	1.0	1.4	3.5	1.9	4.0	2.7
Northland	0.5	0.9	3.2	4.6	5.3	2.4
South Canterbury	0.6	0.4	2.6	3.1	0.3	0.1
Southern	1.0	1.7	5.4	5.9	2.7	0.2
Tairāwhiti	0.2	0.5	3.6	4.2	4.3	0.2
Taranaki	0.3	0.9	4.0	3.7	6.8	1.2
Waikato	0.7	1.3	5.6	7.0	6.4	2.4
Wairarapa	0.8	0.6	3.6	4.0	2.3	0.2
Waitemata	1.5	3.6	7.9	13.5	15.5	5.9
West Coast	0.3	0.6	1.2	2.8	1.9	1.8
Whanganui	0.2	1.3	3.0	4.4	2.7	1.5
Total	1.1	2.2	5.4	7.9	7.4	3

Testing and vaccination rates at Auckland Crowne Plaza and Jet Park Auckland

323 workers attended the **Auckland Crowne Plaza** during the period of interest, from 5 to 18 August. Of these:

- 100% were compliant with vaccination – 311 (96%) had received both doses while 11 (4%) had received their first dose and were not yet due for their second dose.
- For workers who had not been swabbed in the preceding 48 hours and were asked to be re-swabbed, by 22 August there were three outstanding. Of these, two had been swabbed however the results were not yet showing in the Border Worker Testing Register (BWTR) and one remained outstanding. This individual attempted to get a swab on 21 August, is self-isolating and will re-attempt on 23 August.

208 workers attended the **Jet Park Quarantine facility** in Auckland during the period of interest from 9 to 18 August. Of these:

- 100% were compliant with vaccination – 208 (100%) had received both doses.
- For workers who had not been swabbed in the preceding 48 hours and were asked to be re-swabbed, by 22 August there were two outstanding. Of these, one had been swabbed, however, the result wasn't in BWTR yet, and one had been contacted and directed to be tested. Their employer had also been advised.

Appendix 2 – Impacts on at risk populations

Māori

1. Around 86% of all Māori live in the North Island, 23% of all Māori live in the Auckland region, and a further 3.5% live in Thames-Coromandel or Waikato.
2. Previous lockdowns have shown the strength of Māori community and iwi networks in supporting and connecting whānau. Whānau Ora Commissioning Agencies are currently responding to requests for meeting essentials. Te Puni Kōkiri advise the priorities for Māori wellbeing being reported by the community are currently food, vaccinations and testing.
3. An extension to Alert level 4 will intensify demands for support from households unable to meet the essential needs of whānau at this time: access to food and hygiene packs, warm and secure housing, and covering costs for those households unable to pay for basics like power (around one in five Māori children live in hardship). Focus will need to remain on promoting access to testing and vaccination services across age cohorts and across urban and rural areas, to avoid creation of “hot spots” of vulnerable populations.
4. If the Alert Level 4 lockdown is extended, we should expect to see an increase in the impact and visibility of compounding stressors. For example, increased financial stress, insecure housing, and lack of access to essential services may compound other existing factors such as health, mental health, and maternity service needs; social isolation and/or disability needs (e.g. kaumātua living alone); and incidents related to unstable homes e.g. those experiencing family violence.
5. Protective actions include clear messaging encouraging individuals, whānau, Māori businesses and employers to access government financial assistance (e.g. wage subsidies etc). Continuity of access to education for tamariki and rangatahi will also be important if we extend beyond 7 days, including ensuring comprehensive access to devices and digital connectivity, particularly for key cohorts such as those sitting NCEA or with low school attendance rates.
6. Overall, our ability to maintain whānau resilience and address immediate and emerging needs is at least partly dependant on clear messaging about changing Alert Levels but also putting support behind regionally and locally led solutions. This will allow communities to adapt, plan and respond as relevant. Central and local government agencies need to continue to reach out to iwi, hapū and Māori organisations (including Māori health and social service providers) to ensure they are actively part of the regional responses. These organisations will bring important insights and access to networks of people, which government will struggle to access.
7. On this basis, support for locally led responses, transparency, and providing as much certainty as possible are critical to helping communities constructively support and plan for whānau and individual needs. Iwi and hapū involvement enables much more targeted responses and communications to whānau that utilise the main Alert Level 4 guidance but is more tailored to their audience.

Guidance on tangihanga, mental health supports, COVID testing and vaccinations are all good examples of this.

Pacific Peoples

8. A significant proportion of the Pacific population living in New Zealand live in the Auckland region, where the current outbreak is. Higher Alert Levels (i.e. Alert Level 3 and 4) impact the Pacific population in the following ways:
 - a. restrictions on earning capacity flowing from Alert Level shifts amplify income and poverty inequities;
 - b. restrictions on movement positively assist in preventing COVID-19 entering the Pacific community. This is critical considering the high risk of rapid transmission presented by household overcrowding and other practices that bring Pacific peoples together frequently (e.g. church/faith-based gatherings).
 - c. preventing the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the community is also important for Pacific peoples because they tend to have poor health outcomes and high rates of comorbidities.
9. It is critical to ensure that Pacific peoples are aware of the support they are eligible for, and how to access it. Ministry of Pacific Peoples will continue to play a key role in communicating effectively with these populations throughout the response.
10. Ensuring we have the right Alert Levels in place is crucial for Pacific communities as they are more susceptible to the worst effects of COVID-19.

Disabled People

11. The Office for Disability Issues has advised that for disabled people the current issues requiring ongoing consideration are:
 - a. access to food and essential services when these are not able to be accessed independently;
 - b. accessible testing stations, particularly where impairments make a long wait difficult – establish some specialist prioritisation options for those disabled people needing that option;
 - c. access to key information in alternate formats – NZSL translations. Easy read, blind and low vision formats;
 - d. consider standing up a disability call centre;
 - e. vaccination promotion and support (there have been great examples of low sensory sessions and the provision of transport);
 - f. greater respect for those who have face covering exemptions (people are experiencing aggravation and hostility from security guards, the public, supermarkets etc);

- g. maintaining the provision of home and personal care services; and
- h. for COVID related services such as vaccinations gather information in data collection on disabled people accessing services – two simple questions, do you need support today to access this service, are you disabled.

Ethnic Communities

- 12. New Zealand's ethnic communities make up roughly 20% of the population. About 60% of people from these communities live in Auckland. Small business owners will be highly impacted by the lockdown, particularly hospitality businesses.
- 13. Digital connectedness is also a challenge experienced by some ethnic community members, and a percentage of ethnic community members do not understand English. This combination of factors leaves ethnic communities highly socially vulnerable in the context of COVID-19, particularly if they do not live with whānau as part of their bubble under Level 4.

Low income households

- 14. Since the move to Alert Level 4, social and community-based services have been clear about who provides services and how to do this within the required settings and public health requirements.
- 15. Since the announcement of a further period at Alert Level 4 there has been a further increase in demand for financial assistance for food and through foodbanks. This is concentrated in the Auckland region with large communities, such as church and school communities, all having to isolate and therefore not being able to support each other. We anticipate this to continue to rise should there be further cases in these communities.
- 16. If there is an extension at level 4 or a change to 3 in some areas we would expect to see a change in the level of concern, the way communities want to respond and the requests for funding, particularly in relation to food and PPE. This is predominantly because of the nature of communities in that they will want to mobilise and be out and about supporting their most vulnerable. There is a risk that this will drive a level of movement in communities that is counter to the overarching need to minimise movement. MSD alongside NEMA will continue to work with communities and provide consistent messaging about the supports already in place and the need to utilise existing channels.

Older people

- 17. Most older people are likely to be able to cope for a short Alert Level 4 lock down. Organisations supporting older people have used their experience from last year to be able to quickly set up and operate/provide services remotely. Issues that will impact for a longer period of lockdown include:
 - a. Bill paying – some people still pay bills in person and will be impacted by the lockdown and not being able to pay their essential service bills (power, telephone etc).

- b. Accessing services that are online – this impacts on people who are digitally excluded for whatever reason – for older people digital exclusion increases with age.
- c. Food delivery services – with lockdown older people are encouraged to get others to do their shopping – this becomes problematic if they can't go online or aren't able to get someone to assist them – sometimes payment becomes an issue (access to cash).
- d. We also note that there is ongoing anxiety over COVID and its impacts. This anxiety has been heightened with the more virulent Delta variant now in the community. While many older people are vaccinated, there are many still waiting and who are not able to get appointments due to availability or prioritisation.

Young people

- 18. In relation to youth, we have seen through Youthline, a significant surge in support being sought, even at this early stage. I am advised that if there is an extended period at Alert Level 4 or Alert Level 3 there will be a need to bolster funding for this service, and potentially others, that are supporting this cohort.

Appendix 3: Economic Supports Currently Available

1. People can seek support from MSD via phone or online to help with food costs; accommodation costs; power, gas, heating or water bills; medical and dental costs. MSD should be contacted in the first instance, and social services providers such as food banks can be contacted if no income support is available. If people have an urgent food access need that cannot be addressed through these channels then they can contact their local Civil Defence Emergency Management Group, which have now been activated across the country.
2. **The Wage Subsidy Scheme August 2021** scheme helps eligible businesses (including those who are self-employed) to continue paying employees and retain them for the period of the subsidy. The subsidy will pay \$600 for full-time employees and \$359 for part-time employees and applications can be made from 20 August. The Scheme is open for 2 weeks.
3. **The Resurgence Support Payment** is available for firms who incur a loss of 30 percent of revenue as a result of the Alert Level increase. The RSP is worth up to \$1500 plus \$400 per full-time equivalent employee, up to a maximum of 50 full-time employees (a maximum amount of \$21,500).
4. **The Leave Support Scheme** provides businesses with a two-week lump sum payment of either \$600 per week for full-time employees or \$359 per week for part-time workers who must self-isolate and can't work from home, or who need to self-isolate due to family members etc. Payment increases will not take effect until 24 August.
5. **The Short-Term Absence Payment (STAP)** provides businesses with a one-off (once per 30 days) payment of \$359 for employees who must miss work due to a COVID-19 test and cannot work from home. STAP payments can be made more than once in a 30 day period under certain circumstances (which could apply during this lockdown). Payment increases will not take effect until 24 August.
6. Employers cannot get the COVID-19 Wage Subsidy, COVID-19 Leave Support Scheme or the Short-Term Absence Payment for the same employee for the same period.
7. Social and community-based services will continue to provide support to New Zealanders. MSD has provided additional advice to providers about who can operate – social services that provide and support a place for someone to live; social services that support disabled people to maintain critical wellbeing; and crisis support for people who are unsafe.

Appendix 4 – Movement over Alert Level boundaries: Category 2 businesses and services

1. Primary processing, production and supply of food and beverage (for example, agriculture, horticulture, fishing, and aquaculture) and associated supply chains and workers, and the production of packaging for the products of primary production for food or beverage.
2. Veterinary and animal health and welfare services but only to the extent that travel between Alert Level areas is necessary to enable the service to be provided and not providing the service would otherwise result in animal welfare concerns.
3. Vehicle maintenance services so long as the relevant service cannot be provided within the relevant Alert Level area, or it is necessary for an employee of service (who resides outside of the Alert Level area) to travel into the Alert Level area to perform the service.
4. Services for the transportation of tūpāpaku/corpse.
5. Union representatives as long as it is necessary to enable the union to provide a service and the provision of the service cannot be reasonably delayed.
6. State services (inclusive of Crown entities) and services provided by local government (for which chief executives of the relevant public service/local government organisation must provide appropriate control over this permission and manage risk within their organisation).



Cabinet

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.

COVID-19 Response: 23 August Review of Alert Level Settings

Portfolio COVID-19 Response

On 23 August 2021, Cabinet:

Background

- 1 **noted** that since 17 August 2021, 107 community cases of COVID-19 have been identified in New Zealand (as of 09.00 am Monday, 23 August 2021), and that the whole of New Zealand has been at Alert Level 4 since 11.59 pm on Tuesday, 17 August 2021;
- 2 **noted** that on Friday, 20 August 2021, Cabinet agreed to maintain the whole of New Zealand at Alert Level 4 until at least 11.59 pm on Tuesday, 24 August 2021 [CAB-21-MIN-0330];
- 3 **noted** that there is still insufficient information available to be confident there is no transmission elsewhere in New Zealand (including community and wastewater testing data);

Alert Levels

- 4 **noted** that based on the most recent public health risk assessment, the Director-General of Health's interim public health advice is that:
 - 4.1 all New Zealand stays at Alert Level 4 until 11.59 pm Friday, 27 August 2021, with a further public health risk assessment on Thursday, 26 August 2021;
 - 4.2 it is likely Auckland will remain at Alert Level 4 for some time longer; and
 - 4.3 it takes 24-48 hours to safely implement a regional boundary for Auckland, in addition to the recommended period at Alert Level 4, and this means that in effect, all of New Zealand would need to remain at Alert Level 4 until at least 11.59 pm Saturday, 28 August 2021;
- 5 **agreed** to extend Alert Level 4 settings for Auckland until 11.59 pm, Tuesday, 31 August 2021, with a review by Cabinet on Monday, 30 August 2021;
- 6 **agreed** to extend Alert Level 4 settings for the rest of New Zealand until 11.59 pm, Friday, 27 August 2021, with a review by Cabinet on Friday, 27 August 2021;

- 7 **noted** that this timeframe provides for:
- 7.1 in respect of Auckland, a full 14 days following the move to Alert Level 4 at 11.59 pm on Tuesday, 17 August 2021;
 - 7.2 in respect of the rest of New Zealand, at least seven days since the 48-hour window ended in which people could return home following the move to Alert Level 4;

Alert Level boundary and permitted movement

- 8 **noted** that officials are completing work on how an Alert Level 4/3 boundary would be established and what categories of travel would be permitted across the boundary, and will report to the Minister for COVID-19 Response later this week;
- 9 **noted** the view of the Minister for COVID-19 Response that applying the policy framework Cabinet considered in December 2020 for Alert Level 3/2 boundaries to Alert Level 4/3 boundaries is appropriate, subject to confirming precisely what categories of movement would be permitted across the boundary;
- 10 **noted** the view of the Minister for COVID-19 Response that categories of permitted movement should be more restrictive for an Alert Level 4/3 boundary than an Alert Level 3/2 boundary;
- 11 **noted** that officials advise that a period of 48 hours from the decision to establish a 4/3 Alert Level boundary until it comes into effect is required to effectively operationalise it;
- 12 **noted** that Ministers will further consider alert level boundary and timing issues before the next Cabinet meeting to review alert levels;

Other matters

- 13 **agreed** that Cabinet's decision today be communicated by the Prime Minister.

Michael Webster
Secretary of the Cabinet