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Subject: FORMAL MESSAGE: AUSTRALIA-NZ DIALOGUE ON COVID-19 AND RECONNECTING WITH THE WORLD
Attachments: Australia New Zealand COVID-19 Meeting 2 Sept 2021 - Agenda_PMC Edits.docx
withheld in full s 6(b)(i)
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[SENSITIVE]

FORMAL MESSAGE: AUSTRALIA-NZ DIALOGUE ON COVID-19 AND RECONNECTING WITH THE WORLD

Handling

DPMC: Barnes, Fairhall, Hume, White, Cox, Stratford

Rāpopoto – Summary

Australian and New Zealand officials met (virtually) for the first time to share longer-term thinking and strategic planning for “reconnecting with the world”. This was a Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet-led initiative supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

s6(b)(i)

The Australian Government is not mandating vaccines for the general public. But it is establishing a mechanism that will enable businesses to see digital verification of whether someone has been vaccinated. Businesses would then be able to elect whether they grant permission for that individual to enter the premises. This could be used in a range of locations such as hospitality, workplaces, and large events.

s6(b)(i)

Australians that have been fully vaccinated in Australia will be able to undertake overseas travel and return with less onerous biosecurity requirements ^{s6(a)}

s6(a)

Australian officials confirmed the Government was keen to see trans-Tasman quarantine-free travel re-open as soon as it was safe to do so.

Hohenga – Action

For information

Pūrongo – Report

At New Zealand’s request, DPMC met virtually on 2 September with officials from Australia’s COVID Taskforce to hold strategic discussions on forward planning and policy in respect of COVID-19.

2 DPMC Deputy Chief Executive, Cheryl Barnes, led the New Zealand side, supported by DPMC’s COVID-19 Group and joined by Taylor (CPCD, MFAT) and Ralph (NZHC, CBA). Australian officials were led by s6(b)(i), s9(2)(a) with officials from PMC, Health, the Australian High Commission, and Australian Border Force (ABF) in attendance. The agenda and full attendee list is attached.

3 We focus in this report on the Australian commentary. On the New Zealand side, DCE Barnes provided an update on the Delta outbreak in Auckland and how New Zealand was responding to that challenge, including the importance of maintaining social licence for the government’s approach. Hume spoke about the reconnecting New Zealanders approach and the workstreams being advanced at present.

The virus seeks out disadvantaged communities

4 s6(b)(i)

5 s6(b)(i)

6 s6(b)(i)

7 s6(b)(i)

Released under the Official Information Act

8 s6(b)(i)

9 s6(b)(i)

The NSW Delta Wave

10 s6(b)(i)

11 Hospital admissions from COVID will continue to climb (as at 5 September there were 1,023 in hospital including 172 in ICU in NSW). If cases peak later this month, as vaccination levels increase, this would mean hospital admissions will potentially peak in October taking into account the lag from the point of infection. [Comment: this aligns with NSW Government modelling recently released, see SYD's FM of 8 Sept.)

12 By contrast to Melbourne's second wave last year when vaccinations weren't available, NSW is already beginning to see this play out as "a pandemic of the un-vaccinated" which will be the trend going forward. s6(b)(i)

13 Another variation from Melbourne outbreak last year is the higher number of Delta cases among the younger population. The highest bracket are in their 20s, but many children are being affected also, largely catching the virus from household contacts. However even without vaccination, children are largely asymptomatic or have very mild symptoms with very few hospitalisations. s6(b)(i)

Incentivising vaccination: enabling businesses to require proof of vaccine

14 s6(b)(i)

15 s6(b)(i)

16 s6(b)(i)

17 s6(b)(i)

Government mandated vaccinations

18 s6(b)(i)

However, many states have mandated or announced mandatory vaccinations for certain sectors particularly those working at international borders and in quarantine facilities. Other state-wide examples include, the announcement by WA and Tasmania that COVID vaccinations will become mandatory for all health services staff; Queensland police will be requiring all officers and staff to be vaccinated; and NSW teachers will need to be vaccinated to return to the classroom.

International arrivals

19 s6(b)(i)

s9(2)(c)

s6(b)(i)

20 s6(b)(i)

21 s6(b)(i)

s6(b)(i)

s9(2)(c)

22 s6(b)(i)

23 s6(b)(i)

24 s6(b)(i)

Quarantine-free travel with New Zealand

25 s6(b)(i)

26 s6(b)(i)

Tākupu – Comment

27 This was a useful first set of discussions with Australian counterparts on re-opening. While the meeting tended to focus on domestic management of COVID, international aspects were touched on and the parties agreed to focus on international aspects for the next meeting to be held in 2-3 weeks.

28 s6(b)(i)

We assess this will be an extremely valuable opportunity for information exchange going forward.

MUTU - ENDS