

NEW ZEALAND

THE YEAR AT THE BORDER 2020

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MINISTRY OF BUSINESS, INNOVATION & EMPLOYMENT HĪKINA WHAKATUTUKI

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Contents

2 Introduction **4** Closing the border 6 Nationwide lockdown

6 Impact of the border closure by the numbers **9** The passenger journey **12** On-arrival interactions

15 Maritime border

18 IBO takes on a wider range of tasks **20** Future state – a more cohesive border

Introduction

This annual Border Report represents the important work Immigration New Zealand (INZ) undertakes to keep our New Zealand border safe. It also provides an opportunity for us to reflect on our successes and challenges in keeping risk offshore, and keeping New Zealand safe, over the past 12 months. The report covers the 2020 calendar year.

2020 has been the most extraordinary year for INZ. On 19 March 2020, for the first time in New Zealand history, our borders were closed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that has swept the globe.

The ramifications of this for our organisation and New Zealand were huge. Arriving passenger volumes across 2020 dropped by 97% compared with the year before. Global aviation and tourism declined suddenly and dramatically.

INZ had to react quickly in the face of a constantly changing operating environment. We have played a leading role in keeping our society safe during the pandemic through applying strict controls on the number of foreign travellers able to enter New Zealand. We have also overseen the safe and efficient operation of transit passenger flows in and out of New Zealand to the Pacific and beyond, enabling travellers to reach their home countries in the midst of the pandemic. In the early stages of the border closure we worked closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade to organise repatriation flights of New Zealanders arriving home.

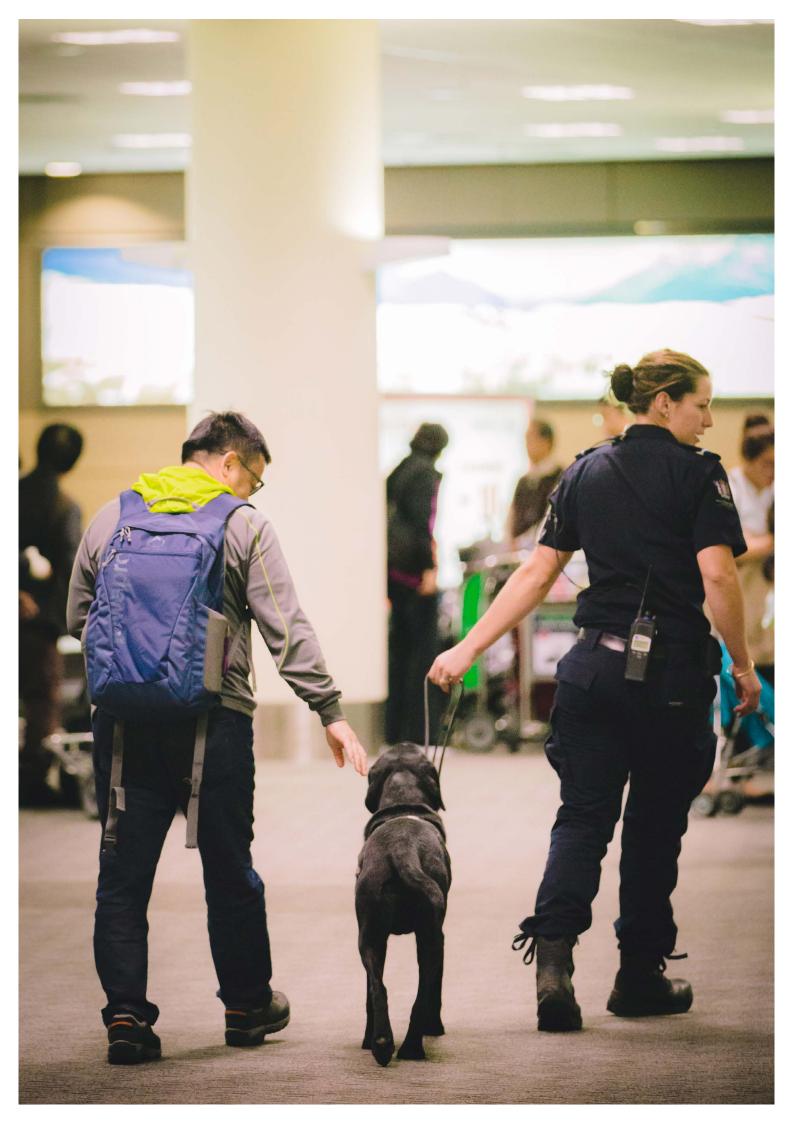
Working collaboratively has been central to our mission in 2020. Over the last year we have worked even more closely with our partners and stakeholders to manage and protect the border. We are exploring new ways of working with other border agencies as part of the 'World's Smartest and Safest Border' project. We also planned ahead for the rollout of Safe Travel Zones and how INZ can promote safe and secure travel in a post-COVID world.

The border closure gave us the opportunity to contribute to a number of additional projects and work streams. INZ worked alongside our MBIE colleagues, and other government agencies, to assist with the all of government response to COVID-19. One such example was supporting our MBIE colleagues with Managed Isolation and Quarantine, and the accompanying booking system – this important work is still ongoing.

During 2020, INZ border staff have demonstrated outstanding commitment and flexibility in undertaking their duties in an ever-changing working environment. They have adeptly balanced our 'business-as-usual' border security responsibilities with the emerging operational challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2021 will no doubt bring fresh challenges but we commit to protecting and growing the wellbeing and capability of our workforce over the next twelve months and beyond.

Nicola Hogg General Manager Border and Visa Operations Peter Elms National Manager Border Border and Visa Operations



Closing the border

Alongside our partners the New Zealand Customs Service (Customs) and other key government agencies, the Immigration Border Operations (IBO) team has been part of the front-line all of government response to COVID-19.

The New Zealand Government made the decision to close the border to travellers from mainland China on 2 February 2020, followed by Iran. The global situation developed quickly, and on 19 March 2020 New Zealand closed its borders to nearly all travellers except New Zealand citizens and returning resident visa holders. This decision required an immediate collective response from all border agencies. This proved challenging given there was no precedent, nor any tested processes for closing the border.

IBO responds swiftly

IBO worked closely with the INZ Operational Policy team to understand how the closure would affect existing operational processes. New procedures were drafted and communicated to operational staff within days. Systems required updating and changes were made to boarding rules in the Advanced Passenger Processing (APP) system. This ensured that boarding directives airlines received correctly reflected the border closure. At the same time, the IBO Carrier Relationship Team (CRT) communicated the changes to individual carriers, and to the Board of Airline Representatives New Zealand (BARNZ).

Operational challenges

IBO faced a number of operational challenges in the initial phase of the border closure. This included recording the highest-ever number of calls to IBO in one day. In addition to the increased volume of calls, Border Officers were required to make difficult and complex decisions and sensitively and compassionately express the effect of border closures to passengers, often in trying circumstances.

IBO was flooded with requests for exemptions as desperate passengers attempted to board at check-in desks across the world despite the border closure. In the weeks that followed the border closure a succession of changes were made to control the movement of people and manage the health risk posed by arriving travellers.

Additional responsibilities were also placed on staff to help contain the pandemic and prevent the uncontrollable spread of the virus as thousands of New Zealanders returned home from all over the globe. In the initial stages, Border Officers were required to verify arriving passengers' plans to self-isolate. As the border closures progressed, Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ) facilities were set up, and Border Officers then became responsible for checking that passengers travelling to NZ held MIQ vouchers.

Transit passengers and repatriations

In the early stages of the border closure, a number of government to government agreements were established to assist foreign nationals trying to return to their home countries. The Minister of Immigration approved an unprecedented number of Special Directions supporting transit travel, as thousands of people attempted to get home.

With Auckland International Airport being a transit hub to and from the wider Pacific, this presented a number of challenges for our teams. The constant transit changes, along with border closures in other countries, required a new approach. Border Officers needed to make assessments on the viability of flight paths and transit hubs globally before allowing uplift to the many thousands of repatriating foreign nationals wanting to use Auckland as a transit stop.

Immigration New Zealand, including the Border Operations team, was a key partner in the repatriation efforts led by Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) as many foreign governments arranged charter repatriation flights for their citizens either from, or through New Zealand. IBO was instrumental in the facilitation of these flights as many of the airlines involved had not flown to New Zealand before. Lufthansa airlines sent 10 aircraft to New Zealand to repatriate their citizens home to Germany, with flights from both Auckland and Christchurch. In a touching gesture that conveyed the significance of the global situation, the pilots performed a spectacular fly by at each airport on their last departing flights out of New Zealand.

Collaborating with our key partners

During this time, our Carrier Relationship Team were busy communicating ever changing regulatory rules and instructions as they happened, to ensure that carriers were informed in real-time to minimise disruption to travellers and assist airlines.

IBO also collaborated closely with Customs, the Ministry of Health and District Health Boards, and MFAT over this time. They supported the Ministry of Health and District Health Boards with the repatriation of essential health workers as well as medical evacuations. They also worked closely with MFAT to facilitate the movement of diplomats in, out, and through New Zealand.

All of government approach to managing risk

The management of passengers arriving into New Zealand during a global pandemic requires a cohesive all of government response. The legal framework put in place to manage the pandemic presented new challenges for IBO. In May 2020 the COVID-19 Public Health Response Act 2020 came into force. This Act and its corresponding COVID-19 Orders required IBO to think differently about how we manage risk, and to reimagine our role at the border, as we were no longer considering risk solely from an immigration perspective.

A remarkable team effort

The border closure has been a very difficult and stressful period for our staff, and Immigration New Zealand is proud of their professionalism, dedication, and hard work over this time.

Nationwide lockdown

On March 21 the Government announced a COVID alert level system as a response to the pandemic in NZ. The likelihood of a move to Level 4, the highest alert level, required a number of logistical factors to be considered to ensure that IBO could continue to operate during the nationwide lockdown.

Swift roster changes were made across all four ports to place staff into segregated roster groups. Most support staff including Administration Co-ordinators, Technical Specialists, and Border Managers worked from home for at least some of this time. 'Zoom', 'teams', 'bubbles' and 'physical distancing' soon became a familiar parts of the IBO vocabulary.

Dealing with passengers face to face during a global pandemic obviously brings additional risks that need to be managed. IBO processes were modified to ensure that staff were not dealing with passengers in small encloses spaces, and interactions were kept as brief as possible. All staff interacting with passengers were required to wear personal protective equipment (PPE). On June 23, as an additional layer of protection against the spread of the virus, The Government announced a testing regime for frontline border workers, and fortnightly COVID testing for IBO staff was introduced.

Impact of the border closure by the numbers

The border restrictions significantly reduced passenger arrivals in New Zealand – 118,000 people crossed the border between 20 March and 1 December 2020. This compared with 4.7 million arrivals in the same period in 2019.



118,142

TOTAL NUMBER OF ARRIVALS BETWEEN 20 MARCH 2020 AND 1 DECEMBER 2020





TOTAL NUMBER OF ARRIVALS BETWEEN 20 MARCH 2019 AND 1 DECEMBER 2019

80,654 **QUEENSTOWN** AIRPORT

4,798 **DUNEDIN** AIRPORT

CHRISTCHURCH AIRPORT

213,390

104,840 WELLINGTON AIRPORT

AUCKLAND AIRPORT

NUMBER OF PASSENGERS **ARRIVING AT EACH AIRPORT**

1,295,094 •

1,698,943

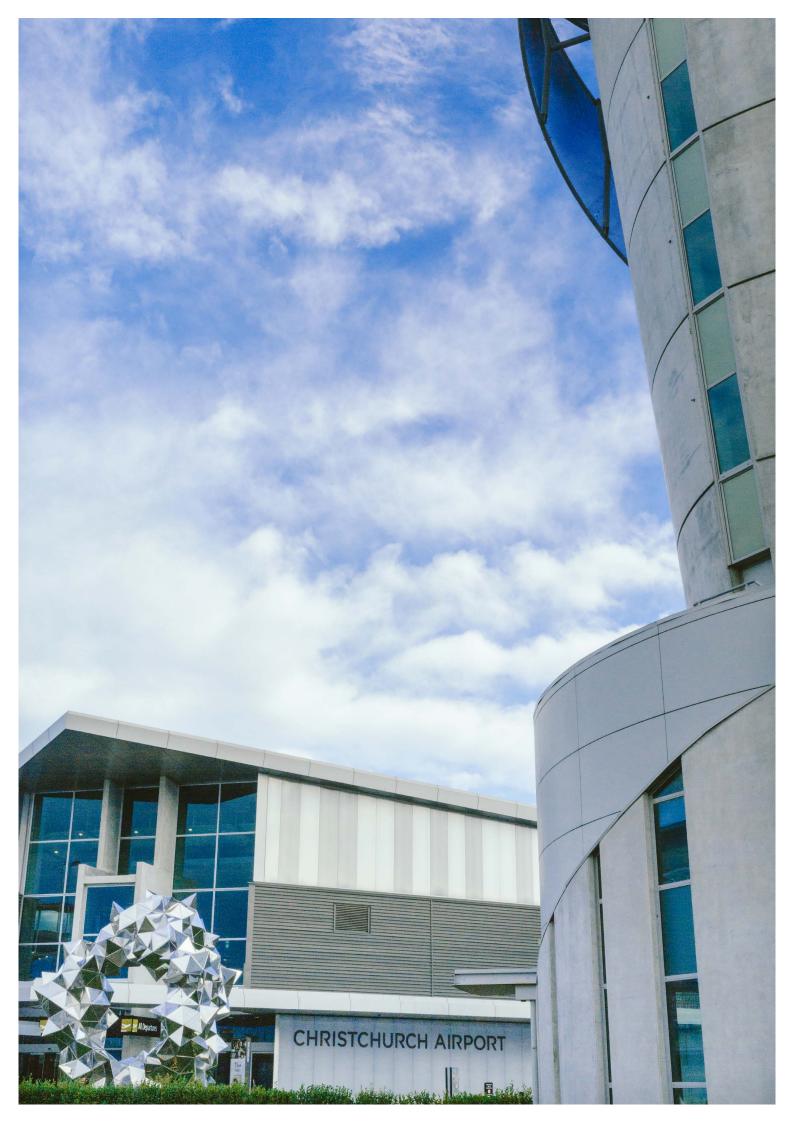
NUMBER OF PASSENGERS ARRIVING **IN NEW ZEALAND BY AIR**

10,807

NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS ARRIVED IN NEW ZEALAND

2020 passenger numbers

7



The passenger journey

INZ's border security processes reach across the globe and contribute significantly to New Zealand's safety, and IBO's ultimate goal (in line with INZ's Striking the Balance Strategy) is to keep risk offshore. INZ has a layered approach to managing risk, and this starts with the visa or New Zealand electronic Travel Authority (NZeTA) application process and continues through until a passenger reaches NZ.

Keeping risk offshore takes on a new meaning for IBO

INZ becomes involved in risk assessing passengers well before they commence their journey. This begins at the visa application stage, or for passengers from visa waiver countries, when they apply for an NZeTA. IBO then risk assesses passengers before they check-in and board their aircraft for New Zealand. IBO staff and the Collaborative Passenger Targeting (CPT) unit electronically screen travellers intending to board a flight to New Zealand. Our legislation, and the early passenger data we get from carriers, gives us a unique opportunity to screen passengers throughout their travel.

If concerns are identified at check in, airlines contact us to determine whether a traveller meets the entry requirements to travel to and enter New Zealand. IBO troubleshoots Advance Passenger Processing (APP) queries from airlines around the world 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

The emerging threat of COVID-19 added another layer of complexity to IBO's core purpose of keeping risk offshore, and our systems and the skills of our staff have been well utilised to identify additional risk brought about by the pandemic. As 2020 progressed, a large number of changes had occurred and IBO soon settled into a new operating rhythm with the ability to quickly adapt to changes in legislation at short notice.

Border Officers played a crucial role in keeping our borders safe, but were also ensuring that passengers could successfully transit through New Zealand. When the first stage of the border closure came into effect Border Officers scrutinized whether passengers had travelled from or transited places of concern 14 days prior to boarding a flight to New Zealand. This involved assessing passenger data submitted by the airlines at check-in and communicating with airline staff to verify exit and entry stamps, land border checkpoints, and marine operators. As countries all over the world starting enacting their own border restrictions, Border Officers familiarised themselves with the foreign entry requirements for other countries in an effort to minimise the instances of stranded foreign nationals transiting New Zealand enroute to their final destinations. This work also helped to reduce the chance of COVID-19 reaching the Pacific Islands.

CASE STUDY ONE

ATTEMPTED TRAVEL ON COUNTERFEIT TRAVEL DOCUMENT

In March IBO received a call from Emirates in Denpasar, Indonesia. A passenger was checking in with a brand new Maltese passport and spoke only Arabic which the airline staff thought was unusual. The passenger also had a Yemen passport containing the same biometric and biographical details. In addition, the passenger had no check in luggage. The passenger presented a NZeTA, however it was discovered that this was fraudulent as the NZeTA details matched to a different identity. The passenger was offloaded from the flight as there were doubts as to his identity and it was determined he was not a bona fide visitor. After the passenger was offloaded, IBO received a call from Maltese authorities confirming that the Maltese passport was fraudulent, and had not been issued from Maltese passport authorities.

On the Ground Support

In addition to Advance Passenger Processing and the Risk Targeting Program, INZ deploy staff to some overseas airports as Airline Liaison Officers (ALOS). This provides another layer of risk management in our efforts to keep risk offshore. On 1 May 2019, Immigration Border Operations received Deputy Chief Executive sign off to replace our existing ALO positions with newly established Border Liaison Manager (BLM) roles.

The core purpose of the BLM role is to enhance border security by building and maintaining strong relationships with key internal and external stakeholders to support IBO and INZ's objectives. The BLMs are expected to operate at a more strategic level than has previously been expected of an ALO and will represent INZ as a whole in market/region in the absence of other INZ roles. They are expected to work collaboratively in markets where we already have an INZ presence, such as Risk and Verification Managers. They may also be required to represent other agencies, such as NZ Customs.

INZ's first ever BLM started in March 2020 – only days before the border closure! He has been unable to take up his posting in Dubai, due to the global pandemic. INZ also retained a part time ALO presence in Hong Kong throughout 2020.

2020 IBO passenger interactions pre-arrival

In the 2020 financial year, 2,277 passengers were prevented from boarding their international flight at their departure port, intending to travel to New Zealand.





O TOP FIVE COUNTRIES WHERE PASSENGERS WERE OFFLOADED



• TOP FOUR CATEGORIES FOR OFFLOADS (EG. NO VISA, DID NOT MEET ENTRY REQUIREMENTS)

1,326 223 120 92 DECLINE UPLIFT - X DECLINE UPLIFT **DECLINE UPLIFT** DECLINE UPLIFT – X - BORDER - VISA - NO VISA – ALERT – - NO SUITABLE **CLOSED NOVEL** A MATCH OPTION CORONAVIRUS

On-arrival interactions

Our onshore border is the final opportunity to manage the risk posed by a passenger before they enter New Zealand.

On arrival interactions are prompted by a number of factors. The interactions may be a result of risks that IBO has identified as part of the pre-arrival screening process, or by Border Officers undertake behavioural targeting at the airport. Interactions can also occur as a result of referrals from our partner agencies: New Zealand Customs Service, Biosecurity New Zealand, and the New Zealand Police.

Border Officers speak with passengers from across the immigration risk spectrum. This includes the lower end of the risk spectrum such as passengers intending to work illegally, through to high risk individuals that may pose risk to national security. The majority of passengers refused entry are visitors assessed to have 'doubtful bona fides'. Passengers typically falling into this category are those who are believed to be unlikely to abide by the conditions of any visa granted to them, by working illegally or overstaying their visas.

Border Officers follow a thorough decision making process to determine whether a person meets entry requirements. First their identity is ascertained and biometrics collected (fingerprint and facial photograph), followed by an interview. If concerns still remain following an interview, passengers will be given the opportunity to comment on concerns, discrepancies or issues. A decision to turn a passenger around is only made following a thorough process including peer or manager review of the proposed decision. We endeavour to resolve all referrals as soon as possible to avoid delaying a traveller unnecessarily, subject to external factors such as verification of information and sourcing an independent interpreter, if required.

Passengers who have been refused entry are returned to the port they travelled from, or to any place that they are permanently admissible. Whilst awaiting their outbound flight, they will either be placed in Police custody, released on a reporting conditions agreement, or in some cases they are invited to stay on the IBO premises.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, on-arrival activity has been very much reduced, but is now more complex and challenging due to the current operating environment. Staff take all necessary COVID-19 precautions to keep themselves and their colleagues safe while dealing with passengers. During the border closure, they also make arrangements for passengers to be placed in a MIQ facility if their outbound flight is not able to be arranged immediately.

CASE STUDY TWO

COLLABORATING WITH NZ POLICE

In March 2020, shortly before the border closure, a Lithuanian passenger was referred to IBO at Auckland International Airport. Police arrested the passenger on arrival as he was suspected of stealing a woman's handbag during the flight. The passenger had embarked on his journey in Palanga, Lithuania, and transited through Copenhagen and Doha before arriving in Auckland. During the interview he made several admissions – one being that he had been deported from China and banned from re-entering for five years. This was for attempting to take a golden elephant while leaving. He also admitted being refused entry into three other countries. The passenger was refused entry and returned to Lithuania on the next available flight.

CASE STUDY THREE

REPLACEMENT CARGO CREW

In October 2020, IBO was advised of five positioning cargo ship crew who had been granted critical purpose visitor visas. These visas allowed the crew to arrive by air, transfer to their vessel, and complete their mandatory 14 days isolation on board. Subsequently, the vessel owner decided not to allow the crew to complete their mandatory isolation on board.

Despite acknowledging INZ advice not to travel, the crew arrived at Auckland International Airport on 31 October 2020. IBO refused entry to the remaining four crew on the basis they were unable to meet the conditions of their visa. They were released on reporting conditions to the Grand Millennium Hotel MIQ facility to await their outbound flight.

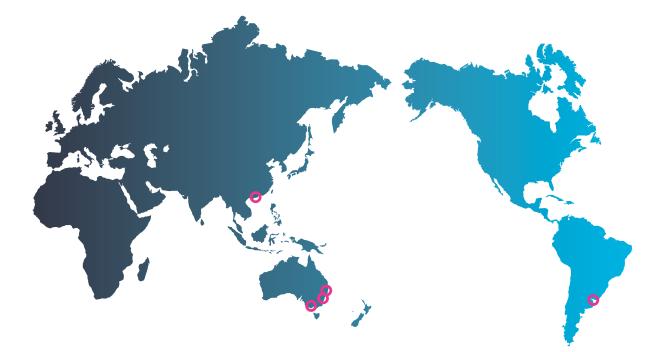
This case highlighted not only the complexity of operating in a 'border closed' environment, but also illustrated how quickly situations can change.





TOP FIVE COUNTRIES WITH PASSENGERS REFUSED ENTRY AT NEW ZEALAND'S BORDER





Maritime Border

The numbers of maritime crew and passengers are relatively small when compared to those arriving through the air border, however the variety and complexity of the issues are consistent. INZ plays an important role supporting the management of risk at New Zealand's maritime border, and this has been particularly important during the border closure.

Over the last few years, New Zealand's popularity as a destination for the foreign cruise market increased significantly, however the industry was hit hard by border closures around the world as cruises ceased to operate very early on in the pandemic.

CASE STUDY FOUR

In February 2020, world media started to report that the Diamond Princess Cruise ship had a large outbreak of COVID-19 on board, and it was subsequently forced to quarantine in a Japanese port. This was at the time when New Zealand border were still open to all but Chinese travellers, and the country had no recorded cases of the virus to date. There were significant concerns that the passengers from the cruise ship may arrive to New Zealand, posing a risk to public health. IBO re-purposed one of its monitoring system to specifically look out for these individuals. Within several days, the system identified two Japanese passengers who disembarked the Diamond Princess and attempted to travel to New Zealand. Both passengers were prevented from boarding the flight.

Maritime border exceptions

IBO worked with Customs, Maritime New Zealand and the Ministry of Health to establish an inter-agency process for administering the Maritime Border Order during the border closure. The Order bans foreign ships from arriving in New Zealand, with a range of exceptions, including fishing ships, cargo ships and those vessels with a humanitarian reason or a compelling need for the ship to be delivered to a NZ business.

Establishing the border exception system at pace and under constantly changing operational conditions has been a testament to the professionalism of INZ staff. Alongside the managed isolation and quarantine system, the border exception system has allowed for the effective management of the border closure and the protection of public health.

CASE STUDY FIVE

GERMAN YACHT CREW

In September 2020 three German sailors arrived into the Bay of Islands from Tahiti on a small yacht. The yacht was met on arrival by government representatives from Health, Police, MPI, Customs and Immigration. This multi-agency response was required as the yacht arrived in Opua without the necessary approval from the Director-General of Health or the required visas issued to the crew by INZ – both mandatory requirements following the border closure.

The yacht was stopped at the breakwater for Opua Marina where Health processed the crew first and undertook rapid Covid tests, this was followed by standard Customs and MPI clearance. Immigration staff were then taken out to the breakwater where a Senior Border Officer interviewed the crew. Ultimately all three were refused entry and placed into Police custody. Following liaison efforts with the German Embassy, and airlines, all three crew members were promptly removed from New Zealand and returned to Germany at their own expense.





670,338	NEWZEALAND
261,663	AUSTRALIA
124,962	USA
116,370	G R E A T B R I T A I N
93,686	CHINA

IBO takes on a wider range of tasks

Border Exception EOI processing

In the months following the border closure, border restrictions were put in place to only allow people with a critical purpose to travel to and enter New Zealand. These categories included: critical health workers; partners, dependents or guardians of visa holders or NZ citizens or residents; some visa holders ordinarily residing in NZ; and a small number of others including humanitarian exceptions.

People eligible for these categories requested a border exception through an online 'expression of interest' process which was administered by IBO staff. Those found to meet the strict criteria were then invited to apply to a visa processing branch. From March to December 2020 20,272 individual, and 1,626 business EOIs were processed.

As the border closure progressed, the Government opened up further border exception categories mostly for critical workers, and this important work is still ongoing.

Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ) – Operation Mercy

IBO also contributed to the Managed Isolation & Quarantine (MIQ) facilities in Auckland – another initiative to keep NZ free from COVID-19. In May 2020, Border Officers were deployed under Operation Mercy to provide on the ground support to AVSEC at various managed isolation facilities across Auckland. This important work continued till July 2020 at which time a more permanent workforce was employed to run MIQ facilities.

Managed Isolation Allocation System (MIAS)

In October 2020 the government introduced the Managed Isolation Allocation system (MIAS) for issuing accommodation vouchers. This helped MIQ to align passengers wanting to travel to NZ with available rooms at participating facilities. On 5 October 2020, all passengers attempting to board a flight to New Zealand were required to hold a valid voucher that confirmed their allocation space at a MIQ facility in New Zealand. Border Officers were trained to use the MIAS system to assist airlines with the verification of vouchers.

As room capacity was often stretched, Border Officers were tasked with assessing passengers who may qualify for an emergency allocation. Border Officers allowed uplift of passenger as long as certain criteria were met.

VOLATILITY OF FLIGHT SCHEDULE CHANGES:

In November Border Officers were tasked with assisting passengers with MIQ bookings who had been affected by flight schedule changes. The increasing volatility of airline schedules resulted in many hundreds of passengers vouchers becoming invalid. Border Officers were trained to manage those queries and update vouchers once passengers were able to confirm their new flight bookings. This valuable working is still ongoing.

CASE STUDY SIX

FRAUDULENTLY ALTERED MIQ VOUCHER:

In December 2020, a family group attempted to board a flight departing from Dubai to Auckland. The family consisted of six NZ citizens and a minor travelling on an Australian passport. They had presented to airline staff a MIQ voucher which showed they were due to arrive into NZ on 9 January 2021. The airline emailed a copy of the voucher to check if the family group was still ok to travel to New Zealand.

Border Officers compared the scan against the voucher on MIAS and immediately noted several discrepancies, indicating that it was not genuine. In accordance with the Air Border Order, the airline offloaded the passengers and IBO advised the family that the minor must apply for visa to enter New Zealand.

All hands to the pump

IBO staff were also involved in a number of All of Government (AoG) response initiatives in the early stages of the border closure. These included: providing DIA with information to help them with emergency grant assessments; working with NZ Police to assist with compliance requests during level four and three lockdowns; processing working holiday visa extensions; processing work visa applications; processing transit visa applications.

Along with taking on additional work at IBO, a number of IBO staff were also seconded or deployed into other roles across MBIE and the wider government, making a valuable contribution to AoG efforts. This outcome was a testament to both the skills and the flexibility of the staff and management team.



Future state – a more cohesive border

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on traveller volumes and has inevitably changed the way we interact with passengers. It has also altered the nature of what we do at IBO, and how we do it. Over the 2019-2020 years, passenger volumes reduced from approximately 20,000 people per day to approximately 300-400 passengers per day arriving in New Zealand. A reduction in passenger flows, in conjunction with a more complex operating environment, presents both challenges and opportunities for the border sector.

Since 21 January 2019 NZCS and INZ have been working together on a Collaborative Passenger Targeting (CPT) project. This has involved Border Officers and Customs Officers sitting side-by-side in the Integrated Targeting and Operations Centre (ITOC) in the Customhouse in central Auckland. CPT has seen excellent results.

In late 2019 the Head of Immigration New Zealand and the Comptroller for Customs agreed that the programme would extend to a 24-hour, seven-day a week operation. At the time, it was envisaged that this would mean staff co-locating in premises near the airport where all border agencies would be represented. COVID-19, and the reduction in traveller volumes unfortunately halted this important piece of work, however the pause has provided INZ and NZCS with the opportunity to think more broadly about the project, and what further changes might be possible beyond the scope of CPT.

INZ have learned over the last year that border risks are changing and becoming increasingly complex, and our collective response needs to adapt to the challenges that both agencies face. It is envisaged that the outcome of this change programme will maximise the sharing of information and expertise across both agencies which will result in a more cohesive border. These changes will better equip us to deal with the ever changing and increasingly complex work that border is tasked with.



New Zealand Government