



Meeting of the COVID-19 Ministerial Group

Amended Minute

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.

All of Government Plan for Managing the Departure of Stranded Foreign Nationals from New Zealand

The group of Ministers with Power to Act on COVID-19 matters [CAB-20-MIN-0130] convened on 2 April 2020 at 10.30am, and in accordance with their Power to Act:

Background

- 1 **noted** that there are a significant number of stranded foreign nationals in New Zealand, placing additional strain on infrastructure and critical support services;
- 2 **noted** that the current land-based and domestic flight restrictions provide a significant limitation on the ability of stranded foreign nationals to catch international flights out of New Zealand;

Ground transportation to Auckland and Christchurch Airports

- 3 **noted** that a significant number of stranded foreign nationals are within ground travel distance of Auckland or Christchurch Airports;
- 4 **agreed** that land-based travel to these airports, by a stranded foreign national with a ticket on an international flight (whether scheduled commercial or, if approved, charter) that is departing from within the city they are in or near, be considered an essential journey for the purposes of the COVID-19 Alert Level system;
- 5 **agreed** that in classifying these as an essential journey, these stranded foreign nationals can travel to an airport via private transport, taxis or rideshare services, public transport, or dedicated charter buses, subject to applicable requirements and health guidelines;

Domestic air travel of stranded foreign nationals to Auckland and Christchurch Airports

- 6 **noted** that a number of stranded foreign nationals are in the regions and will still not be able to reach Auckland or Christchurch Airports through the approach agreed to above;

- 7 **agreed** that stranded foreign nationals be permitted to travel to an airport and board a domestic transit flight (scheduled commercial or, if agreed, charter) to Auckland or Christchurch airports in order to connect with international flights, subject to all relevant COVID-19 Alert Level health conditions, and so long as they have a ticket booked for an international flight schedule to depart no more than 24 hours from the departure of their connecting domestic transit flight;

Land-based transport to domestic airports

- 8 **noted** that extending the ability to take land-based transport to the five domestic transit airports operating (Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin and Nelson) would allow all but a very few stranded foreign nationals to access international flights;

- 9 **agreed** that a transit corridor be permitted for stranded foreign nationals;

Qatar Airways: moving to twice daily flights

- 10 **noted** that Qatar Airways has requested that the New Zealand Government allow it to move from daily to twice daily flights between Doha and Auckland;

- 11 **noted** that no other airlines are currently flying between the Middle East/Europe and New Zealand, and that these extra flights would provide a valuable means for European nationals here to be evacuated and for New Zealanders stranded in Europe to return home;

- 12 **noted** that these flights, depending on how many New Zealanders took them to come home, could place strain on the system of transitioning New Zealanders back into the country (including via managed self-isolation) during Alert Level 4;

- 13 **agreed** to Qatar Airways' request to move to twice daily flights;

Foreign government assisted charter flights

- 14 **noted** that initial feedback from 25 diplomatic missions suggests there are around 35,000 foreign nationals who would leave if they could access enhanced means of doing so on scheduled commercial or foreign government assisted charter flights;

- 15 **agreed** that the current moratorium on foreign government assisted departure flights be lifted, with the tempo and capacity of such flights to be actively managed, commensurate with COVID-19 Alert Level 4 and processes for managing the safe return of New Zealanders into self-isolation and, as necessary, quarantine;

- 16 **noted** that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade will be responsible for leading negotiations with foreign governments on these government assisted departure flights;

s6(a)

s6(a)

s6(a)

Announcement and messaging

- 19 **agreed** that the above decisions be publicly announced on 2 April 2020 (drawing on the strategic communications messaging discussed at the meeting) and implemented immediately thereafter;
- 20 **noted** that officials will develop a more detailed messaging framework to explain these decisions, which will include making it clear that passengers must comply with all health requirements, including a number of COVID-19 related questions, before undertaking travel.

Rachel Hayward
for Secretary of the Cabinet

Secretary's note: minor changes have been made to paragraphs 3, 8 and 9 to better reflect the intent of the discussion.

Distribution:
The Cabinet
Hon James Shaw

Copied to officials via email