



## Greater international quarantine capacity

The Board of Airline Representatives of Australia (BARA)<sup>1</sup> notes the number of Australians registered to return home has now increased to over 32,000 despite passengers arriving each day. International airlines were finally today allocated their per flight passenger caps to apply in just four days from now, and those caps cover only four weeks from 25 October. This delay has frustrated international airlines, and disrupted their ability to meet allocated cap numbers; it will also lead to fewer Australians being able to return home in the four weeks to 21 November. It has already led to yet more uncertainty and stress for Australians stranded overseas because international airlines cannot tell many of them when they will be able to travel home.

BARA understands that at present, each week some 1,600 people undergo 14 days of mandatory quarantine when they enter New South Wales from Victoria. If, when the requirements on arrivals from Victoria are eased, this domestic quarantine capacity were allocated to international flights, it would make a big difference. Expanding the New Zealand Safe Travel Zone into all Australian states and territories and a regulatory framework that permits the commercial provision of quarantine services would also benefit Australians stranded overseas.

### More Australians stranded overseas are officially registering

In late August, based on caps that only allowed some 4,000 Australians to return each week, it would have taken some six months to cover what BARA estimated could be up to 100,000 Australians overseas. BARA notes the number of Australians that have registered their intent to return home with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has steadily increased from about 19,000 in late August to now over 32,000.

“The increasing total number of Australians registered with DFAT despite ongoing arrivals each day is consistent with BARA’s estimate of a total number of 100,000 Australians overseas that were, or would be, seeking to return home back in late August. It will become an even bigger problem when many Australians find they cannot return home before the end of 2020, which is still projected to happen with today’s per flight passenger caps. Most of the seats on the 150 international flights arriving each week into Australian airports will remain empty under the tight international passenger arrival caps.

<sup>1</sup> BARA represents 33 airlines, which provide 90% of all international passenger flights and carry most freight to and from Australia.



“The joint initiative between the Australian and Northern Territory governments with the Howard Springs facility is important. In accepting 1,000 Australians a month, it is correctly recognised as a welcome addition to the existing international passenger arrival caps. There are a number of airlines that have continued to operate international flights during the COVID-19 pandemic, often with largely empty aircraft due to the passenger caps, who remain committed and ready to assist vulnerable Australians stranded overseas,” Barry Abrams, Executive Director of BARA said.

### **Immediate problems – allocation of per flight passenger caps from 25 October**

International airlines were only today given their per flight passenger caps that will apply from 25 October to 21 November. This is unacceptable given the problems it is creating for international airlines in meeting the arrival caps. One airline has informed BARA that it has been forced to cancel its planned flight for 25 October because it has been told too late how many passengers it could carry on the flight.

“International airlines continue to display a high level of professionalism in supporting Australia to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. They are now being tested even further by the Australian Government, which finally today issued them with per flight arrival caps that will apply in just four days and only for four weeks. The allocation of the next international passenger arrival caps to apply from 22 November must occur well before this date to allow international airlines to better support Australians stranded overseas,” Mr Abrams said.

### **Transfer of domestic quarantine capacity and other measures**

Passengers arriving into Sydney Airport from Melbourne Airport are required to undergo 14 days of mandatory quarantine. BARA understands that each week some 1,600 people from Victoria go into mandatory quarantine in Sydney, which represents over one-third of total quarantine numbers.

“Victoria’s achievements in suppressing COVID-19 do offer an important opportunity for Australians stranded overseas. When the quarantine requirements on arrivals from Victoria into NSW are eased or removed, the allocation of this quarantine capacity to international flights would provide for a large increase in the number of Australians that could return home, likely more than 6,600 per month,” Mr Abrams said.

Expanding the New Zealand Safe Travel Zone to all Australian States and Territories would allow more Australians from New Zealand to return home in the most efficient manner and increase the number of Australians that could return from other overseas countries under the existing arrival caps. Some 20 flights from NZ have been arriving in Brisbane each month carrying about 500 passengers who go into quarantine. That number could now go to Australians stranded in other overseas countries if the New Zealand Safe Travel Zone was expanded to Queensland.

Permitting and regulating the commercial provision of quarantine services would also allow people to travel to Australia for business without reducing the quarantine capacity available for returning Australians.

“There is still much that can be done to increase the number of Australians who can return home over the coming weeks and months. Close coordination with airlines is needed to get the most from new initiatives and existing arrangements, which will also increase the certainty Australians overseas have of their expected return date home,” Mr Abrams said. **[ENDS]**