



## **MEDIA STATEMENT FROM THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE COOK ISLANDS, HON. MARK BROWN - 25 September 2021**

### **Repatriation flights confirmed for stranded Cook Islanders in NZ**

Prime Minister Mark Brown announced today that people stranded in Alert Level 2 regions of New Zealand will be repatriated on a special flight from Christchurch to Rarotonga on Thursday 7 October.

Another departure date of Friday 15 October has been scheduled for those people stranded in Auckland, which is currently at Alert Level 3.

Those returning have to qualify for their managed return and Prime Minister Brown said there are strict criteria being applied. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration is currently contacting people who applied for the Christchurch repatriation flight about the outcomes of their assessments. Those who have qualified will have received an “Approved for Travel” confirmation email.

### **Repatriation requirements for the L2 Christchurch flight on 7 October**

Prime Minister Brown said people being repatriated would need to undergo a COVID-19 test 72 hours before departure, as well as a health screening test at Christchurch Airport before boarding.

On arrival in Rarotonga on Wednesday 6 October, they will enter into at least seven days of Managed Isolation Quarantine at the Edgewater Resort, where they will need to clear day 0 and day 5 tests for COVID-19.

### **Repatriation of people in Auckland**

Prime Minister Brown said a flight has been scheduled from Auckland on 15 October.

He said he was pleased to have good news for people sheltering in the Auckland region which is currently at Alert Level 3.

“I know this is news many people have been waiting for and I am happy we can provide a clear date for their return.”

The qualifying criteria are the same as for the Christchurch repatriation and there will be the same pre-boarding requirements. The main difference for people travelling from Auckland was that up to 14 days of quarantine would be required.

### **Precautionary approach**

Prime Minister Brown said with Auckland at L3 and Delta infections still occurring, the Government was taking a particularly measured approach to repatriation. It was critical to ensure all the right steps were being taken to minimise any associated risk, he said.

“Our high level of caution is to ensure our country retains its COVID-free status. We are not prepared to risk the health and safety of our people in the Cook Islands, particularly our children who are not yet vaccinated.” Prime Minister Brown said additionally, having COVID in the Cook Islands would

prevent quarantine free travel to New Zealand. That would be a disaster, given the cost and shortage of quarantine space in New Zealand.

### **Future Border settings**

Prime Minister Brown said more than 96% of eligible Cook Islanders are fully vaccinated, with vaccinations for children aged 12-15 years starting before the end of October.

He said that "Although high vaccination afforded an additional layer of protection, the Government would continue to maintain border controls and public health measures to ensure any outbreaks and swiftly contained and managed."

For now, phased re-opening of the Cook Islands inwards border will continue to be limited only to those visitors who have been in New Zealand for at least 14 days prior to travel.

### **Quarantine-free two-way travel**

Prime Minister Brown said the Government's current thinking was that when all of New Zealand moves to Alert Level 1, even if there are still COVID-19 cases in the community, the Cook Islands could have a high degree of confidence from this classification and should consider resumption of travel through that lens.

He also thanked all Cook Islanders for their co-operation, patience and vigilance during these difficult times, with a reminder to adhere to the Alert Level 2 guidelines.

[Ends]

For media enquiries, contact Karla Eggelton | QFT Comms Coordinator  
[karla.eggelton@cookislands.gov.ck](mailto:karla.eggelton@cookislands.gov.ck)