

Quarantine-Free Travel Zones: New Zealand's experience and insights

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Overview



- ▶ **Context: Quarantine-Free Travel (QFT)**
- ▶ **New Zealand's approach to establishing QFT**
- ▶ **Establishing common ground with QFT partners**
- ▶ **Health settings**
- ▶ **Border settings and experiences**
- ▶ **Communications, key links, and guidance**
- ▶ **Managing a response**
- ▶ **Lessons learned**
- ▶ **Questions**

Context: Quarantine-Free Travel



Our focus has been on QFT initiatives with Australia, our closest international partner, and the Cook Islands and Niue, with whom we share unique constitutional ties.

New Zealand and Australia unilaterally opened two-way QFT with each other.

- ▶ QFT from New Zealand to Australia commenced on 16 October 2020.
- ▶ QFT from Australia to New Zealand commenced on 19 April 2021.
- ▶ QFT zone covers air travel; and commercial maritime vessels (freight/cargo) currently operate by an exemption process.
- ▶ Arrangement based on common understandings of requirements and a joint implementation plan.

New Zealand and the Cook Islands bilaterally opened two-way QFT with each other.

- ▶ QFT from the Cook Islands to New Zealand commenced on 21 January 2021.
- ▶ QFT from New Zealand to the Cook Islands commenced on 17 May 2021.

New Zealand is working with Niue to open two-way QFT in the near future.

- ▶ QFT from Niue to New Zealand commenced on 19 March 2021.



New Zealand's approach to establishing QFT



Outcome and principles that guide our approach



New Zealand established a set of principles at the outset to inform the design and implementation of QFT.

The outcome – to introduce free people movement without quarantine in a way that:

- ▶ people and governments trust is safe
- ▶ ensures public health requirements are met
- ▶ ensures people travelling to New Zealand do not have, or are very unlikely to have, COVID-19
- ▶ is practically workable; and
- ▶ is commercially and operationally viable for airlines and airports.

We have additional responsibility to protect against COVID-19 reaching the Pacific:

- ▶ We recognise the potentially greater impact a case of COVID-19 would have on the Cook Islands or Niue.
- ▶ Should a case occur, we have plans and systems in place to jointly manage this. This includes measures at our borders, capacity in our health systems and contact tracing tools.
- ▶ Community cases of COVID-19 in New Zealand or the Cook Islands could lead to the New Zealand Government pausing or suspending quarantine-free travel arrangements.

Partnership between NZ agencies from the outset



New Zealand has a collaborative inter-agency approach, drawing on the respective roles and expertise of each agency involved.

- ▶ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade – leads engagement and negotiation with other jurisdictions, including interagency coordination; responsible for consular issues associated with pauses.
- ▶ The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet – takes whole of system view and has a core role in managing responses to outbreaks in QFT partner jurisdictions.
- ▶ The Ministry of Health – advises Ministers on the health conditions and criteria informing the establishment of a QFT zone; recommends the public health measures that apply to passengers, airports, airlines and aircrew; assesses airline and airport eligibility to participate in QFT based on public health requirements (“QFT designation”); plays a core role in responses to outbreaks in QFT zones – including redefining requirements.
- ▶ Border Agencies (the New Zealand Customs Service and Immigration New Zealand) – advise on operational processes at airports, passenger clearance processes, and information-sharing with counterparts on managing risk at partner airports. Primary liaison with NZ airports.
- ▶ The Ministry of Transport – advises on transport regulatory requirements, and commercial and operational viability of proposals. Primary liaison with airlines and wider industry stakeholders.

Each agency leads engagement with respective counterparts in QFT partner jurisdictions.



Establishing common ground with QFT partners



Ground rules and common principles



In the NZ-Australia context:

- ▶ Protecting the health and safety of both countries' communities from risks posed by COVID-19 remains the highest priority for both governments, in a collaborative approach to the operations of the QFT zone.
- ▶ Both governments had clearly identified the conditions that needed to be met in order to allow QFT into their country (and for citizens and residents to leave).
- ▶ People eligible to travel quarantine-free are those who have been in either Australia or New Zealand for 14 consecutive days immediately prior to travel, subject to meeting health and immigration requirements of Australia or New Zealand.

Directly applicable in the NZ-Cook Islands context, too.

Ground rules and common principles cont'd



With respect to each QFT zone:

- ▶ The management and operation of the QFT zones is grounded on health principles, acknowledging each country makes its own assessments and decisions on arrangements for QFT into its jurisdiction, including assessment of public health risks.
- ▶ Each country accepts that the other could impose travel restrictions at short notice in response to a COVID-19 outbreak, including pausing or suspending QFT
- ▶ Each country has agreed to engage with each other if they intend to open QFT to other countries.

Information sharing, coordination, and communications



In the NZ-Australia context:

- ▶ Timely sharing and exchange of information between relevant Australian and New Zealand agencies and other key stakeholders (e.g. state jurisdictions in the case of Australia) is critical.
- ▶ Australia and New Zealand were fortunate that there were established institutional relationships between our agencies helping with information and data exchange across issues such as health, border controls, quarantine, and other operational, policy and regulatory areas.
- ▶ Progress to establish and maintain a QFT zone requires coordinated engagement.

Again, directly applicable in the Cook Islands context, too.



Health settings



Building on existing engagement



- ▶ NZ-Australia and NZ-Cook Islands health officials were already maintaining close and regular engagement throughout the COVID-19 response.
- ▶ In the Australian context, this included engagement with Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) – the key decision-making committee for health emergencies, comprised of all state and territory Chief Health Officers and chaired by Australia’s Chief Medical Officer.
- ▶ In preparation for the QFT zone, both countries routinely exchanged epidemiological and genomic data. New Zealand has confidence that it has the necessary access, at the highest levels of Australia’s health system, to facilitate early exchange of information, and the collaboration necessary to make decisions at pace as public health situations change in either country.
- ▶ Directly applicable in the NZ-Cook Islands context, too.

Building on existing engagement cont'd



- ▶ However, lessons continue to be learned through managing QFT zones with partners, including how we can refine information-sharing processes with Australia to support a more timely and streamlined flow of information between health officials.
- ▶ One recent improvement is a new process whereby the Office of the Director of Public Health in New Zealand contacts Australian State and Territory counterparts directly for information.
- ▶ This will be supported by a process whereby the Ministry of Health disseminates these health-to-health communications across the New Zealand All-of-Government system via established update channels.
- ▶ Another focus point will be greater monitoring of open-source information to compliment situation awareness (for example monitoring relevant health departments websites).



Border settings and experiences



Working together



- ▶ Strong pre-existing relationships between New Zealand, Australia and Cook Islands border agencies has been critical.
- ▶ Joint Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) enabling information-sharing between countries.
- ▶ Joint Implementation Plan (JIP) established to outline processes and provide visibility of any differences.
- ▶ Having people on the ground in the QFT countries has proven to be another important factor. NZ and Australia, for example, both have Airline Liaison Officer (ALO) programmes and Customs have staff in country in both Australia and the Cook Islands.

Assurance



- ▶ Assurance model based on Passenger Name Record (PNR) data looking at time spent in country.
- ▶ New Zealand relies on the Australian Border Force (ABF) to do eligibility checks on passengers coming to New Zealand, and Australia relies on NZ border agencies to do eligibility checks on passengers coming to Australia.
- ▶ Border agencies collaborated on adapting traditional passenger data systems to be able to undertake non-traditional screening for passenger eligibility.
- ▶ 24/7 Border Operations Centre enables real-time data sharing and issue resolution with the airlines and the ABF.
- ▶ Reliance on automated systems wherever possible – creates greater assurance about a passenger’s eligibility to operate in a QFT zone.
- ▶ ALOs are a critical piece of the assurance process and provide on the ground support for airlines and stakeholders, whilst ensuring QFT systems and processes are effective.
- ▶ Robust airport and airline accreditation process to assure separation of red and green passenger pathway & established infection protocols.

Some challenges to consider



- ▶ Challenges identified with quality of data within the PNR were quickly worked through with airlines.
- ▶ Additional challenges associated with:
 - ▶ *managing multiple QFT zones – Australia, Cook Islands and Niue (in the future)*
 - ▶ *managing multiple scenarios within one QFT zone – e.g. different responses to passengers arriving in NZ from Australia depending on which state they have come from and whether they have been at a location of interest*
 - ▶ *internal borders in Australia and how assurance over movement across borders can be obtained given a lack of data available.*
- ▶ Resourcing both red and green arrivals processes through airports creates resourcing pressures, especially with the health and safety requirement to separate workforces.
- ▶ Timely and comprehensive notification of changes in border settings – the reliance on strong inward and outward facing communication cannot be undervalued.
- ▶ There is a need for broader sharing of information outside of formalised existing arrangements.
- ▶ Reliance on manual processes creates resourcing pressure that compound across the QFT demands.



Communications, key links, and guidance



Public information



▲ Level 1 All of New Zealand is at Alert Level 1. [What to do at Alert Level 1](#)

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Home / Travel / Quarantine-free travel

Quarantine-free travel

Information on travelling between New Zealand and some countries without having to enter a managed isolation facility when you arrive.

Quarantine-free travel with Australia →
You can travel between Australia and New Zealand without having to go into a managed isolation facility.

Quarantine-free travel with the Cook Islands →
You can travel between the Cook Islands and New Zealand without having to go into a managed isolation facility when you arrive.

Quarantine-free travel from Niue to New Zealand →
You can travel from Niue to New Zealand without having to go into a managed isolation facility.

Keep track of where you've been
NZ COVID Tracer app
NZ COVID Tracer booklet
Get your QR code poster
Contact tracing at your workplace

Updates and resources
Read the latest updates
Follow our social media
Subscribe to our newsletters
Posters

Contact and feedback
Contact a helpline
Provide feedback

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▶ Australia

- ▶ [Quarantine-free travel with Australia | Unite against COVID-19 \(covid19.govt.nz\)](https://covid19.govt.nz)

▶ Cook Islands

- ▶ [Quarantine-free travel with the Cook Islands | Unite against COVID-19 \(covid19.govt.nz\)](https://covid19.govt.nz)
- ▶ [New Zealand Treaties Online - Arrangement Details \(mfat.govt.nz\)](https://mfat.govt.nz)

Health Operations Framework



Document written primarily for District Health Boards (DHBs) and Public Health Units (PHUs) to consolidate information about the requirements to operate under QFT arrangements:

- ▶ **Departure from overseas:** e.g. “Nau Mai Ra” travel declaration and its pre-departure validation, passenger health declaration on check in, etc.
- ▶ **In the air:** passenger announcements, management of ill travellers.
- ▶ **Arrival in New Zealand:** face coverings, arrival declarations, random temperature checking, secondary health assessment, onward referrals, COVID-19 App, presentation of foreigners with suspected COVID-19 within New Zealand.
- ▶ **On departure from New Zealand:** information given at booking, managing departing passengers who are unwell or present with COVID-19 symptoms.
- ▶ **Record keeping and reporting:** aggregate data, interim reporting.
- ▶ **Testing and vaccination of QFT border workers.**
- ▶ **Response framework:** Incident Management Team, decision-making, information sharing.
- ▶ **Air Border Order – operational guidance.**
- ▶ **Annex 1:** Information to be provided by airlines at booking – QFT to New Zealand.
- ▶ **Annex 2:** Text of In-flight Announcement (as at March 2021).
- ▶ **Annex 3:** Information to be provided by airlines at booking – New Zealand to [QFT country].

Quarantine Free Travel Health Operations Framework

Version 1.0 – current as at 21 April 2021

Note: This document is updated regularly. Printed copies may be out of date.



Airline and airport guidance



▶ The [guidance](#) covers requirements and key information on how to become a designated QFT airline or airport

Airlines

The table below sets out New Zealand's key measures for airlines to participate in quarantine-free travel from Australia to New Zealand, in addition to all other relevant requirements.

Air Crew Eligibility	
1	<p>Measure: Airline verifies plans to meet aircrew requirements, including separation of air crew operating green flights from those flying to destinations beyond those specified.</p> <p>Under the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Air Border) Order (No 2) 2020, aircrew flying quarantine-free flights to New Zealand may fly on other short-haul routes to Australia and Pacific Island countries, and non-MIQ flights domestically within New Zealand ('green flights'). It is expected that crews flying green flights will be kept completely separate from crews flying to other destinations ('red flights').</p> <p>If an aircrew member needs to transition from red to green flights they can do so by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • undertaking a minimum 72 hour stand down; and • taking a negative PCR COVID-19 test at the end of that period. Air crew can only return to work after confirmation of a negative result. <p>Note: Australia currently requires air crew arriving from New Zealand on green flights to have not travelled outside Australia and New Zealand in the previous 14 days. Aircrew operating green flights into and out of New Zealand will have to meet both standards.</p>
Passenger Eligibility	
2	<p>Measure: Airline provides evidence of process to include eligibility and health questions as part of check-in process.</p> <p>Passengers departing from Australia must meet health and eligibility requirements for travelling on green flights to New Zealand, as well as immigration and all other relevant regulatory requirements.</p> <p>As specified in the Air Border Order, airlines are required to take reasonable steps to ensure that, prior to boarding, each person on the aircraft meets all the quarantine-free travel conditions for New Zealand. To facilitate this, airlines must ask the prescribed pre-departure questions at check-in in Australia. Airlines can choose how they ask the questions, i.e. paper-based, through electronic check-in, or orally.</p> <p>If a passenger answers yes to any of these questions, they are not eligible to travel on a green flight and should be declined boarding. However, if a passenger has a symptom or symptoms consistent with COVID-19 (e.g. chronic hay fever causing a runny nose), they should declare these symptoms and provide the airline with evidence (such as a letter from their doctor) of their condition. If a passenger produces evidence of a medical condition that</p>

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[Covid19.govt.nz](https://www.covid19.govt.nz)

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Page 4 of 18

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Airports

The table below sets out New Zealand's key measures for airports to participate in quarantine-free travel from Australia to New Zealand, in addition to all other relevant requirements. Airports must also work with Customs to facilitate an airport 'walk-through' for relevant Government agencies to observe how the measures will be met.

Separation of green and red passengers	
1	<p>Measure: Airport provides plan demonstrating how green and red passengers will be separated throughout the airport.</p> <p>Airports must implement a COVID-Safe plan that details how green and red travellers will be physically separated. Airports that will receive both green and red flights will be required to create green and red zones to enable green and red travellers to be processed concurrently. The zones are to provide physical separation of the traveller pathway through the airport, from disembarkation all the way to the exit.</p> <p>Note: These requirements have been updated. A previous version of this document stated that airports could separate red and green passengers by having the flights arrive in separate time slots.</p> <p>If all flights arriving at or departing from the airport are green flights, the airport must still comply with the cleaning standards set out in the IPC document. An airport choosing this option will be unable to accept domestic red flights (i.e. those carrying new arrivals from their port of arrival to the city where they will undertake MIQ), unless they can meet physical separation requirements.</p> <p>Airports' plans for separating red and green passengers must account for the separation requirements of arriving, departing and (where applicable) transiting passengers.</p> <p>Note: Red zones arrivals will only be processed by flight, even when physical separation is in place.</p>
Cleaning and use of personal protective equipment (PPE)	
2	<p>Measure: Airport provides documentation demonstrating cleaning protocols comply with approved processes set out in the Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) Guidance: Air Border.</p> <p>Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 airport companies are persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs). They are required to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of persons working for the airport company, whether those persons are directly employed by the airport or not.</p>

Find out more at
[Covid19.govt.nz](https://www.covid19.govt.nz)

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Page 10 of 18

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Airline and airport guidance cont'd



- ▶ Specific information covered for **airlines** includes detail about:
 - ▶ *air crew eligibility*
 - ▶ *passenger eligibility*
 - ▶ *ill travelers*
 - ▶ *face coverings*
 - ▶ *communications*
 - ▶ *aircraft cleaning.*
- ▶ Specific information covered for **airports** includes detail about:
 - ▶ *separation of green and red passengers*
 - ▶ *cleaning and use of PPE*
 - ▶ *ill traveler processes*
 - ▶ *health staff presence*
 - ▶ *communications.*



Managing a Response



QFT response frameworks



- ▶ QFT response frameworks are in place – they outline the possible responses to an increase in risk in Australia and the Cook Islands.
- ▶ The frameworks set out the factors that would trigger the implementation of measures associated with data-sharing, border and health controls, and public communication.
- ▶ Risks of QFT remain under constant review given the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ▶ New Zealand and Australia, and New Zealand and the Cook Islands, consult each other if there are any material changes to domestic COVID-19 measures, restrictions and processes.
- ▶ Understanding each others' government operations (including decision-making authority) is essential to avoid confusion and delays.
 - ▶ *In the NZ-Australian context, for example, Australian states and territories may at any time implement their own border and quarantine measures, and health requirements, within their jurisdictions, which can impact on quarantine-free travel.*

Suspension of quarantine-free travel



- ▶ Remember – national sovereignty over decision-making remains in place.
- ▶ NZ or its QFT partner may unilaterally decide to pause or suspend QFT into their jurisdiction at any time based on their assessment of the health risks to their respective communities.
- ▶ If this occurs, they will:
 - ▶ inform the other government promptly through established (diplomatic) channels; and
 - ▶ endeavor to provide as much notice as possible to passengers, government agencies, airlines and airport operators affected by the measures to minimise disruption.
- ▶ Reciprocal agency notification arrangements facilitate timely communications between NZ and QFT partner agencies.

NZ-Australia Response Framework



Quarantine-Free Travel (QFT) How a COVID-19 case in Australia would be managed

When travelling to Australia, you'll need to keep track of the COVID-19 situation and play your part in stopping any spread back to New Zealand. We cannot predict when or how a new case might appear in any Australian state. But we do have a plan for how we'd handle a wide range of possible situations.

While any response will depend on the circumstances, such as timing and location, it's useful to know what to expect. This is a guide to what might occur and what you could be asked to do in the event there are COVID-19 cases in Australia when you travel.

QFT CONTINUE

E.g. case linked to border – low risk of further transmission.

What will happen?

Flights to and from Australia likely to continue.

What do travellers do?

Follow local health instructions.
Keep a record of your movements.
If unwell, stay home or in your accommodation.
Get a COVID-19 test if you have any symptoms.

QFT PAUSE

E.g. case of unknown source, but most likely linked to border. State enters short-term lockdown.

What will happen?

Flights to and from affected state or states may be paused for up to 72 hours.

What do travellers do?

Follow instructions from the state you are in.
If unwell or have symptoms get a COVID-19 test.
Watch for updates from your airline and check your travel insurance.
When returning to NZ, travellers from affected state may be asked to:

- Get a pre-departure test before flying
- Self-isolate and get a COVID-19 test
- If you are returning from a state where travel has been paused you may go into managed isolation when you arrive in New Zealand.

QFT SUSPEND

E.g. multiple cases of unknown source. State enters longer term lockdown.

What will happen?

Flights to and from affected state or states may be suspended for an extended period.

What do travellers do?

Follow instructions from the state you are in.
If unwell or have symptoms get a COVID-19 test.
Watch for updates from your airline and check your travel insurance.
When returning to NZ, travellers may be asked to:

- Get a pre-departure test before flying
- Self-isolate and get a COVID-19 test
- If you are returning from a state where travel has been suspended you may go into managed isolation when you arrive in New Zealand.

Be prepared:

- This guidance may apply to one state or multiple states, depending on the cases.
- Register with SafeTravel before you leave.
- Check your travel insurance and ticket conditions.
- You may need to stay longer. Be aware additional costs and getting home is your responsibility.

What you should do

Follow official advice, download a COVID tracer app in the state you are in and keep an eye on [Covid19.govt.nz](https://www.covid19.govt.nz)

- ▶ In the event of a prolonged pause or suspension of QFT in one or both directions, the NZ and Australian governments have undertaken work on contingency plans to facilitate the return of travellers to their country of residence to the extent practicable and when safe to do so.
- ▶ However, the overarching public message is travel has changed and travellers need to be prepared for disruption (“flyer beware”).

NZ-Cook Islands Response Framework



Quarantine-Free Travel (QFT) How we would manage travel to the Cook Islands if there is a COVID-19 case

The Cook Islands has never had a COVID-19 case and New Zealand has a great record of eliminating the virus. It is everyone's responsibility to keep it that way. When travelling to the Cook Islands or New Zealand you'll need to keep track of the COVID-19 situation and play your part in stopping any spread.

We cannot predict when or how a new case might appear, but we do have a plan for how we'd handle a wide range of possible situations. While any response will depend on the circumstances and location, it's useful to have a guide to what might occur and what you could be asked to do in the event there are COVID-19 cases when you are travelling on Cook Islands green flights.

QFT CONTINUE	QFT PAUSE	QFT SUSPEND
<p>E.g. QFT is operating as intended and there is low risk of transmission</p>	<p>E.g. case of unknown source, but most likely linked to border. Affected area enters short-term lockdown.</p>	<p>E.g. confirmed case of unknown source. Country enters longer-term lockdown.</p>
<p>What will happen? <i>Flights to and from the Cook Islands likely to continue.</i></p>	<p>What will happen? <i>Flights to and from the Cook Islands will be paused. We may move quickly from pause to suspension in the Cook Islands.</i></p>	<p>What will happen? <i>Flights to and from the Cook Islands will be suspended for an extended period.</i></p>
<p>What do travellers do? Follow official instructions from the country you are in. Keep a record of your movements – use the local COVID-19 tracer app or keep a paper record. If unwell, do not travel – stay home or in your accommodation. Get a COVID-19 test if you have any symptoms.</p>	<p>What do travellers do? Follow official instructions from the country you are in. If unwell or have symptoms, get a COVID-19 test. Watch for updates from your airline and check your travel insurance. When returning to the Cook Islands or NZ, travellers may be asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get a pre-departure test before flying• Self-isolate and get a COVID-19 test• Go into managed isolation on arrival.	<p>What do travellers do? Stay where you are, do not travel. Follow official instructions from the country you are in. If unwell or have symptoms, get a COVID-19 test. Watch for updates from your airline and check your travel insurance. Your return to NZ or the Cook Islands will be managed to minimise the risk of spread during travel. Travellers may be asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get a pre-departure test before flying• Self-isolate and get a COVID-19 test• Go into managed isolation on arrival.

Be prepared:

- Download the CookSafe+ app or the NZ COVID Tracer app before departure. There may be connectivity issues in the Cook Islands.
- Take extra medication, cash and other personal items in case you need to stay longer. Be aware additional costs and getting home are your responsibility.
- Check your travel insurance and ticket conditions.
- You are required to complete a travel declaration before departure.
- You will be required to provide a health declaration and there will be random health checks at airports.

What you should do

Check out eligibility, what to expect and keep an eye on updates on [Covid19.govt.nz](https://www.covid19.govt.nz) and [Covid19.gov.uk](https://www.covid19.gov.uk)

- ▶ In the event of a pause, a suspension might follow quite quickly.
- ▶ NZ and the Cook Islands have worked together on contingency plans in the event of an outbreak in the Cook Islands. This includes the possibility of travellers needing to 'shelter in place' or facilitating the return of travellers to New Zealand to the extent practicable and safe.
- ▶ However, the overarching public message is travel has changed and travellers need to be prepared for disruption ("flyer beware").



Lessons learned



Lessons learned



- ▶ The key to the development of a QFT zone is that the countries involved establish a shared understanding of what outcomes they are seeking to achieve.
- ▶ In New Zealand's case with Australia and the Cook Islands, the outcome sought was QFT with each of these countries, based on a health assessment that each had low or no COVID-19 community transmission.
- ▶ With an agreed outcome, countries then need to agree on criteria that qualify people for access to safe or "green" zone travel:
 - ▶ *For the NZ-Australia and NZ-Cook Islands zones, the key criteria that gives passenger access is that you can demonstrate that you have been in either country for at least 14 days (and not in a COVID-19 area).*
- ▶ Countries that wish to be involved in these arrangements must also be prepared to share reliable information – if you do not then it is difficult to see how you can make a reasonable health assessment of the other country.
- ▶ You also need to be patient – inevitably, countries and their respective officials may have some initial differences about what they are willing to allow; these can usually eventually be resolved through discussions.
- ▶ Issues around transit passengers are challenging for the purposes of QFT zones as they involve passengers wanting to come in from countries outside the bubble.

Lessons learned cont'd



- ▶ You need to reach a position and framework on how both countries handle subsequent COVID-19 outbreaks – in Australia and New Zealand's case this is the ability of either country to decide they will pause or suspend the arrangements. Working closely with airlines on what might happen in a response is critical so they can be prepared.
- ▶ Clear public messaging about the QFT zone including passenger eligibility and what might happen if an outbreak occurs is critical – travellers must be aware and be prepared.
- ▶ Working with airlines and airports is critical in the planning stage of a QFT zone to understand what is operationally feasible, with clear guidance about the health measures they need to apply.

Questions?

