



1 Additional international traffic volumes



Australians stranded overseas and Australian businesses would benefit the most from support that allows additional traffic volumes.

Until more open international borders are in place, short-term support measures should be targeted to allow more international passengers and greater freight volumes. This would support Australia in many ways, including income and employment in operating the international flights.

A risk-based approach to international arrivals and ongoing support arrangements for international air freight are essential over the next six months.

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2 Northern winter 2020 slot waivers



International flights have been granted slot waivers for the northern winter 2020.

The rules for slot allocation mean airlines must operate at least 80% of their allocated slots under normal circumstances. International flights to Australia are at about 10% of pre-COVID levels.

Suspending the requirement for the entire season (to March 2021) will mean airlines can respond to market conditions with appropriate capacity levels, while providing certainty for slot allocations when more open borders become possible.

3 Passenger arrival allocations per flight post 24 October



International airlines need to know soon the international arrival allocations per flight that will apply after 24 October.

International travel is based on known rules and procedures. The Australian and State governments have decided how many Australians can return each day or week with allocations to airlines through to 24 October 2020.

To sell tickets and organise flights for after that date, international airlines need to know soon the maximum number of passengers permitted for flights through to the end of the 2020 calendar year and into 2021.

4 Testing before departure



Rapid testing of passengers for COVID-19 before departure could become an important part of more open international borders.

BARA supports the International Air Transport Association's progress with rapid COVID-19 testing before departure.

Using an electronic process would also make it easier for the Australian Government to efficiently record necessary information from passengers before they arrive into the country.

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Additional international traffic volumes

The prevailing very low traffic volumes have stranded Australians overseas, lost business opportunities, and left many without employment. Short-term assistance to allow increased international traffic volumes would directly help to alleviate all these issues for Australia.

Australia's international aviation industry is operating at a small fraction of its pre-COVID-19 levels. The bans on international travel implemented back in March 2020 have reduced flights and passenger volumes by over 90%. The introduction of mandatory quarantine for international arrivals, together with daily or weekly passenger caps, has further reduced the commercial viability of international flights.

The unfortunate economic and social effects of mitigating COVID-19 for Australia have now been extensively reported on in the media and ongoing government reviews, including the Senate Select Committee on COVID-19.

In addressing these consequences, there is a strong case for prioritising short-term support, both financial and non-financial, which will allow more international passengers and freight. By doing so, Australians can return home in a more orderly manner and increased air freight supports Australian businesses.

As international flights are paying commercial rates for their inputs, it also provides additional income for all parts of Australia's aviation sector, including ground handlers, catering companies, fuel suppliers and the airport operators.

A risk-based approach to international arrivals

BARA estimated in late August 2020 that it was likely 100,000 Australians overseas were seeking to return home, and it would take some six months to return them under the tight international passenger arrival caps.

As well as increases in quarantine capacity, BARA was pleased to hear the Prime Minister's statements that the Australian Government was working towards arrangements where 'Australians can return to Australia from New Zealand without the need to go through quarantine if they're not coming from an area where there is an outbreak of COVID-19'.¹

This is a good example of how a risk-based approach can be sensibly applied that supports greater numbers of international arrivals to Australia while mitigating COVID-19. It would also be sensible to apply such arrangements to Pacific Island nations, making it easier for more Australians to return home and other nationalities to transit through Australian airports.

BARA notes that some overseas countries have already applied a risk-based approach to international arrivals, including Singapore, Hong Kong and Qatar. The measures used across the countries vary.

As one example, a visitor from New Zealand to Singapore undergoes a COVID-19 polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test at the airport upon arrival in Singapore. After being tested, the visitor must take private transport from the airport to their declared accommodation and remain in isolation at that location until notified the test result is negative. If the result is negative, then the traveller from New Zealand can go about their activities in Singapore.²

¹ The Hon Scott Morrison MP, Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service, 18 Sept 2020, Transcript.

² See: <https://safetravel.ica.gov.sg/newzealand/atp/requirements-and-process>



The application of risk-based approaches for international arrivals remains inconsistent across countries. While they cannot be expected to restore pre-COVID-19 levels of passengers, they do, however, offer critical pathways for Australia to address the social and economic problems associated with the existing travel bans and tight caps on international arrivals.

International students and specialist workers

Greater quarantine capacity and risk-based approaches to arrivals can also support more international students and specialist workers entering Australia over the coming months.

BARA notes the comments by the NSW Government about its intention to allow international students to enter Australia from early 2021.³ It will be important enough quarantine capacity is available so that international airlines will still be able to offer enough seats to Australians seeking to return home, especially those in difficult circumstances.

It is in the interests of governments, universities and businesses to examine options for additional quarantine capacity so as to allow more international arrivals.

Extra quarantine capacity might be possible through new models of provision, including hybrid ones where governments has more of a regulatory and inspection function.

Again, such initiatives cannot sustain Australia's international aviation industry in the medium term. But they will contribute towards addressing the immediate social and economic consequences from the bans on international travel. They will also support a minimal network of connectivity of international flights to and from Australia.

³ SMH (24 Sept 2020) Overseas students could be back in NSW by 2021: Ayres.

Maintaining air freight volumes

In 2019, Australia benefited from over 1 million tonnes of combined imports and exports of high value air freight. International passenger aircraft carried most of this freight, with Australian businesses gaining from the sustained growth in international flights, creating substantial freight capacity for importers and exporters.

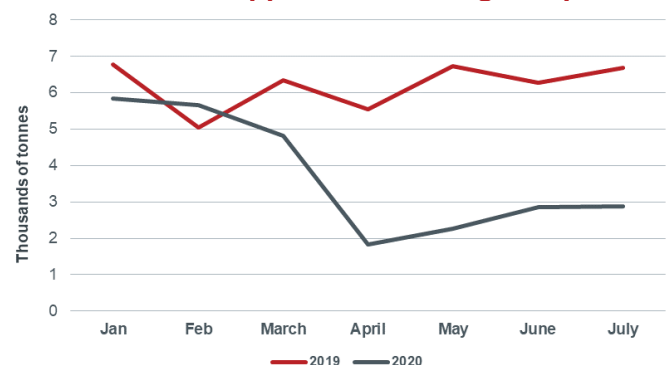
With international passenger flights reduced by some 90%, the capacity available for international air freight has also been reduced.

Data published by the Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics show that gaps remain in the air freight capacity, especially for Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia, where flight numbers are lowest.

The Australian Government's International Freight Assistance Mechanism (IFAM) has been beneficial in supporting Australian businesses by enabling ongoing air freight capacity into Australia. This is necessary given the low commercial viability of international passenger aircraft operating as freight-only flights.

The ongoing assistance will need to match the gradual recovery in international passenger flights so it can support Australian businesses that rely on international air freight.

Queensland's suppressed air freight exports



Source: Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics



Testing before departure

BARA supports the International Air Transport Association's (IATA)⁴ progress with workable solutions to restarting global international aviation, including for Australia. COVID-19 testing before departure provides a critical pathway to more open international borders. BARA would like to see such measures incorporated into Australia's framework for re-starting international aviation.

Given the importance of testing in helping to suppress COVID-19, it is to be expected that advances will occur in testing methods, especially the speed with which test results can be obtained. Media and other reports indicate the opportunity for tests to deliver accurate results within 20 minutes will be shortly available.

IATA's call is to develop a test that not only meets the criteria of speed, accuracy, affordability and ease of use, but could also be administered systematically under the authority of governments following agreed international standards. IATA is pursuing this position through the International Civil Aviation Authority (ICAO), which is leading efforts to develop and implement global standards for the safe operation of international air services amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 testing before departure is the preferred option as it will create a 'clean' environment throughout the travel process. Testing on arrival can discourage travel given the potential for quarantine at the destination in the event of a positive result.

Public opinion on testing

IATA's public opinion research revealed people strongly supported COVID-19 testing in the travel process, as is evident from the following survey results:

- 84% agreed testing should be required of all travellers
- 88% agreed they are willing to undergo testing as part of the travel process.

Public opinion research also indicated testing will help to rebuild passenger confidence in aviation.

Application for Australia

Space at Australia's major international airports would be necessary to administer rapid pre-departure testing. People would need to be tested before check-in.

The international terminals at Australia's major airports have limited space, so it would require careful coordination with airlines and management of passengers. To allow greater passenger volumes, it might also be possible to administer the rapid tests in the nearby car park or other area close to the terminal.

Greater use of electronic processes that record necessary information from arriving passengers would benefit both governments and airlines. Ensuring passengers provide required information in the most efficient and effective manner reduces costs and makes for a more seamless travel experience.

Many overseas countries have established web-based applications where passengers register and provide all required information before departure. It is both more efficient and provides the flexibility to amend the information sought from passengers at short notice.

⁴ See www.iata.org/en/pressroom/pr/2020-09-22-01/