



## **BET Press Release - 2.15pm, Wednesday 23 June 2021**

As has now been widely reported, an Australian traveller from Sydney, Australia who visited Wellington, New Zealand from Saturday 19 June to Monday 21 June (NZT) has tested positive upon return to Australia.

While investigations are ongoing in Wellington and noting Wellington has been elevated to Alert Level 2 until Sunday 27 June (NZT), Te Marae Ora Cook Islands Ministry of Health (TMO) requested Te Kauono Tutara e te Mana Tiaki – Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration (MFAI) issue a Section 9A notice to refuse uplift of persons of interest due to depart Auckland, New Zealand for Rarotonga, Cook Islands on Wednesday 23 June CKT. The cohort of travellers impacted numbered 13 in total.

Te Marae Ora requested refusal to uplift to allow TMO prioritisation of resources and staff to mitigate risk whilst TMO continue efforts to contact trace, interview and where necessary isolate the 114 Wellington-originating arrivals from the last 4 flights.

In addition, via the Online Contact Information form required of all travelers 24 hours prior to travel, TMO received confirmation from the persons of interest that they originated from and or were present in Wellington, New Zealand on and from Saturday 19 June and it was assessed by TMO that a deferral in arrival will further allow TMO time to undertake direct investigations with each passenger regarding their movements in Wellington and therefore associated risk to the Cook Islands prior to travel.

Said Cook Islands Chair of the Border Easement Taskforce Tapaeru Herrmann, “Our ability to identify and offload these persons of interest before this morning’s flight is a testament to our systems and processes doing what they have been designed to do in providing additional layers of protection to the Cook Islands. It should be noted the situation in Wellington is still evolving, and this pause in arrival for persons of interest will allow us invaluable time to observe and assess the situation in Wellington, NZ which ultimately impacts on our own risk profile and primary objective to prevent the arrival of COVID19 to the Cook Islands.”

These comments were further supported by Secretary for Te Marae Ora Bob Williams, “The collaboration between TMO and MFAI speaks to our continued joint-vigilance at the border, and we appeal to impacted travelers to re-book their travel arrangements to the next available flight to allow TMO the time necessary to examine and determine their particular risk profile prior to travel. We thank the public for their continued understanding and cooperation at this time.”

TMO will reach out to impacted travellers directly and by the end of today.

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