



**30 August 2021**

## **Media statement from the Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, the Hon Mark Brown**

### **Alert Level 2 extended and financial support announced**

Today the Cook Islands Government has decided to extend Alert Level 2 until 11.59pm on Monday 13 September 2021.

It has also eased restrictions on gatherings and travel to the Pa Enea, but Cook Islanders stranded in New Zealand must remain there for now.

Importantly, financial support is being provided, with the wage subsidy and sole trader grants for the immediate pause period being rolled out currently.

Prime Minister Mark Brown said that keeping the Cook Islands safe is the Government's top priority and that a precautionary approach remains the best way to ensure the country stays COVID-19 free.

Today's Cabinet decision was based on the latest information from New Zealand, which yesterday announced 53 new community cases of Delta and an extension of Alert Level 4 in Auckland for at least another two weeks.

### **Today's key changes**

- Alert Level 2 extended until 11.59pm on Monday 13 September 2021
- Restriction on inward travel from New Zealand extended until Monday 13 September 2021
- Gatherings of over 100 people permitted from 11.59pm tonight (30 August 2021), but it remains compulsory for all gatherings of 25 people and more to be registered, with compulsory contact tracing of all attendees the responsibility of the organiser
- Sea and air travel both to and from Rarotonga to Pa Enea to be reinstated from 11.59pm tonight (30 August 2021) with the introduction of health screening on departure
- Managed return of the 256 Cook Islanders stranded in New Zealand to begin when Auckland moves to Alert Level 3

### **Financial support**

From today Monday August 30 wage subsidies and sole trader grants have already started being paid to eligible businesses.

For the month of August, the subsidy will reflect the half of the month where the border was closed (and is paid automatically to businesses which received the subsidy in May or June), while for September this will reflect the full month.

The Wage Subsidy will be paid at a rate of \$320 per week for a full-time employee and \$160 per week for a part-time employee. Sole Trader Grants of \$500 for August and \$1,000 for September will be available also if conditions are met as in May.

Information on eligibility can be found on the MFEM website ([www.mfem.gov.ck](http://www.mfem.gov.ck)), and on MFEM social media accounts.

If the border stays closed to tourists beyond 30 September, then the support will continue including potentially further support such as a round of business grants.

## **Economic recovery**

Mr Brown said while the pause in economic recovery was frustrating, it was not unexpected, and \$15M had been earmarked for additional business support in the Government's June budget. Based on the quick bounce-back of tourists in the three months since May, he was confident that the tourism market was resilient.

## **COVID free**

Mr Brown was also confident about the systems in place and the measures taken to protect the country. "We have done everything we can to protect both the health and wellbeing of our people, as well as the economy," he said. "So far, we have been very fortunate to be one of the few countries in the world to be COVID-free."

Taking immediate action on contact tracing and testing of all high-risk arrivals into the country since the Delta outbreak in New Zealand began had so far paid off, with all tests so far proving negative.

He reminded all arrivals into the Cook Islands from 2 August 2021 that they must be tested, and that all symptomatic visitors and locals, irrespective of their testing history, must be re-tested.

He added that the financial support outlined today was another important protection, keeping many Cook Islanders in work and businesses afloat.

## **Tribute**

Mr Brown thanked everyone for their cooperation and patience.

He paid tribute to the dedicated team of people who had worked exceptionally hard over the last few weeks to contact trace, test, process laboratory results and care for the families in MIQ.

Mr Brown urged everyone to help keep the Cook Islands safe through frequent hand washing, mask-wearing and physical distancing, as well as tagging in with CookSafe and turning on Bluetooth for CookSafe+.

## **Further information**

Full details about the requirements of all Alert Levels can be found at [www.covid19.gov.ck](http://www.covid19.gov.ck)

People are advised to regularly check official communications for both the Cook Islands and New Zealand at [www.covid19.govt.nz](http://www.covid19.govt.nz).