



# Meeting of the COVID-19 Ministerial Group

## Minute of Decision

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### Financial Support for New Zealanders Temporarily Overseas or Domiciled in Australia who are in Financial Distress due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The group of Ministers with Power to Act on COVID-19 matters [CAB-20-MIN-0130] convened on 3 April 2020 at 10.30am, and in accordance with their Power to Act:

- 1 **noted** that travel restrictions resulting from the global COVID-19 response mean a high likelihood of travelling New Zealanders being stranded offshore, who may lack access to financial or other resources to support themselves, with consequent health and welfare risks
- 2 **noted** that MFAT consular advice is that New Zealanders who are not able to return home should take steps to ensure their safety in place, and contact their travel insurer, bank, family and friends in the first instance if they are facing financial difficulties
- 3 **agreed** that stranded New Zealanders overseas should continue to follow the advice above, with consular support available including the possibility of an emergency loan s9(2)(g)(ii)
- 4 **noted** that in the current circumstances, MFAT consular officials are taking a more flexible approach to the provision of financial support, so that individuals are not prevented from returning to New Zealand quickly or sheltering safely in place by e.g. securing appropriate accommodation or health services
- 5 **noted** that on 23 March 2020, the Prime Minister issued an Epidemic Notice, which took effect on 25 March 2020 and enables the use of special welfare powers under the Social Security Act 2018
- 6 **noted** that Epidemic Management Notices issued with the written approval of Ministers have provided further tools for the delivery of financial assistance to stranded migrants, including broad emergency powers under the Social Security Act 2018
- 7 **agreed** that the following payment arrangements be made for MSD clients stranded overseas:
  - 7.1 payments of New Zealand Superannuation and Veterans Pension can be resumed from the date a person expected to return to New Zealand, with the flexibility to resume payments from an earlier date for people in severe hardship or not to resume payments where it is identified that people no longer qualify;

7.2 payments of main benefits, Orphan's Benefit, Unsupported Childs Benefit and/or supplementary assistance: payments can be resumed from the date a person expected to return to New Zealand, with the flexibility to resume payments from an earlier date for people in severe hardship or not to resume payments where it is identified that people no longer qualify;

8 **noted** that emergency powers are needed to implement the changes agreed in paragraph 7 above and that officials are working through the process to put in place the instruments that will authorise the changes, which may include Immediate Modification Orders under the Epidemic Preparedness Act 2006;

9 **noted** that there are no fiscal costs associated with the decisions in paragraph 7 above;

10 s9(2)(f)(iv)

11 s9(2)(f)(iv)

12 **noted** that New Zealanders are eligible for Australia's COVID-19 wage subsidy scheme and for early withdrawal of Australian Superannuation Guarantee funds, which may alleviate some of the financial pressures for New Zealanders domiciled in Australia;

13 **agreed** that advocating for the extension of Australia's social security support is the preferred option to support New Zealanders domiciled in Australia who require this assistance.

Michael Webster  
Secretary of the Cabinet

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**Distribution:**

The Cabinet  
Hon James Shaw

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