



11 October 2021



Ref: OIA-2021/22-0125

Dear 

**Official Information Act request relating to Delta variant scenario planning**

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) request received on 16 August 2021. You requested:

1. *"I request any reports or briefings written up after the Delta Variant scenario planning & stress testing exercise was completed.*
2. *I request any feedback or review documents written by any of the expert Advisory Group members including Sir Brian Roche, Debbie Ryan, Dale Bramley, Philip Hill or Rob Fyfe which relate to the Delta Variant exercise / workshop."*

The timeframe for responding to your request was extended under section 15A of the Act by 20 working days because it necessitated consultations to be undertaken before a decision could be made on the request. Following this extension, I am now in a position to respond.

In relation to the first part of your request, I have decided to release the following documents to you in full:

1. *COVID-19 Group: Update in Winter Resurgence Readiness Workshop*, dated 6 July 2021.
2. *Initial Summary – Queenstown Winter Readiness Workshop.*
3. *Report back on Delta variant readiness planning workshop*, dated 12 August 2021.
4. *COVID-19 Response – Pathway to Readiness.*

In relation to the second part of your request, no written feedback has been received from the Group. Therefore, as far as your request relates to written advice, I must refuse this part of your request under section 18(e), as the requested information does not exist.

You have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and review my decision under section 28(3) of the Act.

This response will be published on the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's website during our regular publication cycle. Typically, information is released monthly, or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

Yours sincerely



Cheryl Barnes  
**Deputy Chief Executive**  
**COVID-19 Group**

06 July 2021

To: Members, COVID-19 Chief Executives Board

## COVID-19 Group: Update on Winter Resurgence Readiness Workshop

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### Purpose

1. To provide CCB members an update on the first DPMC COVID-19 readiness workshop in a series of workshops provided by the COVID-19 Readiness Team's 'Pathway to Readiness' work programme.

### Background

2. On 22 June, CCB was provided a noting paper on the COVID-19 Group 'Readiness Pathway' work programme. The intent of this body of work is to stress-test the COVID-19 response system through a series of scenario-based, cross agency workshops. This is to enable continual improvement of the system as it adapts to the ever-changing nature of the virus and the global context.
3. The first workshop was held in Wellington on 15 June 2021, and discussion was focused on the strategic and key operational decisions. There was cross agency representation from across the system, with over 30 attendees.
4. The scenario was based on a winter resurgence in Queenstown. It sought to test a range of variables in the response including - a regional outbreak impacting multiple regions in the South Island, highly transient population, new variant (Delta), impact on QFT, access and transport to MIQFs, as well as surge capacity requirements. While the focus of the workshop was based on a regional outbreak, the exercise was a national stress test, with a regional workshop to come.

### Key outcomes from the Queenstown Winter Resurgence workshop

5. The workshop highlighted the significant agency planning which has been completed in the region to date, including MoH led scenario workshops with DHB's in early June. Agencies' contingency plans are at varying stages of completion and it was identified that there is a need to enable system-wide, coordinated regional engagement.
6. A number of actions were identified in the workshop, to be completed in the next month. Progress and outcomes against these actions are being monitored. Some actions include:
  - 6.1 DPMC to complete Post Activity Report and support ongoing regional engagement
  - 6.2 MoH to connect local agencies to PHU, to support information flow and contingency planning in the region

6.3 MFAT to engage with QFT partners to understand impacts and triggers when NZ detects community transmission, to assist planning assumptions.

- 7 An A3 summarising the Winter Resurgence workshop, including key insights, assurance information and next steps has been attached.

#### Next steps:

- 8 Ongoing engagement with the region (virtually and in-person), empowering regional stakeholders to progress the outcomes from the national workshop, at the regional level. These DPMC engagements include the Communications and Public Engagement team, the Planning team for regional boundaries, and the Readiness team to facilitate cross-system conversations (in close collaboration with MOH).
- 9 These are to enhance communications, ensure consistency across all levels of the system, clearly identify roles and responsibilities, understand gaps and mitigate potential risks. As a result, agencies will be more connected, and will have the opportunity to address any areas where further work is required, ahead of a response.

#### Recommendations

- 10 I recommend the COVID-19 Chief Executive Board members:

10.1 **Note** The outcomes from the COVID-19 Planning and Readiness team workshop on a Winter Resurgence, in Queenstown.

10.2 **Note** That a scenario summary will be included in the National Response Plan, Quarter 4 edition.

#### Graham MacLean

Head of Planning and System Readiness, COVID-19 Group  
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet



# Initial Summary - Queenstown Winter Readiness Workshop

## AREA FACTS

**Date:** Jul – Sep 21

**Region:** Queenstown Lakes District

**Area:** 8,719 km<sup>2</sup>

**Population:** 39,000 local (QT and Wanaka)

**Townships:** Queenstown, Wanaka, Wakatipu, Arrowtown

**Governance:** 5 local councils, 1 regional council  
(NB: Small government footprint)

**Key industry:** Tourism

**Winter Tourist #s:** 2-3,000 people p/day (winter)

**DHB:** Southern DHB, 5 hospitals, services 345,000 people

**Airport:** Domestic and Int'l flights from Australia

**International Flights:** 14 flights p/day

**MIQF access:** Nil. Closest is Chch, 450+km (6hrs)

**Mayor:** Jim Bolt

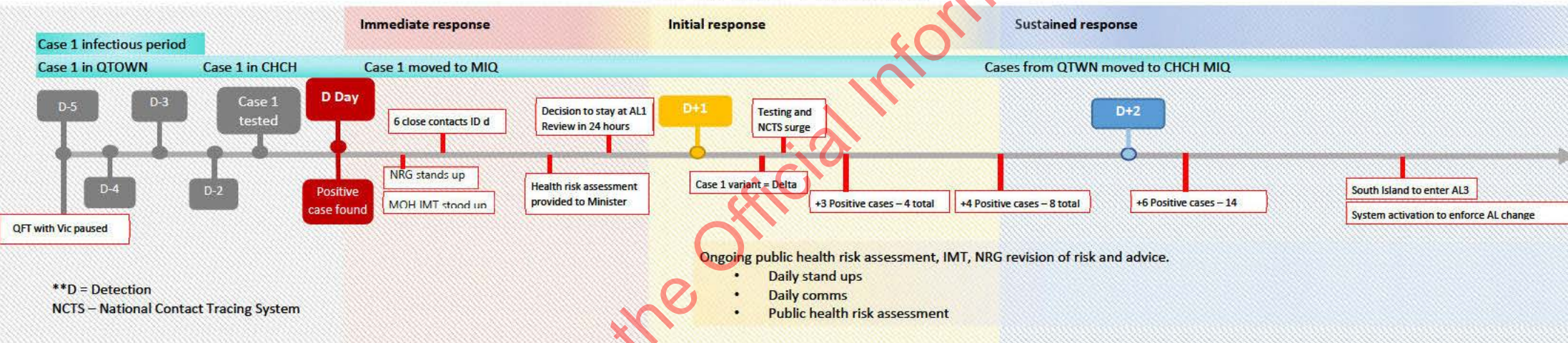
## REGIONAL ASSURANCE INFORMATION

- 97% airport border staff vaccinated; general popn, largely unvaccinated
- MoH secured temporary isolation accommodation for 6 people from Jul-Sep
- MoH confirmed SDHB ability to rapid test in 4 locations with results ~2hrs
- Contractual arrangement between MBIE and Johnsons Bus to relocate people to an MIQ
- All bus, taxi and ride share drivers vaccinated

## SCENARIO TESTED

- Regional outbreak
- Highly transient popn
- High event schedule
- New variant (Delta)
- Impact on QFT partners
- Outbreak across multiple regions in South Island
- MIQF transport requirements
- Surge capacity requirements

## SCENARIO TIMELINE



## KEY READINESS INSIGHTS

- Significant agency planning in the region completed to date, including MoH led local workshops. Agencies contingency plans are at varying stages of completion. Enabling system-wide, co-ordinated regional engagement is the future focus
- Lessons from past responses have identified key areas for development, including roles and responsibilities, welfare support and resource allocation
- Local businesses and tourist operators advocate COVID-19 health behaviours for people accessing their services
- Tourists bring a challenge with compliance and education, and the question of how to support foreign nationals caught in a regional response
- National Outbreak Response Team (NORT) will be on the ground within 24hrs to support DHB on-the-ground activities, including standing up regional IMT
- Due to the demographic and dispersed nature of the Southern District, agencies favoured approach is to "go wide" with establishing regional boundaries
- Need for time between decisions being made and decisions being operationalised. All agencies highlighted early communication enables co-ordinated, robust local responses, with enough lead-in time – with consideration of QFT travel impacts
- Clear, timely communication on decisions is essential for successful response outcomes

## NEXT STEPS

- DPMC to complete Post Activity Report, and conduct regional follow up
- DPMC to co-ordinate and facilitate regional boundary considerations for Queenstown
- MoH to link government agencies to DHB in region
- DPMC / MFAT engage with QFT partners to understand impacts when NZ detects community transmission, including decision making timeframes, national response and QFT impact



Prepared 12 August 2021

To: Members, COVID-19 Chief Executives Board

## **Report back on Delta variant readiness planning workshop**

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### **Purpose**

1. The COVID-19 Chief Executives Board (CCB) requested that the CCB remain apprised of significant progress across system readiness planning, as and when planning occurs.
2. The CCB requested that the System Readiness and Planning team report back to the CCB on the Delta variant readiness planning workshop.
3. The purpose of this paper and the appended A3 is to update the CCB on the Delta variant readiness planning workshop, key points discussed, and actions that agencies agreed to progress. Views are sought from CCB members on:
  - 3.1. If the Delta variant readiness planning workshop addressed the right areas.
  - 3.2. If the CCB need further information about readiness planning to respond to an incursion of the Delta variant of the virus.
  - 3.3. If the CCB want assurance that agencies' agreed actions to support system readiness are progressed.

### **Context**

4. The Delta variant presents different challenges for the system to respond to. It has worse clinical outcomes, is significantly more transmissible, and has a shorter incubation time than previous variants. Evidence suggests those infected with the Delta variant are infectious for longer, are likely to be highly infectious, and possibly highly infectious before they are tested and isolated.
5. An AOG readiness workshop was held on 10 August. The objective was to align the system's readiness settings with the latest MOH insights and advice on the Delta variant, validate thinking around the Australian responses in NSW and Victoria, and identify system adjustments to optimise the response to a Delta outbreak.

### **Key focus areas and developments at the Delta readiness planning workshop**

6. Workshop participants agreed that it is critical for our systems to be prepared for a rapid shift to Alert Level 3 or 4 in response to a positive case of Delta in the community.
7. Overall, the response needs to assume the worst-case scenario, and be faster, more stringent, and wider than previous responses.

8. To enable a rapid and bold response, the key focus areas of discussion included:
  - 8.1. Agencies and organisations prioritising adjusting BCPs for the Delta variant.
  - 8.2. Alert Level Framework review as a critical enabler to informing preparedness, especially for AL4.
9. Agencies agreed specific actions to enable a swift and effective response, these are reflected on the appended A3.
10. I seek feedback from CCB members that the workshop addressed the right areas and produced the right kinds of actions.

#### *Assurance*

11. Agencies will individually progress their own agreed actions. I suggest there is an assurance mechanism across agencies to ensure the right actions are occurring at the right time, so that our system is prepared to respond to Delta when required.
12. I seek confirmation from the CCB that members seek this assurance, and that CCB members discuss a preferred mechanism for them to receive that assurance, such as via an existing assurance mechanism (eg the SAF).

#### **Next Steps**

13. The Strategy and Policy team in DPMC's COVID-19 Group is leading a process to confirm Alert Level 4 settings. This is part of a wider process to confirm that all Alert Level settings are fit for purpose in light of more transmissible variants and consider how best the different Alert Levels would be used in a response. The process will not revisit policy settings unless there is an obvious need, however it will include "essential services" and "essential personal movement". This will result in advice to the Minister on 27 August, seeking confirmation of key policy settings.
14. The process will involve working with PCO to prepare a template Alert Level 4 Order (drafting of this has already begun). Workshops are being held to confirm previous Alert Level 4 settings on 16 and 17 August with key agencies (MPI, MBIE, PCO, CLO, DPMC, MOH) and the Unite Against COVID Communications team.
15. In the event we have to move to Alert Level 4 before 27 August, the current Alert Level 3 template Order would be used and quickly amended to reflect previous Alert Level 4 settings. This would be broadly effective but could be untidy as some arbitrary calls would be required without specific details. As the Alert Level review progresses from now until 27 August, our ability to respond would improve and be tidier.
16. To further the Delta readiness planning across the system, DPMC will lead a stress test exercise in sequence with Alert Level policy work and updated Ministry of Health IPC protocols and guidance. This will occur within two weeks, and an update will be reported back to the CCB.

## Recommendations

17. I recommend the COVID-19 Chief Executive Board members:

- 17.1. **Note** the key focus areas of the workshop.
- 17.2. **Note** the agency actions to strengthen readiness planning to an incursion of Delta that arose out of the workshop.
- 17.3. **Inform** the Readiness Manager of further information sought on readiness planning to an incursion of Delta.
- 17.4. **Agree** assurance across readiness planning to Delta is important to strengthening our system response.
- 17.5. **Discuss** if the CCB would like assurance across readiness planning to Delta, and what the appropriate mechanism for this might be.
- 17.6. **Note** DPMC will lead a system wide stress test exercise within two weeks and will report back to the CCB.

### Emma Broederlow

Readiness Manager, COVID-19 Readiness and Planning Group  
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet



## AOG Readiness Workshop – Recalibrating for Delta

### What's Different About Delta?

***"The virus has got fitter. The virus has got faster. The game plan still works, but we need to implement and execute our game plan much more efficiently and much more effectively than we've ever done before"***

Michael Ryan, WHO Director of Emergencies

Delta is becoming the dominant global variant of COVID-19. It is more transmissible, has a shorter incubation period (from 6 days to 4), most cases are likely to be asymptomatic and infectious in the community before they are tested and isolated, cases will infect significantly more people, and are infectious for longer.

To maintain an elimination strategy, we will need to assume the worst-case scenario, that all cases are Delta. Health and economic outcomes are better served by short, sharp, lockdowns that are proportionate, appropriate and effective.

### Learnings from Australia

- NSW approach of incremental shifts in AL, while conducting case investigation and contact tracing, has not worked with the Delta variant
- Victoria imposed significant restrictions on day three of their community cases (Sharp), across the whole state. Lockdowns have tended to be of shorter duration, with 16 days between two different lockdowns. An appropriate and effective duration for an NZ outbreak will need to be considered
- Essential for messaging to align with actions taken in order to maintain social licence
- Due to the likelihood of a significant increase in close contacts, contact tracing and testing systems will need to scale up effectively and at pace. Of note, if New Zealand was to test to the same scale as NSW's current testing rates, it would require capacity for up to 60,000 tests per day – more than 4 times previous testing rates

### Health System Readiness

MOH has been working across DHBs and Public Health Units using scenario based workshops to ensure readiness for a Delta outbreak. In order to optimise the health system settings for Delta, reviews have commenced on the following components: the role of the vaccination programme, policy settings, IPC protocols, response plans, testing and contact tracing capacity and isolation and quarantine options.

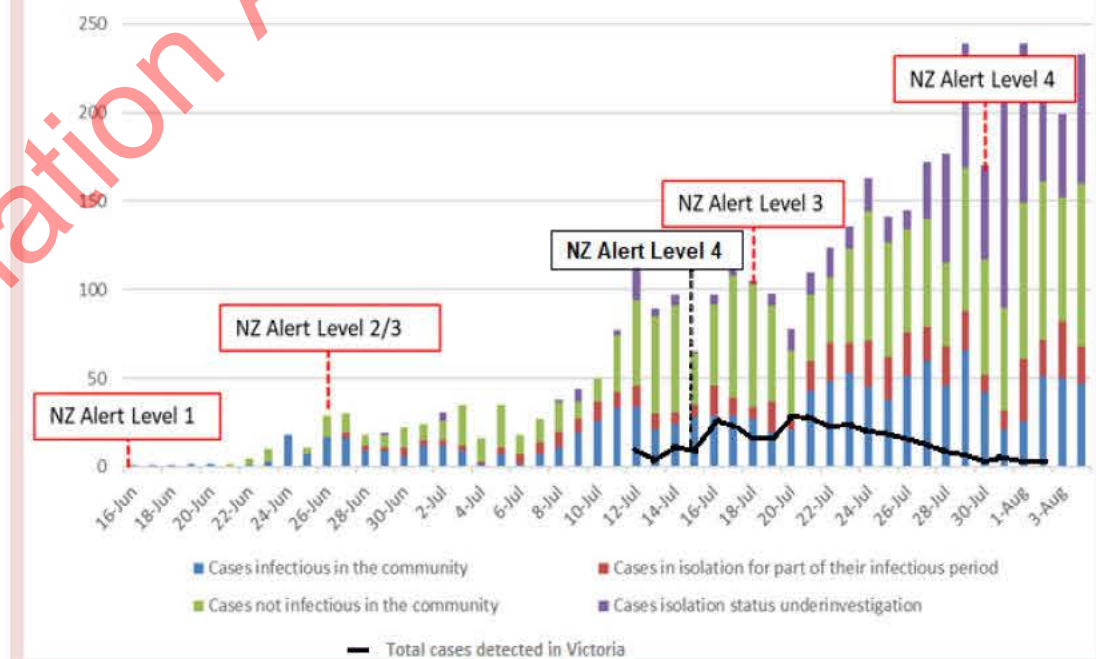
### ACTIONS FOR AGENCIES

Pacific Islands QFT (DPMC, MOT, MFAT, MOH, BEB)	Understanding triggers and thresholds for QFT settings with Pacific nations
Decision Support Matrix (DPMC)	DPMC to create a Decision Support Matrix, intended to articulate critical, strategic decisions, by time, for decision makers
Regional Leaders engagement (MSD, NEMA, DIA and DPMC)	Work is underway to clarify the various regional leadership arrangements, and to provide assurance on regional response planning
Organisational planning updates (MOH and Organisations)	Formal advice from MOH to organisations on IPC protocols for Delta. All agencies are to review staff and facility plans, and agency COVID-19 Response plans. DPMC will update NRP for Q4 publication
Classification of contacts (MOH)	Review of the classification of contacts to ensure the appropriate steps are taken to isolate and test those contacts appropriate to the characteristics of the Delta variant
AL4 Policy Settings (DPMC)	Finalise Alert Level 4 settings under the COVID-19 Act 2020 including settings for essential/lifeline services.
Messaging for New Zealand on adjusting for Delta (UAC Comms, NEMA, DIA, TPK, MPP)	Agree on terminology and key messaging across the system. Develop a communications plan using a variety of channels to prepare individuals, whanau, households, community leaders, businesses and organisations for a delta outbreak
Organisational priorities (CCB and PSC)	All organisations are to revise their BCPs. CEs to support prioritisation of critical agency functions in order to meet Government's priorities and determine the key workforce capacity needed to deliver priority work during AL3/4, PSC will work with agencies to gain visibility of any possible workforce capacity to support system requirements
Maritime Public Health controls (MOH, MNZ and BEB)	Review public health requirements to strengthen protections at the Maritime border, whilst maintaining the national supply chain

### NSW and Victoria response

The graph below illustrates the decisions made by NSW (bar graph) and Victoria (black line) over time and the impact on positive cases. The decisions highlighted in red and black boxes are an approximation of the equivalent NZ alert level, rather than exact replicas. NZ alert levels are objectively more stringent than those of Australia. This reinforces that a stepped approach (as taken by NSW) is not effective against the Delta variant.

Graph showing variation in case numbers and Alert Level response in both NSW and Victoria



### Complexities and Interdependencies

The following complexities and interdependencies have been identified:

- Essential workers can become vectors of transmission
- Concurrent emergencies will complicate a national response, with recovery from the emergency impacted under Delta conditions
- Risk of waning social licence in a more stringent response (AL4), including potential for protests/demonstrations, without appropriate welfare mechanisms established
- The need to continue vaccinations at AL3 and AL4
- AL4 has not been implemented under the COVID-19 Act 2020
- Limited capacity in MIQ facilities creates an imperative to identify community isolation and quarantine options
- Maritime Border is currently the biggest risk to NZ, however it is critical to NZ's supply chain
- AL4 exemptions are a high priority to articulate, especially in light of a swift response with less time to prepare (i.e. Animal welfare)
- The need to continually evaluate welfare and equity impacts of response decisions (including the ability to isolate at home, support to vulnerable or isolated people, and access to health and support resources)

### Considerations for CCB

The following considerations are provided:

- Chief Executives communicate strategic priorities to own agencies, to enable clear prioritisation of critical agency functions at AL3 and 4
- Chief Executives feed back to the CCB the impacts and trade-offs of the above prioritisations
- Agencies report to the CCB, through their CEs, confirming a review of BCPs, work prioritisation, and workforce surge capacity at AL3 and 4

Key

Within 1 week

Requires 2-3 weeks

Longer term ~1 month

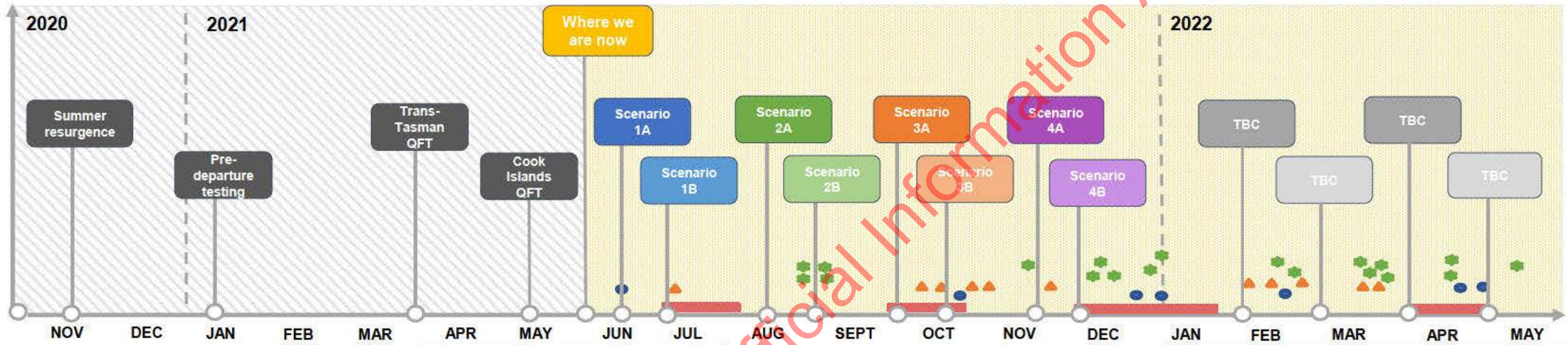
Trade-off / needs a decision by Government on priority



# COVID-19 Response – Pathway to Readiness

## Purpose of this document

To provide an overview of the workplan for scenario planning for the remainder of 2021. DPMC will facilitate a series of planning workshops, focusing on New Zealand's domestic preparedness for a potential COVID-19 response.



## Workshop Principles

- DPMC and Ministers commit to an ongoing work programme which is carried out throughout 2021.
- An important function of the COVID-19 Group Planning and Readiness team is the maintenance of the National Response Plan, and to ensure readiness of the system to respond.
- The same team has been assessing readiness for QFT zones which to date include Australia and the Cook Islands.
- Workshops will run as two-part activities, one held at the National level (Level A), with the second held in the region (Level B) with local government, community and business leaders and key regional stakeholders.
- Workshops are to establish readiness and not to provide a performance rating. Identifying gaps is a positive outcome.

- Workshop scenarios will evolve based on Government and health priorities, informed by seasonal and event imperatives.
- Future workshops will continue to build on previous lessons identified.

## Workshop Outputs

- The outcome from scenario testing creates tangible change and partners carry out these changes.
- The discussion in workshops will inform the build of the Readiness Framework, providing a consistent, robust framework for evaluating readiness criteria with current state.
- An update will be provided after each workshop series.

## June / July - Scenario 1

*Theme: Winter resurgence in Queenstown*

**Purpose:** To test the NRP and ensure readiness in a popular holiday destination, prior to upcoming winter holidays and events.

### Key considerations to work through:

- National outbreak
- Multiple regions impacted
- No pre-existing MIQF
- QFT
- Schools about to reconvene
- Largely unvaccinated popn
- Migrant and tourist populations (domestic and int'l)
- Overlapping activities (winter games, winter festival)
- Surge capacity for key elements (i.e. contact tracing, testing)

**Outcome:** to ensure a remote location is prepared for a winter response, with high visitor traffic and possibly Australian tourists.

## Future focus – Scenario 2, 3, 4 and beyond

**Purpose:** to continue to explore new scenarios, or where appropriate review previous real time outbreaks (both domestic and international) to ensure lessons identified have been integrated into response plans.

### Key considerations to work through:

- High density events
- High density living complex
- Spread of outbreak – local, regional, national
- Outbreaks at community event (i.e. – church, public holiday)
- Communication channels
- Outbreaks in ethnically diverse communities

**Outcome:** Developing preparedness across New Zealand in accordance with the National Response Plan by testing a wide range of locations, demographics, scale and complexity. This is in order to determine current state against readiness criteria.