

## **Still closed for business: New Zealand's being left behind**

New Zealand is clinging to some of the tightest border restrictions in the world that no longer make sense with COVID-19 circulating widely in Auckland and spreading to other regions.

Justin Tighe-Umbers, co-chair for the New Zealand Aviation Coalition (NZAC), says the aviation sector cannot understand why the Government is still requiring self-isolation when data shows it's unnecessary.

The staged opening of the border announced by the government today, ultimately means New Zealand is off the radar for international travellers and airlines are likely to react by deploying aircraft to other routes.

"With the latest dates for re-opening we're months behind Australia and out of step with the rest of the world," says Justin Tighe-Umbers.

New Zealand is one of few countries to require self-isolation – North America and Europe and some Australian states are opening for double vaccinated and tested travellers.

"We can go and visit family and friends in Australia, but there is no certainty they will be able to come see us for another five months and even if they can they'll still have to isolate for seven days," Mr Tighe-Umbers says.

"Evidence shows self-isolation is just not needed for double vaccinated travellers. Over the past month 11,376 people have crossed the border with only 71 cases reported - that's less than 1%.

"Compared with around 200 cases here in New Zealand each day, many with community contact exposure, there are only an average of two per day entering New Zealand. This shows the real danger is not the border.

"Parliament was told yesterday that of 2544 arriving passengers from Australia since 23-August, there were only three cases of COVID, and not one of these were double-vaccinated."

New South Wales and Victoria have been open to returning citizens since November 1. New South Wales is now quarantine free. More than 17,000 people have crossed its border since opening and their daily case rate is similar to New Zealand's.

"Allowing Kiwis to return home and self-isolate is long overdue, given the negligible risk they represent to the community" Mr Tighe-Umbers says.

Chris Roberts, chief of the Tourism Industry Aotearoa (TIA), says it's helpful to have some dates to work to, but the total lack of clarity around when New Zealand will allow in international visitors without a seven-day isolation requirement is hugely disappointing.

"The Government has failed to recognise the critical importance of visitors to re-establishing our connections with the world. This is not just about tourism. If international airlines decide to pull out of New Zealand, it may be years before they return—putting vital trade links for high value exports and critical imports at risk."

Meanwhile, the rest of the world is establishing clear timeframes on genuine border reopening. Countries are allowing vaccinated and tested travellers to move more freely. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) says this is in keeping with the Ministerial Declaration on the issue at the recent ICAO High Level Conference on COVID-19.

Conrad Clifford, IATA's deputy director general, is calling on all governments to adopt simple, predictable, and practical measures to both safely and efficiently facilitate the ramping-up of international travel as borders re-open.

Tourism Export Council of NZ Chief Executive Lynda Keene said she was disappointed with the Government's decision to continue with self-isolation into Q1 of 2022.

"The impact on international tourism businesses cannot be understated. Decisions today will affect the next five years of New Zealand's international tourism offering. Australia will be the winner. New Zealand will be the loser."

Meanwhile the aviation coalition believes New Zealand's lack of clarity on the border re-opening and prolonging the requirement for arrivals to self-isolate will leave New Zealand's international connectivity stuck at 1960's levels.

"International airlines plan schedules way in advance and New Zealand is falling off the radar," Mr Tighe-Umbers says. "Every day that goes by without certainty, is a day they choose to put their assets elsewhere."

Ends

**About the New Zealand Aviation Coalition (NZAC)**

NZAC is an industry group representing New Zealand's leading airlines and airports: Auckland Airport, Board of Airline Representatives of New Zealand (BARNZ), Christchurch Airport, NZ Airports' Association, Queenstown Airport and Wellington Airport. Our goal is to rapidly rebuild New Zealand's domestic and international air transport network. We are working closely with government and experts to create the ability to travel safely by air both at home and overseas.

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