



NEW ZEALAND
FOREIGN AFFAIRS & TRADE



20 March 2020

Minister of Foreign Affairs

For action by

23 March 2020

COVID-19: Options for returning New Zealanders to New Zealand

BRIEFING Issues

PURPOSE To outline the options for returning New Zealanders to New Zealand.

Recommended referrals

Prime Minister

For information by

23 March 2020

Contact details

NAME	ROLE	DIVISION	WORK PHONE	MOBILE PHONE
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Minister's Office comments

COVID-19: Options for returning New Zealanders to New Zealand

Key points

- There are four options for returning New Zealanders to New Zealand: Open commercial routes; NZ assisted charter flight; shared assisted departure flight; NZDF operation.
- The government's messaging to New Zealanders is to use open commercial routes where available.
- NZ charter flights and shared assisted departures should be on a cost recovery basis.
- Emergency consular financial assistance is available for those in hardship.
- We recommend that we begin to work with s9(2)(b)(ii), s9(2)(j) to explore feasibility of a charter flight from Buenos Aires for New Zealanders stranded in Latin America. This will include:
 - assessing the number of New Zealanders in Argentina and across the region requesting to be evacuated;
 - restrictions on travel around the region that would need to be negotiated for New Zealanders to get to the departure point;
 - the option to work with the Argentine Embassy to repatriate Argentines stranded in New Zealand;
 - using the charter for freight transport; and
 - the option to work with Australia on a joint assisted departure.
- We will also work in conjunction with other countries on options to put New Zealanders on their assisted departure flights, or use our New Zealand charter flights for reciprocal evacuations.



Deborah Geels
for Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade

COVID-19: Options for returning New Zealanders to New Zealand

Recommendations

It is recommended that you:

- | | | |
|---|--|-----------------|
| 1 | Agree that the government's messaging to New Zealanders is to use commercial routes where available. | Yes / No |
| 2 | Note that we are working with other countries on options for shared assisted departures. | Yes / No |
| 3 | Note that we are working through other charter flight options where there are no available flight routes back to New Zealand. | Yes / No |
| 4 | Agree that New Zealand charter flights and assisted departure flights shared with partner countries should be on a cost recovery basis and only where no commercial options are available. | Yes / No |
| 5 | Agree we explore with s9(2)(b)(ii), s9(2)(j) the feasibility of a Buenos Aires charter flight as the first evacuation flight. | Yes / No |
| 6 | Note NZDF aircraft are only a back-up option for the Pacific Islands and Australia. | Yes / No |

Rt Hon Winston Peters
Minister of Foreign Affairs

COVID-19: Options for returning New Zealanders to New Zealand

Report

1. There are four options for returning New Zealanders to New Zealand: Open commercial routes; NZ assisted charter flight; shared assisted departure flight; NZDF operation.
2. Air New Zealand has committed to keeping a number of commercial flight routes open under the deal with the government. There are also a number of other commercial airlines operating flight to global hubs, including Cathay Pacific, Singapore Airways, Qatar, Emirates, Latam and Qantas.
3. Air New Zealand committed flight routes are:

Long haul	Auckland – North America (LAX)
	Auckland – Hong Kong
	Auckland – Singapore
Tasman	Auckland – Sydney
	Auckland – Melbourne
	Auckland – Brisbane
Pacific	Auckland – Niue
	Auckland – Rarotonga
	Auckland – Nadi
	Auckland – Tonga
	Auckland – Apia

4. We are receiving approaches from a number of countries signalling that they may be putting together assisted departure plans for their nationals stranded in New Zealand. We will work in conjunction with other countries on options to put New Zealanders on these flights, or use our New Zealand charter flights in a reciprocal evacuation on a cost recovery basis.
5. We have received an approach from Australia to work together on assisted departures as they begin to consider options. Should Australia be able to assist with evacuating New Zealanders to an Australian drop point, we will consider charter options from Australia to New Zealand, as we did with the *Diamond Princess*.
6. New Zealand charter flights and shared assisted departures should be on a cost recovery basis. Consular emergency funding is available to New Zealanders in hardship situations. Government messaging should continue to advise New Zealanders attempting to return home to use commercial routes where available.

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7. In situations where there are a significant number of New Zealanders with no commercial options available, and the assisted departure criteria applies, we could consider charter flights. The preferred option for a charter operator would be Air New Zealand, but depending on variables such as location and number of passengers, other commercial operators may be considered.
8. The geographic areas with concentrations of New Zealanders that have been identified as immediate gaps due to no commercial routes being available are Latin America (Buenos Aires), India, s6(a) Discussion with s9(2)(b)(ii), s9(2)(j) including from an operations perspective, have indicated that an evacuation flight from Buenos Aires may be a good first charter option. Other countries are looking at evacuating their citizens from South America.
9. While Buenos Aires (Ezeiza) airport is operational, the available commercial options are limited. Air NZ have withdrawn their service s6(a) s9(2)(b)(ii), s9(2)(j)
10. We recommend that we begin to work with s9(2)(b)(ii), s9(2)(j) to explore feasibility of this charter flight. This will include:
 - a. assessing the number of New Zealanders in Argentina and across the region requesting to be evacuated;
 - b. restrictions on travel around the region that would need to be negotiated for New Zealanders to get to the departure point;
 - c. the option to work with the Argentinian Embassy to repatriate Argentinians stranded in New Zealand;
 - d. using the charter for freight transport; and
 - e. the option to work with Australia on a joint assisted departure.
11. We are aware that there are a number of New Zealanders (around 36) on cruise ships in, or arriving shortly into Buenos Aires. s6(a)
12. NZDF options have been considered and are recommended as a back-up only due to a number of factors. These include limited flight range (flights are challenging beyond Australia and the Pacific) which are currently serviced by commercial options, availability and capacity of NZDF aircraft.
13. In addition, NZDF aircraft are currently being used on s9(2)(g)(i) tasking for transporting health related supplies (e.g. facemasks and PPE equipment). This means that any additional tasking to NZDF requires National Crisis Management Centre (NCMC) prioritisation.