



AIDE MEMOIRE

Information regarding timing of next MIQ room release

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|---------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|-----------|
| Date: | 7 January 2022 | Priority: | Medium |
| Security classification: | | Tracking number: | 2122-2278 |

Information for Minister(s)

Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall
Acting Minister for COVID-19 Response

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)

| Name | Position | Telephone | 1st contact |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------|
| Kara Isaac | General Manager, MIQ Policy | Privacy of natural persons | ✓ |
| Privacy of natural persons | Policy Advisor | | |

The following departments/agencies have been consulted

Ministry of Transport

Minister's office to complete:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Approved | <input type="checkbox"/> Declined |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Noted | <input type="checkbox"/> Needs change |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seen | <input type="checkbox"/> Overtaken by Events |
| <input type="checkbox"/> See Minister's Notes | <input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn |

Comments



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Purpose

To provide you with information as to why current capacity pressures and uncertainty around the timing of the delayed self-isolation pathway with Australia have resulted in the next MIQ room release being delayed to Thursday, 20 January (previously planned for Thursday, 13 January).

Kara Isaac
General Manager
MIQ Policy, MBIE

7 / 1 / 2022, 11.30am

The next room release has been delayed due to unfolding events

1. On 6 January 2022, MIQ released approximately 1,250 rooms for March and April through its lobby process. While the next lobby release was planned for 13 January, this date had not been publicly announced. Due to the considerations below, MBIE has decided that the next release will instead be on Thursday, 20 January.

Given significant capacity pressures, no more managed isolation rooms can be released for January and February

2. On 21 December 2021, the Minister for COVID-19 Response (the Minister) decided to extend the duration of the MIQ stay from 7 to 10 days in response to risks from the Omicron variant [2122-2240 refers]. This change came into effect at 11.59pm on 23 December. As noted at the time, the move to a 10-day stay was estimated to result in a 27 percent reduction in managed isolation capacity (approximately 1,800 rooms) every 33 days.
3. Meeting existing voucher commitments given this increased stay length is putting MIQ capacity under pressure, with diminished room reserves and a stretched workforce. For example, 2075 rooms were in use for Managed Isolation on 21 December, compared to approximately 2900 rooms today.
4. On 21 December, the Government announced that Step One of Reconnecting New Zealand (i.e. the medium risk self-isolation pathway) would be delayed until the end of February, and on 30 December, the Minister agreed that we support two specific cohorts of people to return from Australia to New Zealand before the end of February [2122-2262 refers]. These are people who travelled to Australia following the Government's announcement on 24 November and before 22 December and who did not have a MIAS voucher (estimated up to

370 people) and those who held a voucher for between 25 November and 28 February and who proactively cancelled that voucher expecting that they would not require it (estimated up to 200 people).

5. MIQ is working to accommodate these people and as of 9am, 7 January approximately 200 people had been issued vouchers for approximately 150 rooms, 50 further applicants have been approved for a voucher, and another 100 cases await assessment as to eligibility. Managed isolation rooms are currently at capacity for 17-23 January so those eligible are being required to travel before or after that week.
6. As global case counts continue to increase to unprecedented levels and at unprecedented speed, officials are also mindful of expected pressures from positive border cases over the coming weeks. Border cases of COVID-19 have increased significantly in the last week with 90 cases identified in the last three days. These numbers are expected to rise further in the coming days which will place significant pressure on our quarantine capacity. Further advice on this will be provided next week.

Holding the release on 20 January allows additional time for any upcoming Ministerial decisions to be reflected

7. Holding the room release on 20 January will allow any upcoming Ministerial discussions or decisions regarding border settings to be reflected. In particular, the postponement provides an opportunity to account for any decisions regarding the forthcoming re-opening of the border to Australia.

Airlines have not scheduled red flights from Australia for March and April

8. Airlines have not scheduled red flights from Australia for March and April, based on Government messaging that MIQ-free travel was expected to open for eligible travellers from Australia from “the end of February”. This means that people looking to travel directly from Australia to New Zealand were not able to participate in yesterday’s room release. This has created significant commentary in both the media, social media, and increased complaints to MIQ.
9. If the 13 January room release had proceeded, and a decision was subsequently made to further delay the reintroduction of the self-isolation pathway from Australia beyond the end of February, people in Australia would end up disadvantaged by not having had the opportunity to participate in multiple room releases.
10. Airlines have “green” flights in place for March/April, but it is more difficult to secure slots for red flights and having dual red/green schedules is complex. If the Government announces that Step One may not proceed at the end of February, officials will work with airlines to seek to schedule red flights from Australia in March and April in time for the 20 January room release. Timing will be tight, so it would be useful to understand the likely direction as soon as possible. Air New Zealand is the only airline currently operating red flights from Australia and officials have encouraged them to start looking at what a red schedule might look like as a contingency.

Possible public reaction to the next room release being in late January

11. MIQ has notified people on its website that the next release will be on 20 January and we do anticipate some frustration from New Zealanders overseas. This will mean that there will have been only one small room release since 16 December. People may also view not having a room release until late January as signalling uncertainty around future border and MIQ settings. Our communications team will liaise with your office on this as required.