



Restarting international travel

The Board of Airline Representatives of Australia (BARA)¹ welcomes the recent announcements by the NSW Government about its intention to permit greater international travel when vaccination targets are met as described in *National Plan to transition Australia's National COVID-19 Response*.

While this commitment is welcome, some practical issues must first be resolved before international travel can restart in a worthwhile and confident manner. The extensive and complex processes now in place at airports allow for a very small number of international passengers and flights each day. Any substantive increase in international flights and passengers is not possible under current operating requirements.

International airlines have consistently been seeking engagement with governments at all levels to discuss how to plan for the safe and gradual increase of flights and passengers. Unfortunately, there has been limited engagement with industry to develop sound plans that can be operationalised effectively. Airlines also recognise the significant resources across health, police and military staff devoted to supporting the arrival of international passengers and aircrew into Sydney Airport each day. Resources that could now be better deployed to supporting efforts in managing the current outbreak, especially given the majority of arriving aircrew are fully vaccinated or tested pre-departure before they arrive.

The airlines remain open and committed to working with governments to support their efforts in managing COVID-19 safely, while allowing for the return of more Australians and laying the foundations of the safe and sustainable restart of international travel later this year.

Moving from minimal flights to operations at scale

Pre-pandemic, airlines operated some 2,000 international flights to and from Australia each week, providing air transport services to over 850,000 passengers. International airlines now operate about 13 commercial international passenger flights a day into Sydney Airport, down from over 110 per day. These 13 daily flights carry only about 215 passengers in total, which will reduce to some 108 per day from 8 September. BARA expects international airlines to further reduce flights into NSW in line with the arrival cap reductions.

“Member airlines report that it is not unusual for it to take an hour to clear an international flight at the airport, even though the flight only has about 25 passengers. The extensive and complex arrangements

¹ BARA represents 33 airlines, which provide 90% of international passenger flights and carry most air freight to and from Australia.



used to hotel quarantine passengers and aircrew on arrival will need to be greatly simplified and streamlined to support more international flights and passengers.

“Vaccination and testing requirements provide the opportunity to move from state authorities directly managing passengers and aircrew to a set of clearly defined expectations and operating practices, which will require far fewer government resources. However, BARA is unaware of any planning documents that contemplate how the processes for passengers and aircrew will be simplified and streamlined, which are necessary for a restart to international travel. Work on this needs to occur quickly to allow greater travel options later this year,” Barry Abrams, Executive Director of BARA said.

Arrival processes

All international passengers who arrive at the capital city airports are extensively and directly managed, as described in Attachment A. The arrivals process cannot be practically ‘upscaled’ for more passenger arrivals, which would also greatly increase the health and police resources required.

“Pre-arrival information, electronic processes and clear communication and coordination between all parties at the airport will be necessary for international aviation to restart successfully. Many of the current extensive processes will need to be reduced or removed if international borders are to reopen, stage by stage safely. It will take some time to put new arrangements in place, so early consultation with industry will best support an orderly process of reopening,” Mr Abrams said

International aircrew

Arriving international aircrew follow the same process as passengers plus they undergo a PCR COVID-test. Often the aircrew have already departed on their flight the next day before the test result is received.

The general requirements and process for aircrew from the airport to the quarantine hotel on layover then back to the airport for their departing flight are provided in Attachment B. BARA understands that NSW Police are escorting some 500 international aircrew (passenger and freight flights) each day to and from quarantine hotels. This process would use substantially more of the state’s resources should they continue to apply when international flights increase.

“International airlines would welcome an operating practices model for international aircrew that gives them more scope to efficiently manage their daily flight operations. It could be based around a clear statement of expectations, and compliance monitoring, including consequences for any airline not keeping to the statement of expectations,” Mr Abrams said.

Network operations

Global hubs allow airlines to carry passengers and freight with efficient operating costs. This means individual arriving flights have passengers from various countries with differing vaccination status.

“A workable model for international aviation cannot be a complex framework of flight requirements into Australia that tries to divide up the status of passengers via the arriving flights. Any future arrangements will need to be clear and simple, to ensure airlines can operate consistently and efficiently, and passengers can have confidence in being able to understand the regulations that are in place.



“BARA and individual international airlines have consistently sought to engage with governments over the last 18 months about a risk-based approach to international travel. The industry’s desire to engage has been based around being able to plan together, so that travel can restart safely and confidently based on the decisions made by government.

“While useful engagement has to date been limited, the opportunity for collaboration remains. The experience, lessons and data that airlines have obtained over the past 18 months of pandemic operations would be valuable to government in progressing the *National Plan to transition Australia’s National COVID-19 Response*. Engagement with industry now has the potential to both free up health and police resources for immediate use outside international aviation as well as establish the foundations to safely restart international travel later this year,” Mr Abrams said. **[ENDS]**



Attachment A International passengers arrivals process

Step	Agencies	Activities
Aircraft arrival	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABF • Health authority • AQIS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm inbound numbers with crew and airline representative • Play on board announcement through PA system • Clearance to disembark and confirm passengers holding arrival cards
Hold clearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AQIS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearance to open holds
Passenger disembarkation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABF • Health authority • AQIS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitored by all staff present • As passengers disembark, AQIS leave • As passengers disembark, health authority leave • ABF escort to screening
Passenger escort to screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABF • AQIS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Escort to health screening area line up
Temperature checks pre-entry to screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passenger temperatures checked and initial questions on “how they feel”, symptoms etc.
Pre-screening questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health authority • Police 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health authority asks screening questions • Police sit next to health staff to monitor (assume to manage any escalations)
Passenger health screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrival screening questions and recording information
Border control/passport control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entry to Australia and passport control
Baggage collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passengers collect baggage • ABF monitor to ensure passenger flow to next stage and that they do not enter other zones
Pre-customs clearance questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABF • AQIS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-pandemic questions on quarantine items etc.
Customs clearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABF • AQIS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-pandemic baggage scanning and clearance
Passengers directed to staging area for hotel transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passengers directed to line up area for next stage
Staging area questions pre-bus boarding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police • AFP • ADF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police, ADF and AFP monitor passenger flow to buses • Any diplomats, young people and unaccompanied minors’ questions and clearances given by police
Escort to bus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police • ABF • ADF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police and ADF escort passengers to waiting bus • AFP in proximity to monitor
Hotel allocation once on bus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police (operations center) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once passengers on board, call made to Police Operations Center and hotel allocated • Call made by supervising police officer • Driver advised which hotel to take passengers
Escort bus to hotel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bus leaves for hotel with 2 x motorbike police escort

Source: Process map developed by BARA’s international airline members to describe the process as it largely applies across the capital city international airports.



Attachment B **International aircrew requirements**

Step	Agencies	Activities
Airport to quarantine hotel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police • Ground transport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police escort crew to transport • Aircrew taken by bus to allocated quarantine hotel • Police brief crew on the bus before disembarking bus • Once aircrew have checked in at hotel lobby, they go back to police to show their passport • Police escort aircrew to the lift • Police meet aircrew at the allocated floor and escort them to their room
Quarantine hotel to transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police • Ground transport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police determine if it is ok to allow aircrew to check-out depending on whether another aircrew is waiting in the lobby; ground transport often need to wait • Police oversee aircrew entering bus • Aircrew are transported to the airport by ground transport
To the airport and departing flight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AFP • Private security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aircrew are met kerbside and names are cross-checked • Aircrew escorted by private security to ABF • Aircrew are processed and escorted by private security through security check point • Aircrew wait for AFP to escort them to the departure gate

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