



# Cabinet Economic Development Committee

## Minute of Decision

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### COVID-19 Temporary Border Measures and Possible Exemptions

**Portfolios**                      **Education / Health / Immigration**

On 19 February 2020, the Cabinet Economic Development Committee:

- 1        **noted** that the overall situation regarding the COVID-19 virus internationally remains rapidly evolving with a high degree of uncertainty;
- 2        **noted** that it is critically important that the government protects New Zealanders from the virus and plays its part in the global effort to contain COVID-19, including considering the impact on the public health of other Pacific Island countries;
- 3        **noted** that on 14 February 2020, Ministers with Power to Act [CAB-20-MIN-0015] agreed to continue a precautionary approach, and to retain current border restrictions relating to travel from mainland China for a further 8 day period, expiring at 23:59 on 24 February 2020;
- 4        **noted** that the situation is being kept under a 48 hour review, and that there is no information that changes the overall current assessment of the risk that COVID-19 presents to New Zealand at this time;
- 5        **noted** that on 18 February 2020, Ministers with Power to Act will be considering advice regarding appropriate border restrictions for people who have been quarantined on the Diamond Princess cruise ship in Yokohama, which has had a significant COVID-19 outbreak;
- 6        **noted** that ahead of Cabinet considering on Monday, 24 February 2020, whether to lift, continue, or extend in scope the border restrictions, officials have begun to investigate whether there are options for partial lifting of the restrictions, taking into account:
  - 6.1        the risk to the health of New Zealanders;
  - 6.2        the risk to the health of Pacific Island countries;
  - 6.3        the readiness of agencies to operationalise any measures; and
  - 6.4        the risks to foreign relations or of significant adverse economic impacts;
- 7        **noted** that with more time, it may be feasible to implement some exemptions from the current border restrictions, but that there are a number of operational challenges and hurdles that would need to be overcome before Ministers could take such a decision;

- 8 **noted** that further work is required to develop and assess the feasibility of any exemptions, to provide confidence to Ministers that exemptions are feasible while continuing to effectively manage the public health and other risks and, that to that end:
- 8.1 the education sector is developing proposals to provide supported self-isolation facilities for students, which will be necessary regardless of decisions around exemptions;
  - 8.2 Immigration officials are implementing border system changes to support exemptions for whole visa categories, should they be required, and this will take 3-4 weeks;
  - 8.3 Health officials are providing clear guidelines that should be followed, and adhered to, in various circumstances of risk and that can be used to assess the feasibility of any proposed exemption for specific groups;
  - 8.4 Education, Health and Immigration officials are engaging with the education sector to support them to develop their proposals and their implementation;
- 9 **noted** that by the time plans for exemptions are in place and able to be implemented, it is possible that Ministers will be in a position to lift all border restrictions entirely;
- 10 **noted** that there are there are a number of scenarios in which the relative desirability and feasibility of the overall travel restrictions, or exemptions from them, may change:
- 10.1 Australia lifts its restrictions in total;
  - 10.2 Australia introduces exemptions;
  - 10.3 new countries or places, e.g. a cruise ship, of concern (in addition to China) arise and are reflected in the restrictions;
  - 10.4 there is an outbreak of the virus in New Zealand; and/or
  - 10.5 there are significant changes in international scientific and public health consensus about infectiousness or mortality of the virus and disease;

## Publicity

- 11 **noted** that as work on exemptions progresses, a communications approach will be developed to engage with the general public, the education sector, employers, and foreign governments ahead of any decisions being taken.

Jack Petterson  
Committee Secretary

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**Present:**

Rt Hon Winston Peters  
Hon Kelvin Davis  
Hon Grant Robertson (Chair)  
Hon Phil Twyford  
Hon Dr Megan Woods  
Hon Dr David Clark  
Hon Nanaia Mahuta  
Hon Stuart Nash  
Hon Iain Lees-Galloway  
Hon Jenny Salesa  
Hon Damien O'Connor  
Hon Shane Jones  
Hon Kris Faafoi  
Hon Willie Jackson  
Hon Eugenie Sage

**Officials present from:**

Office of the Prime Minister  
Officials Committee for DEV

**Hard-copy distribution:**

Minister of Education  
Minister of Health  
Minister of Immigration

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