



## COVERSHEET

<b>Minister</b>	Hon Erica Stanford	<b>Portfolio</b>	Immigration
<b>Title of Cabinet paper</b>	Pacific Visitor Visa Settings: Report Back	<b>Date to be published</b>	14 May 2026

### List of documents that have been proactively released

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>
July 2025	Pacific Visitor Visa Settings: Report Back	Office of the Minister of Immigration
30 July 2025	Pacific Visitor Visa Settings: Report Back SOU-25-MIN-0097 Minute	Cabinet Office

### Information redacted

**YES**

Any information redacted in this document is redacted in accordance with MBIE's policy on Proactive Release and is labelled with the reason for redaction. This may include information that would be redacted if this information was requested under Official Information Act 1982. Where this is the case, the reasons for withholding information are listed below. Where information has been withheld, no public interest has been identified that would outweigh the reasons for withholding it.

Some information has been withheld for the reasons of international relations and free and frank opinions.

**Restricted**

Office of the Minister of Immigration

Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs

Cabinet Social Outcomes Committee

**Report back on Pacific visitor visa settings**

**Proposal**

1 This paper sets out three options for Cabinet consideration to further improve immigration settings for the Pacific. The options are:

1.1 **International relations**  
[Redacted]

1.2 **International relations**  
[Redacted]

1.3 investigate funding options to reduce visa fees for nationals from Pacific Islands Forum countries and/or improve processing times.

**Relation to Government Priorities**

2 **International relations**  
[Redacted]

**Executive Summary**

3 **International relations**  
[Redacted]

A number of countries have requested that New Zealand grants them visitor visa waiver status.

4 On 7 April 2025, Cabinet noted and agreed [ECO-25-MIN-0042] to the following:

4.1 agreed to implement visa waiver status for Pacific nationals travelling from Australia that hold a valid Australian visitor, student, work, or family visa to enter New Zealand for up to 3 months on a trial basis for 12 months; and

4.2 noted that the Minister of Immigration has instructed Immigration New Zealand (INZ) to issue up to two-year multi-entry visitor visas as the default for Pacific Islands Forum country nationals; and

4.3 noted that the Minister of Immigration, in consultation with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, intends to report back to Cabinet in July 2025 on Pacific immigration settings more broadly so that further decisions can be taken **Inte**

[REDACTED]

5 Officials have considered a further range of options to improve and streamline short-term visa settings for the Pacific. The following options would improve our visa offerings and travel facilitation:

5.1 **International relations** [REDACTED]

5.2 **International relations** [REDACTED]

5.3 investigate funding options to reduce visa fees for nationals from Pacific Islands Forum countries and/or improve processing times.

6 **International relations** [REDACTED]

7 **International relations** [REDACTED]

- 8 (R) In addition, updated overstayer figures that are due to be released by Immigration New Zealand in August or September indicate that while Pacific people are between 3-4% of total arrivals they make up approximately 25% of our overstayer cohort.
- 9 If agreed, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Immigration will investigate funding pathways for the above and options to reduce visitor visa fees and/or improve processing times for Pacific nationals. Further fee subsidies may require new Crown funding if funding cannot be reprioritised within Vote Foreign Affairs. As an example, a 50% subsidy on visa application fees would cost approximately \$4.5 million per year. An estimate of eight additional processing staff would be required to improve processing speed, with an initial estimated cost of up to \$1 million per annum. If these options progress, Ministers will report back to Cabinet on the outcomes of these funding considerations.

10 International relations, Free and frank opinions  
[Redacted]

**Background**

11 Pacific leaders and their nationals have regularly raised concerns that it is too difficult and expensive to travel to New Zealand for short visits. While a range of improvements have been made in the last 18 months, International relations  
[Redacted]

12 On 7 April 2025, Cabinet noted and agreed to the following:

- 12.1 agreed to implement visa waiver status for individuals travelling from Australia on passports from Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu (Pacific Islands Forum countries) that hold a valid Australian visitor, student, work, or family visa to enter New Zealand for up to 3 months on a trial basis for 12 months; and
- 12.2 noted that the Minister of Immigration has instructed INZ to issue up to two-year multi-entry visitor visas as the default for Pacific Islands Forum country nationals and this will decrease revenue by approximately by \$1-2 million per annum.
- 12.3 noted that the Minister of Immigration, in consultation with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, intends to report back to Cabinet in July 2025 on Pacific immigration settings more broadly so that further decisions can be taken Inte  
[Redacted]

- 13 The Pacific Islands Forum is the pre-eminent regional organisation for Pacific leaders to chart the regional policy agenda and respond to priority issues. The theme for this year's Forum Leaders Meeting is "Act Now for an Integrated Blue Pacific Continent". This is expected to include a focus on better facilitating people movement across the region, including through immigration settings. **International relations**

*New Zealand has already made a number of changes to improve visa processing in the Pacific*

- 14 As well as the changes agreed by Cabinet in April, there have been a number of recent changes to improve the experience of Pacific nationals applying for a visa. This has been done in recognition of the important role that people-to-people connections' play in our special relationship with the Pacific. New Zealand has:
- 14.1 improved processing times from an average of 15 working days in 2023 to 12 in 2024. For the non-peak period of April to September, it improved from 12 working days in 2023 to 7 working days in 2024. For May 2025, this had improved to 6 days;
  - 14.2 opened a Visa Application Centre in Apia, Samoa, to allow Samoans to submit applications 'in-person';
  - 14.3 published guidance material online in multiple languages to support Pacific applicants with the visa application process, with material available in Samoan, Tongan, Fijian, Fijian Hindi, Tuvaluan and Gilbertese;
  - 14.4 improved communications and relationship management approaches in the Pacific, with the Pacific Engagement Plan bringing together the various aspects of engagement with Pacific partners, identifying four priority countries (Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu) where INZ has strengthened the bilateral relationship through a programme of annual visits by senior INZ officials. INZ also continues to be a member of the Pacific Immigration Development Community (PIDC) to actively engage with forum members for multi-lateral co-operation in strengthening territorial borders and the integrity of immigration systems;
  - 14.5 introduced a dedicated inbox for the Pacific, allowing applicants to request escalation of all visa types, whereas outside of the Pacific requests for escalation for visitor visa are made via the Customer Service Centre. The standard escalation process applies to these requests for priority allocation: whether there is a compelling personal/business circumstance (for example attending a funeral urgently), humanitarian factors, or a matter of national interest; and
  - 14.6 provided further subsidies for the Pacific Fee Band (which was already lower than fees for other countries) during the 2024 Fees and Levy changes, funded by Vote Foreign Affairs **International relations**

**Further measures to improve Pacific visitor visas**

- 15 While the changes above have gone some way to addressing the concerns of our Pacific partners, issues around visas are still raised regularly by the Pacific. We have therefore been considering a range of further measures that New Zealand could implement to improve perceptions that we make it costly and cumbersome for Pacific nationals to visit New Zealand.
- 16 The following three options could further improve immigration settings for the Pacific. The options are:
  - 16.1 **International relations** [redacted]
  - 16.2 **International relations** [redacted]
  - 16.3 investigate funding options to reduce visa fees for nationals from Pacific Islands Forum countries and/or improve processing times.

**Further extending multi-entry visa period**

- 17 In April, we announced the increase of the current multi-entry visitor visa duration for nationals from Pacific Islands Forum countries that require a visa from 12 months to up to two years, in response to concerns that we make it too difficult and expensive for many Pacific nationals to visit New Zealand. This was implemented on 6 July, with responses from Pacific leaders being largely positive. Some, however, consider the changes do not go far enough in creating a less onerous process for their nationals.
- 18 **International relations** [redacted]
- 19 **International relations** [redacted] INZ would continue to grant a shorter visa, or decline a visa application, if specific risks or issues are flagged. Visitor visa holders would still need to be assessed for entry at the border, and may be refused entry if there are bona fide or character concerns. However, the change from visitor visas for Pacific nationals from 12 months to up to two-years multi-entry as the default has only been recently implemented. In addition, our April decision to implement visa waiver status for Pacific nationals travelling from Australia that hold a valid Australian visitor, student, work, or family visa to enter New Zealand for up to 3 months on a trial basis for 12 months will only be implemented in November. This means there has been no time to monitor or evaluate these changes and identify any issues and/or unintended consequences.

20 International relations  
[Redacted]

21 (R) In addition, updated overstayer figures that are due to be released by Immigration New Zealand in August or September show that while Pacific people make up between 3-4% of total arrivals they make up approximately 25% of our overstayer cohort.

22 The recently announced change to increase multi-entry visitor visa duration from 12 to up to 24 months was estimated to decrease revenue of between \$1-2 million per annum. International relations  
[Redacted]  
[Redacted] This change will increase existing pressure on the immigration funding system as fixed costs (such as IT system costs) will need to be spread across fewer fee payers. This will increase the need to review, and subsequently increase fees and levy rates in the future.

**International relations, Free and frank opinions**

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

**International relations**

[Redacted text block]

**Reducing visitor visa fees and improving processing times for the Pacific**

- 28 Pacific nationals have subsidised visitor visa application fees, with those applying from the Pacific only paying \$175 (\$216 including the immigration levy) compared to \$300 (\$341 including levy) for those applying from within New Zealand or the rest of the world. The costs of this subsidy, agreed by Cabinet in 2024 [ECO-24-MIN-0017], are funded in 2025/2026 and outyears by a Vote transfer from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade due to the foreign policy objectives of the subsidy, reducing New Zealand’s Official Development Assistance budget by approximately \$4.5m per annum. Despite this, Pacific Leaders and nationals have told New Zealand officials that the process to apply for a visa to travel to New Zealand is too cumbersome and expensive.
- 29 We seek Cabinet agreement to investigate options to further reduce visitor visa fees and improve processing times for Pacific nationals. When combined with the recent changes to multi-entry visitor visas, this would substantially increase the affordability and accessibility of New Zealand. However, this may require new Crown funding. As the immigration system is a user pays system a reduction of fees would need to be subsidised by the Crown. **International relations**  
[Redacted text block]
- 30 As an example, a 50% subsidy would cost approximately \$4.5 million per annum. An estimate of 8 additional dedicated processing staff for the Pacific would significantly improve processing speed, with an initial estimated cost of up to \$1 million per annum. If these options progress, we will investigate reprioritisation and new funding options. If these cannot be identified, other funding options may involve seeking an out of cycle funding request to seek a pre-commitment against Budget 2026 or a possible invitation into Budget 2026 for new Crown funding.

International relations [redacted]  
[redacted]

[redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]

International relations [redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]

[redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted] International relations [redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted] INZ are currently undertaking a comprehensive assessment of overstaying rates which is due to be released in August or September. The data shows that arrivals from Pacific Islands Forum countries comprise approximately 25 per cent of all overstayers, while only making up 3-4 per cent of total arrivals since 2015. International relations [redacted]  
[redacted]

**(R) International relations and reputational risks**

34 (R) Pacific countries will likely welcome changes to immigration settings which make it easier to travel to New Zealand. International relations [redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]

35 International relations [redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]

### Implementation

36 International relations, Free and frank opinions  
[Redacted]

### Cost-of-living Implications

37 This proposal will not have any impacts or implications on the cost of living. It will not impact on New Zealanders’ ability to maintain their standard of living including direct or indirect impacts on the cost of everyday expenses.

### Financial Implications

38 There will be revenue impacts for INZ, International relations  
[Redacted]  
[Redacted] As the immigration system operates on a cost recovery basis, any reduction in revenue will have an impact on the immigration fee memorandum and levy hypothecation accounts which are currently in a deficit position.

39 Should Cabinet agree to progress work to investigate options to further subsidise the visitor visa application fee for Pacific visitors, funding will need to be identified. Further work will be undertaken to identify options to reprioritise funding or seek new funding.

40 The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade are working with the Treasury to identify possible funding sources. If sufficient reprioritisation options are not identified, this may involve seeking an out of cycle funding request to seek a pre-commitment against Budget 2026 or a possible invitation into Budget 2026 for new Crown funding.

41 We acknowledge these options are being presented during a time when the immigration system needs to be more efficient, self-funding, sustainable and is under financial pressure. While these options are out of step with 2024 Cabinet decisions to increase immigration fee and levy rates, we consider the foreign policy gains to be worth pursuing.

### Legislative Implications

42 The options to reduce visitor visa applications fees for Pacific nationals, Internatio  
[Redacted] require changes to regulations to establish the new rates, if they progress.

## Impact Analysis

### Regulatory Impact Statement

- 43 The Ministry for Regulation has determined that the proposal to reduce visitor visa fees for Pacific nationals **International relations** are exempt from the requirements to provide a Regulatory Impact Statement on the grounds that it has no or only minor impacts on businesses, individuals, and not-for-profit entities.

### Climate Implications of Policy Assessment

- 44 The Climate Implications of Policy Assessment (CIPA) team has been consulted and confirms that the CIPA requirements do not apply to this policy proposal, as the threshold for significance is not met.

### Population Implications

- 45 These options will benefit New Zealand's Pacific community. As a Pacific region, New Zealand's people, economy, and environment are closely linked to the wider Pacific countries through our histories, cultures, languages, trade, and shared interests. New Zealand has a long history of migration from the Pacific, with several significant waves of migration from various parts of the Pacific throughout the decades. New Zealand is also home to more than 381,600 Pacific peoples, who often maintain a strong connection with their families back in their respective Pacific home countries.

### Human Rights

- 46 This policy does not pose any human rights implications.

### Use of External Resources

- 47 No external resources have been used during the development of this proposal.

### Consultation

- 48 The following agencies have been consulted: Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Oranga Tamariki - Ministry for Children, Ministry for Pacific Peoples, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Internal Affairs, the Treasury, Ministry of Social Development, and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

### Communications

- 49 Communications will be conducted with external stakeholders, agencies and partners by relevant Ministers, INZ, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

### Proactive Release

- 50 This Cabinet paper will be proactively released after announcements have been made, with withholdings under the Official Information Act 1982 as appropriate.

## Recommendations

The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Immigration recommend that the Committee:

- 1 **note** that in April Cabinet agreed to implement visa waiver status for individuals travelling from Australia on passports from Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu (Pacific Islands Forum countries) that hold a valid Australian visitor, student, work, or family visa to enter New Zealand for up to 3 months on a trial basis for 12 months and that this will be implemented in November [ECO-25-MIN-0042];
- 2 **note** that on 6 July the default visitor visa for Pacific Islands Forum country nationals was extended from 12 months to two-year multi-entry [ECO-25-MIN-0042];
- 3 **note** the Minister of Immigration committed to report back to Cabinet, in consultation with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, on Pacific immigration settings more broadly so that further decisions can be taken **International relations** [ECO-25-MIN-0042];
- 4 **International relations, Free and frank opinions**
- 5 **note** this paper sets out three options to further improve immigration settings for the Pacific:
  - 5.1 **International relations**
  - 5.2 **International relations**
  - 5.3 investigate funding options to reduce visa fees for nationals from Pacific Islands Forum countries and/or improve processing times;
- 6 **International relations**
- 7 **(R) note** that updated overstayer figures soon to be released indicate that while Pacific people make up between 3-4% of total arrivals they make up approximately 25% of our overstayer cohort;
- 8 **International relations**

9 agree to:

9.1 International relations [redacted]

9.2 International relations [redacted]

9.3 investigate funding options to reduce visa fees for nationals from Pacific Islands Forum countries and/or improve processing times.

10 International relations, Free and frank opinions [redacted]

11 Maintenance of the law [redacted]

12 **if 9.3 is agreed, invite** the Minister of Immigration and Minister of Foreign Affairs to investigate funding options to reduce visitor visa fees and improve processing times for Pacific nationals, alongside any subsequently necessary enforcement costs;

13 **invite** the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and of Immigration to report back to Cabinet on the results of recommendations 9.2. and 9.3;

14 **authorise** the Minister of Immigration to take decisions to give effect to the policy intent of the immigration settings changes agreed in this paper and any issues that arise in the drafting process; and

15 International relations [redacted]

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Erica Stanford

Minister of Immigration

Rt Hon Winston Peters

Minister of Foreign Affairs