

Briefing

Trans-Tasman Quarantine-Free Travel (QFT): Health advice on resumption of QFT from Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory

Date due to MO:	5 July 2021	Action required by:	5 July 2021
Security level:	IN CONFIDENCE	Health Report number:	20211543
To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister for COVID-19 Response		
Copy to:	Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister Hon Grant Robertson, Deputy Prime Minister Hon Nanaia Mahuta, Minister of Foreign Affairs Hon Michael Wood, Minister of Transport		

Contact for telephone discussion

Name	Position	Telephone
Dr Ashley Bloomfield	Te Tumu Whakarare mā te Hauora Director-General of Health	s 9(2)(a)
Maree Roberts	Deputy Chief Executive System Strategy and Policy	s 9(2)(a)

Minister's office to complete:

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Approved | <input type="checkbox"/> Decline | <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 Withdrawn | |

Comment:

Trans-Tasman Quarantine-Free Travel (QFT): Health advice on resumption of QFT from Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory

Security level: IN CONFIDENCE **Date:** 5 July 2021

To: Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister for COVID-19 Response

Purpose of report

1. This report provides my advice that quarantine-free travel (QFT) from Western Australia, the Northern Territory to New Zealand should recommence as of 11:59pm Thursday 8 July 2021.
2. I am also proposing that the current pause on QFT from New South Wales and Queensland be reviewed on Wednesday 7 July 2021.

Summary

3. On 26 June 2021, you decided to pause QFT from Australia for an initial period of 3 days and a notice was subsequently issued excluding QFT for travellers who had been in Australia on or after 10:30pm on 26 June 2021 (New Zealand Standard Time (NZST)). From 11:59pm (NZT) on Sunday 4 July, quarantine-free travel from Tasmania, ACT, Victoria and South Australia resumed.

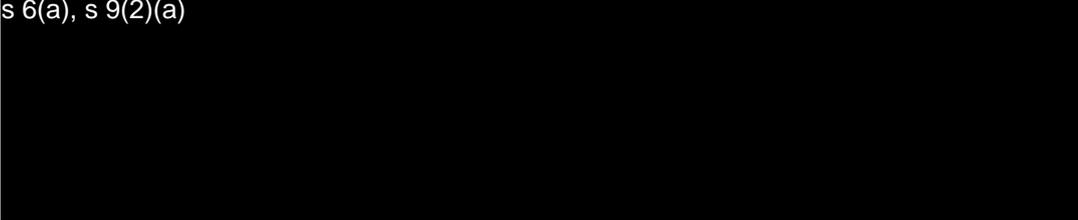
Latest case information

4. Outbreaks of varying sizes have been reported in six jurisdictions, New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia.

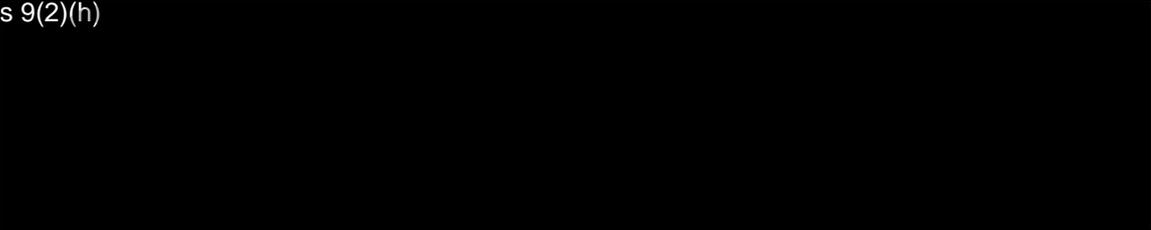
- a. In the Northern Territory, a positive case has been detected ^{s 6(a), s 9(2)(a)}

- b. Western Australia has reported one new case in the 24 hours prior to 4 July 2021, a ^{s 6(a), s 9(2)(a)}

- c. The outbreak in New South Wales is continuing to grow s 6(a), s 9(2)(a)

- d. Queensland has reported one new case in the 24 hours prior to 4 July 2021, related s 6(a), s 9(2)(a)


Health advice

5. Based on the information available at 4:00pm New Zealand time on Sunday 4 July 2021 the risk to New Zealand appears to be low overall, noting that the risk varies considerably by State or Territory.
6. In respect of Western Australia and the Northern Territory I consider that the spread of COVID-19 cases appears to have been contained at this point, there is robust surveillance, testing and contact tracing to detect and manage cases, and adequate border controls are in place to prevent the import and spread of new cases.
7. **I therefore advise that QFT from Western Australia and the Northern Territory could recommence at 11:59pm on 8 July 2021 provided that travellers have not previously been in New South Wales or Queensland on or after 10:30pm on 26 June 2021 (New Zealand Standard Time (NZST)).**
8. I note that you have already decided that all travellers from Australia provide evidence of a negative a Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) COVID-19 test, taken within three days of departure.
9. I propose that you announce on Monday 5 July that QFT travel for these States and Territories. This will give adequate time between when you announce a resumption of QFT flights and those flights resuming to enable travellers to receive results from the pre-departure tests they will need before departure and for airlines to meet their operational requirements to provide such flights.
10. s 9(2)(h)

11. I further propose that should QFT from these States and Territories recommence, clear communications should be provided to passengers reinforcing:
- a. the current public health measures in place,
 - b. the requirement to wear face coverings on the aircraft and at the airport,
 - c. the requirement to make a health declaration,

- d. that passengers may be subject to random temperature checks,
 - e. the importance of downloading the COVID tracer app, and
 - f. the requirement to self-isolate and be tested immediately if they have any symptoms of illness.
12. These measures should minimise the risk of COVID-19 spreading to New Zealand.
13. I consider that **a precautionary approach should continue to be taken for New South Wales and Queensland and recommend that QFT continue to be paused, with a review on 7 July 2021.**
14. Continuing the pause on QFT from New South Wales and Queensland will allow further information and a better understanding of the outbreaks. The continued QFT pause for New South Wales does not impact on any decision to allow green zone flights from New South Wales beginning 11:59pm 8 July 2021, which will be subject to additional public health mitigations.

Recommencing QFT from Western Australia and the Northern Territory

15. QFT from Australia has been enabled by the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Air Border) Order (No 2) 2020 (the Air Border Order) which allows the Minister for COVID-19 response to issue an exemption from quarantine and isolation requirements for travellers who arrive in New Zealand on an aircraft undertaking a QFT flight. If you agree to recommence QFT from Western Australia and the Northern Territory, you need to amend the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Exemptions and Conditions for Quarantine-free Travel) Notice 2021.
16. When deciding whether to grant or modify an exemption and what (if any) conditions to impose you must take into account my advice provided above, on the public health implications.

Impact on travellers

17. If you agree with my recommendation, QFT from Queensland and New South Wales will continue to be temporarily paused. Travellers from New South Wales will be required to either follow the health advice in their jurisdiction for the duration of the pause or return to New Zealand on a green zone managed return flight, if available. Travellers in Queensland will be required to shelter in place and continue to follow the health advice in their jurisdiction for the duration of the pause.
18. Travellers from Western Australia and the Northern Territory would become eligible again to undertake QFT to New Zealand, provided they have returned a negative COVID-19 test, taken within three days of departure, and have not previously been in New South Wales or Queensland on or after 10:30pm on 26 June 2021 (New Zealand Standard Time (NZST)).
19. If they have been in a location of interest before this date, they will not be able to travel to New Zealand for 14 days since they were last in that location of interest or, if they have already travelled to New Zealand and subsequently find they were at a newly-identified location of interest be subject to the conditions of the section 70 Notice and will be required to get tested and isolate or quarantine.

Further review

20. Further review and advice on the COVID-19 situation in Queensland and New South Wales will be provided on 7 July 2021.

Consultation

21. Before any decision to recommence QFT from Western Australia or the Northern Territory, you must consult the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Minister of Transport. You may consult other relevant Ministers.¹

Recommendations

We recommend you:

- a) **Note** that on 26 June 2021 you decided to pause Quarantine Free Travel (QFT) from Australia from 10:30pm on 26 June 2021 (New Zealand time). **Noted** ✓
- b) **Note** that on Tuesday 29 June 2021, you agreed to recommence QFT from the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria, effective from 11:59pm on Sunday 4 July 2021. **Noted** ✓
- c) **Note** that based on information and public health advice available on 4 July 2021, QFT from the Northern Territory and Western Australia could recommence from 11:59pm on 8 July 2021 (NZST). **Noted** ✓
- d) **Agree** that QFT from the Northern Territory and Western Australia will recommence from 11:59pm on ~~Thursday 8~~ ^{Friday 9} July 2021 (NZST) for travellers who have not previously been in New South Wales and Queensland on or after 10:30pm on 26 June 2021. **Yes/No**
- e) **Note** that the public health risk assessment undertaken on Monday 5 July 2021 recommends that the pause on QFT for New South Wales and Queensland should remain in place and will be reviewed again on Wednesday 7 July 2021. **Noted** ✓
- f) **Agree** that QFT travel from New South Wales and Queensland remains paused with a further review on Wednesday 7 July 2021. **Yes/No**
- g) **Note** that I do not recommend that green zone managed flights from Queensland recommence until at least Saturday 10 July 2021. **Noted**
- i) **Note** that you have previously decided that all travellers from Australia provide evidence of a negative Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) COVID-19 test, taken within three days of departure. **Noted**
- j) **Agree** to announce your decision on Monday 5 July 2021 to resume QFT flights from Western Australia and the Northern Territory on ~~Thursday 8~~ ^{Friday 9} July 2021. **Yes/No**
- k) **Note** that if you agree to recommence QFT from the Northern Territory and Western Australia, the Parliamentary Counsel Office will prepare the required amendments to the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Exemptions and Conditions for Quarantine-free Travel) Notice 2021 for your signature on Wednesday 7 July 2021. **Noted** ✓

¹ CAB-21-MIN-0101 and cl 26(3A)(a), Air Border Order.

- l) **Note** that the revised exemption notice recommencing QFT flights from Western Australia and the Northern Territory will also implement any decision to begin green zone managed return flights from New South Wales. **Noted**
- m) **Agree** to forward this advice to the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Transport for consultation. **Yes/No**



Dr Ashley Bloomfield
Director-General of Health
Te Tumu Whakarae mō te Hauora
Date: 05/07/2021



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

Date: 5/7/2021

PROACTIVELY RELEASED

Trans-Tasman Quarantine-Free Travel (QFT): Health advice on lifting the pause of QFT from Western Australia and the Northern Territory

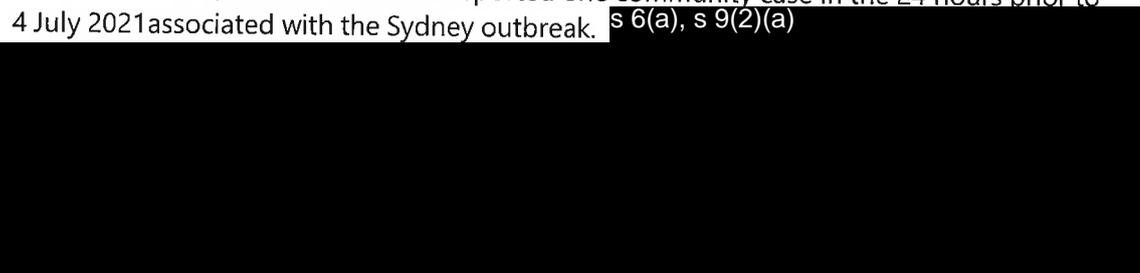
Background

1. On Tuesday 22 June, the Government announced a pause on quarantine-free travel from New South Wales from 11:59pm (NZT) on Saturday 26 June 2021. On 24 June, the Government announced an extension to the pause.
2. On Saturday 26 June, the Government announced a pause on quarantine-free travel from all ports in Australian states and territories from 10.30pm (NZT) on Saturday 26 June 2021.
3. The pauses meant that:
 - a. anyone who has been in New South Wales at or after 11:59pm on Tuesday 22 June (NZ Time) is not permitted to travel on a QFT flight to New Zealand from anywhere in Australia until further notice.
 - b. anyone who has been in from Queensland, the Northern Territory or Western Australia at or after 10:30pm on Saturday 26 June (NZ Time) is not permitted to travel on a QFT flight to New Zealand until further notice.
 - c. anyone who has been in Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), Victoria, South Australia or Norfolk Island at or after 10:30pm on Saturday 26 June (NZ Time) was not permitted to travel on a QFT flight to New Zealand.
4. From 11:59pm (NZT) on Sunday 4 July, quarantine-free travel from Tasmania, ACT, Victoria and South Australia resumed, with the following conditions:
 - a. Passengers must meet all of the eligibility requirements captured in the baseline pre-departure questions, including that they have not been in a current location of interest in the past 14 days; and
 - b. Passengers must have not been in a state from which the New Zealand Government does not currently allow quarantine-free travel; and
 - c. Passengers must have evidence of a negative PCR COVID-19 taken within 72 hours of travel. This condition does not apply to anyone who has been in Australia for less than 72 hours.
5. The existing condition remains in place in relation to locations of interest. This means that anyone that has been at a location of interest anywhere in Australia cannot travel to New Zealand within 14 days of exposure, regardless of whether they have evidence of a negative pre-departure test. (Anyone already in New Zealand who has been in a location of interest is subject to a Section 70 notice.)

Latest case information for paused QFT States and Territories

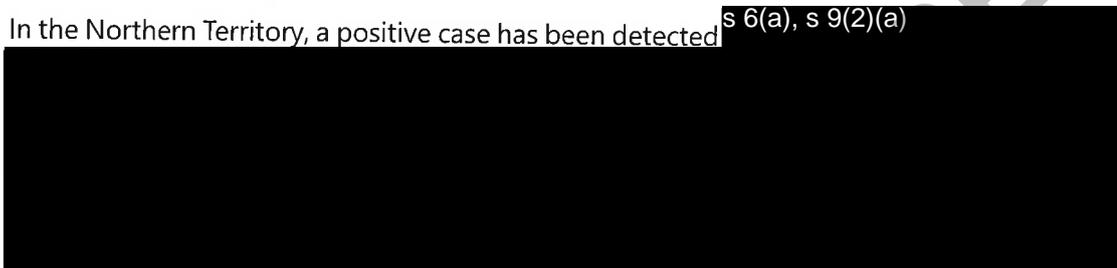
Western Australia

6. On 27 June 2021, Western Australia reported one community case in the 24 hours prior to 4 July 2021 associated with the Sydney outbreak. s 6(a), s 9(2)(a)



The Northern Territory

7. In the Northern Territory, a positive case has been detected. s 6(a), s 9(2)(a)



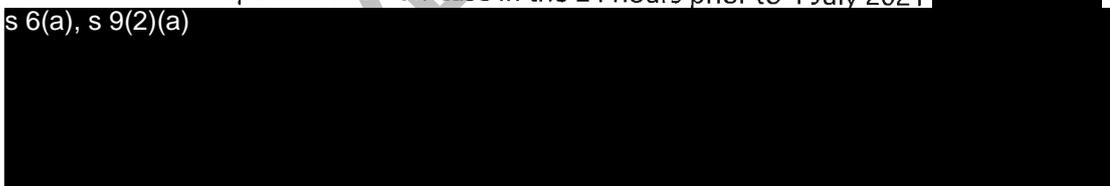
New South Wales

8. The outbreak in New South Wales is continuing to grow. s 6(a), s 9(2)(a)



Queensland

9. Queensland has reported one new case in the 24 hours prior to 4 July 2021. s 6(a), s 9(2)(a)



Ongoing risk assessment is underway

10. We will continue to review the situation regularly, based on the most recent information and intelligence from Australian health officials. Any additional locally acquired cases will be notified immediately.

Health Assessment

11. Where information is available, the following has been considered:
- Potential source of COVID-19 infection e.g. setting or occupation of relevance
 - Timeframes over which contacts were infectious in the community before isolation
 - Locations of interest while infectious in the community
 - Comprehensiveness of testing and testing results

- e. Any other relevant considerations, such as COVID-19 strain, vaccination status, the response from individual states and territories.
12. This information is set out in the health assessment, attached as Annex 1.
13. You are also receiving ongoing advice about the risks associated with COVID-19. In accordance with section 9(2) of the COVID-19 Act, you may have regard to that advice without it being repeated here. COVID-19 is a highly infectious disease which may be spread by people who are not showing symptoms. This supports significant intervention measures for those at heightened risk of contracting or spreading COVID-19.

Health advice

Western Australia and the Northern Territory

14. Based on the information available on 4 July 2021 the risk to New Zealand appears to be low overall, noting that the risk varies by State or Territory. In respect of Western Australia and the Northern Territory, I consider that the spread of COVID-19 cases appears to have been contained at this point, there is robust surveillance, testing and contact tracing to detect and manage cases, and adequate border controls are in place to prevent the import and spread of new cases.
15. **I therefore advise that QFT from the Northern Territory and Western Australia could recommence any time at 11:59pm on 8 July 2021 provided that travellers have not previously been in Queensland or New South Wales on or after 10:30pm on 26 June 2021 (New Zealand Standard Time (NZST)).**
16. I note that you have already decided that all travellers from Australia provide evidence of a negative a Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) COVID-19 test, taken within three days of departure.
17. I recommend that you announce on Monday 5 July 2021 that QFT travel for these States and Territories will resume. This will give adequate time between when you announce a resumption of QFT flights and those flights resuming to enable travellers to receive results from the pre-departure tests they will need before departure and for airlines to meet their operational requirements to provide such flights.
18. I further propose that should QFT from these States and Territories recommence, clear communications should be provided to passengers reinforcing:
 - a. the current public health measures in place,
 - b. the requirement to wear face coverings on the aircraft and at the airport,
 - c. the requirement to make a health declaration,
 - d. that passengers may be subject to random temperature checks.
 - e. the importance of downloading the COVID tracer app, and
 - f. the requirement to self-isolate and be tested immediately if they have any symptoms of illness.
 - g. These measures should minimise the risk of COVID-19 spreading to New Zealand.
19. New South Wales and Queensland
20. I consider that **a precautionary approach should continue to be taken and recommend that QFT from New South Wales and Queensland continue to be paused,**

with a further review on Wednesday 7 July 2021. Continuing the pause on QFT from New South Wales and Queensland will allow further information and a better understanding of the outbreaks.

21. A decision to continue the QFT pause with New South Wales and Queensland will not impact on any decision to allow green zone flights from New South Wales commencing 11:59pm Thursday 8 July 2021, which will be subject to additional public health mitigations including the following:
- a. travellers have been required to follow local self-isolation/lockdown rules for at minimum of five days (before taking a PDT) and then remain compliant with the state's self-isolation/lockdown conditions after that test and while awaiting return to New Zealand.
 - b. a Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) PDT is taken after a minimum of five days in the state's self-isolation/lockdown conditions and within 72-hours of their intended travel to New Zealand.
 - c. travellers have not been in a location of interest in the past 14 days.
 - d. travellers are not symptomatic at the time of travel.
 - e. travellers are not currently classified as a close contact.
 - f. travellers are not awaiting the results of a COVID-19 test.

Queensland

22. I do not recommend commencing managed return flights from Queensland on Thursday 8 July 2021. The situation in Queensland remains unclear because there are still unknown epidemiological links and there are number of different clusters. The State does not have high levels of restrictions in place. There is a possibility there could still be undetected community transmission.
23. In that context, enabling travellers to return to NZ even with a PDT means that they could be exposed to the risk of transmission in between their PDT and getting on plane, or they could be incubating. That means travellers could arrive in New Zealand either infectious at the time of arrival or incubating disease and potentially becoming infectious subsequently. While the likelihood of this is low; the risk remains real.
24. Instead, the pause on Queensland should be **reassessed** on Wednesday 7 July 2021. In doing so, I will consider the following factors:
- a. the number of cases in the community.
 - b. levels of testing in the community and of contacts.
 - c. unexpected cases detected.
25. In the event that a decision is made to lift the pause **in Queensland** then travellers would be able to return as normal from 11:59pm on Saturday 10 July 2021. If the decision is to continue the Queensland pause, then I would recommend that managed return flights are enabled from 11:59pm on Saturday 10 July 2021 under conditions to be determined on Wednesday.

Simplifying process

26. The decisions to resume QFT flights from Western Australia and the Northern Territory and to begin green zone flights from New South Wales will be implemented via a single amendment notice that will be sent to you for signing on Wednesday 7 July to come into force 11:59pm on Thursday 8 July 2021. on the day on which it is signed. If the circumstances require, there can be a split commencement so the decision to resume QFT flights can come into force on 8 July and the decision to begin green zone flights from New South Wales could come into force on a later date.

New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990

27. The exemption discretion must be exercised consistently with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 (NZBORA).
28. The discretion to grant or rescind exemptions should be viewed in light of the restrictions imposed on other arrivals to New Zealand under the Air Border Order and Isolation and Quarantine Order. If the exemption power is not exercised in line with the purpose of the Act this could have the effect of making managed isolation restrictions on others appear arbitrary and not proportionate to the public health risk.
29. New Zealand citizens have the right to enter New Zealand. s 9(2)(h)

30. You need to be satisfied that the level of public health risk from red and orange places in Australia justifies a complete restriction on New Zealand citizens' right to return from each of those places for the duration of any pause.
31. Our advice is that any public health advice to support managed returns should be state or territory specific. This will ensure that specific risks are managed and any public health controls are proportionate and justifiable under the NZBORA. You need to be satisfied that a complete restriction on citizens' rights to return is necessary to meet the public health risk posed by the relevant State/territory, and that less-restrictive measures (such as allowing citizens to return following a negative test, or requiring self-isolation on return) would not be adequate.
32. The greatest threat to the health of people in New Zealand continues to be from the introduction of COVID-19 cases at the border. That risk continues to be present with the emergence of new Covid-19 variants. The continuation of the pause in QFT from New South Wales and Queensland will help to prevent the introduction of COVID-19 to New Zealand, pending further clarification of the risk this outbreak poses to people in New Zealand.
33. However, the restrictions on citizens' rights to return for the duration of the pause needs to be necessary for public health reasons, and proportionate to the risk each state/territory poses to public health. At this time, the pause in QFT is intended only as a further temporary measure allowing officials appropriate time to gather further information regarding the outbreak, and to consider proportionate public health measures in response. Provided there are managed return options where citizens can still enter New

Zealand on green flights despite QFT remaining paused, the overall response will be a justified limit on the right to return.

Equity

34. Preventing the introduction and spread of COVID-19 in New Zealand will protect vulnerable New Zealanders, including Māori and Pacific communities who have been historically disproportionately impacted by a widespread epidemic.
35. There will be social and economic impacts from the continued pause of QFT from Australia, but this is expected to be limited compared to an introduction of COVID-19 into New Zealand and the potential for increased Alert Levels and the resulting economic and social costs.

Next steps

36. The decisions to resume QFT flights from Western Australia and the Northern Territory and to begin green zone flights from New South Wales will be implemented via a single amendment notice that will be sent to you directly from Parliamentary Counsel Office, for signing on Wednesday 7 July 2021.
37. This notice can come into force on the day on which it is signed but must be published in the New Zealand Gazette. On Wednesday 7 July, you will need to return the signed notice directly to Parliamentary Counsel Office who will arrange for it to be published.
38. Further review and advice on resuming QFT from New South Wales and Queensland will be provided on Wednesday 7 July 2021.

ENDS.

Annex 1: Health Assessment Questions

Withheld under section 6(a) of the Act, if the release would be likely to prejudice the international relations of the Government of New Zealand.

PROACTIVELY RELEASED