



# International flights into Western Australia and hotel quarantine

The Board of Airline Representatives of Australia (BARA)<sup>1</sup> estimates there are some 20,000 Western Australians overseas, of whom only 265 are currently allowed to return each week through hotel quarantine. BARA considers the Western Australian Government should be accountable for this situation and decide which few of its citizens can return each week. The stress and difficulties faced by Australians stranded overseas should not be effectively outsourced to international airlines via the international passenger arrival cap, as set by the Western Australian Government.

The Western Australian Government has just announced that West Australians may now be able to fly into other Australian jurisdictions first and then may qualify for home quarantine for entry into Western Australia. It is difficult to understand the risk-basis for a person's quarantine requirements to be determined by their first point of entry into Australia. BARA notes that it has proven extremely difficult to operationalise strict home quarantine arrangements at scale.

BARA also considers it is time to review the need for 14 days hotel quarantine for unvaccinated returning Australians into New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia. Quarantining this small cohort of passengers (likely less than 100 per day on average), who are then released into a community with COVID widely circulating, is not consistent with the stated rationale of hotel quarantine. If hotel quarantine was replaced with alternative measures, such as a period of home self-isolation and required testing, it would free up health and other resources that could be better deployed in supporting the current wave of infections within communities.

## International flights and passengers into Western Australia

Since the outwards international travel ban was lifted on 1 November 2021, over 6,000 people are estimated to have steadily outflowed from Western Australia. When these passengers left Australia there was always a risk the international border would not re-open as planned on 5 February 2022. Combined with those people already overseas and seeking to return once the border re-opened, the backlog of passengers is estimated at some 20,000. With the 265 arrivals for hotel quarantine allowed each week, it would take some 18 months to return all these people to Western Australia. And the backlog could grow if people continue to leave Western Australia and then seek to return when only a very small number can do so each week.

<sup>1</sup> BARA represents 34 airlines, which provide 90% of all international passenger flights and carry most freight to and from Australia.



“International airlines reported that their arriving flights from 5 February into Perth Airport had high load factors with hundreds of passengers on each flight for many days. It will now be necessary to choose which few of these booked individuals and families can return, while the remainder will either need to remain stranded overseas or perhaps return to a different Australian state.

“It should not again fall to the international airlines to choose which few of the 20,000 people can return to Western Australia over the coming months. All of these passengers will have legitimate reasons for returning, which generates considerable stress between them and international airline staff.

“The Western Australian Government should accept accountability for the situation and obtain information about its stranded citizens. It can do so either via the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) or, preferably, do it directly. It could then choose who can return each week based on its assessment of the circumstances faced by individuals and families and allocate the available hotel quarantine places through its G2G Pass.

“The recent announcement over home quarantine arrangements via entry into other states such as New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia is difficult to understand. Why cannot the passengers simply fly direct into Western Australia and then home quarantine? And why have hotel quarantine at all then?” Barry Abrams, Executive Director of BARA said.

### **The merits of hotel quarantine for unvaccinated international arrivals**

A small number of returning Australians into New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia are choosing not to be vaccinated, and undergo 14 days mandatory hotel quarantine. At present there are likely less than 100 unvaccinated international arrivals per day on average.

The National Review into hotel quarantine found: “Hotel quarantine is difficult to endure, particularly for vulnerable people. It is an expensive resource and requires a highly specialised workforce to support the system including clinical, welfare and security services in order to mitigate risk and discharge duty of care obligations.” And: “Countries such as Australia and New Zealand implemented border restrictions together with 14 days quarantine in order to prevent spread of the virus.”<sup>2</sup>

The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) has also noted that: “Whilst international travellers currently have a higher likelihood of infection, this may change as Omicron spreads within the community. Need to continuously review the benefit of this measure.”<sup>3</sup>

“Hotel quarantine is a resource intensive activity for everyone involved, implemented during a time when its purpose was to support little to no community transmission of COVID-19. With over 400,000 active COVID-19 cases now in the community, the merits of 14 days mandatory quarantine for this small cohort of passengers – who already have a negative COVID-19 test before departure to Australia – does not seem to fit well with its stated purpose.

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<sup>2</sup> See National Review of Hotel Quarantine, pp.3–5.

<sup>3</sup> See [www.health.gov.au/news/ahppc-statement-on-the-omicron-public-health-implications-and-response-options](https://www.health.gov.au/news/ahppc-statement-on-the-omicron-public-health-implications-and-response-options)



“Ending hotel quarantine and perhaps replacing it with other measures, such as home self-isolation and a testing regime, could free up considerable health and other support services that could be better used supporting the current situation in the community.

“Desirably, governments would review all existing testing, self-isolation and other measures for international passengers and air crew to ensure they match the identified risk. For example, requiring arriving passengers to keep a log of their travel journey home from the airport, including wiping down any surfaces such as petrol bowsers, toilet doors and locks with disinfectant wipes before and after use<sup>4</sup>, seems redundant,” Mr Abrams said. **[ENDS]**

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<sup>4</sup> NSW Health guidelines for recent fully vaccinated arrivals.