



Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee

Minute of Decision

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Extending the COVID-19 New Zealanders Stranded Overseas Support Programme

Portfolio **Social Development and Employment**

On 7 April 2021, the Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee, having been authorised by the Prime Minister to have Power to Act:

- 1 **noted** that:
 - 1.1 on 3 April 2020, the COVID-19 Ministerial Group agreed to resume or continue payment of certain benefits and pensions to Ministry of Social Development (MSD) clients stranded abroad as a result of COVID-19 [CMG-20-MIN-0047];
 - 1.2 on 20 April 2020, the Minister for Social Development and Employment established the COVID-19 New Zealanders Stranded Overseas Support Programme (NZSOS programme) to provide special financial support to eligible MSD clients overseas who are unable to return to New Zealand due to COVID-19;
- 2 **noted** that in September 2020, Cabinet agreed to extend the expiry of the NZSOS programme from 20 October 2020 to 27 April 2021 [CAB-20-MIN-0452];
- 3 **noted** that as at 22 March 2021, 1,298 clients were being supported by the NZSOS programme, and the impact of COVID-19 may be limiting these clients' ability to return to New Zealand before the expiry of the programme;
- 4 **agreed** to extend the NZSOS programme for four months, to 31 August 2021;
- 5 **noted** that the Minister for Social Development and Employment will amend the NZSOS programme with immediate effect before 27 April 2021 to implement the extension, and to allow payments currently being made under the existing programme to continue to eligible clients;
- 6 **directed** MSD officials to clearly communicate to clients that the NZSOS programme will not be extended further beyond 31 August 2021;
- 7 **directed** MSD officials to undertake a check of the location and eligibility of all clients being supported by the NZSOS programme to receive ongoing support under the programme commencing in the week of 12 April 2021;
- 8 **noted** that MSD officials will determine the eligibility of most clients who respond to the check referred to in paragraph 7 above by the end of May 2021 and payments will be stopped for those who do not respond to the check by 6 June 2021;

- 9 **directed** MSD officials to undertake a check of the eligibility of New Zealand Superannuation (NZS) and Veterans’ Pension (VP) clients being supported by the NZSOS programme to alternative support options, including payment under statutory portability provisions and reciprocal social security agreements, and to transition as many clients as possible to alternative supports;
- 10 **directed** MSD officials to actively work to transition NZS and VP clients to alternative support options and encourage the 71 beneficiaries currently being supported by the programme to return to New Zealand;
- 11 **noted** that once MSD has gathered information about clients’ locations, as part of the eligibility check noted in paragraph 7 above, if quarantine-free travel opens with another country (including Australia), MSD will directly communicate with clients in that country to re-assess their eligibility for continued payment under the NZSOS programme and payments will be stopped within seven weeks, unless MSD is satisfied they remain eligible;
- 12 **noted** that MSD officials will report back to the Minister for Social Development and Employment on the number of people being supported by the NZSOS programme, who have exited the programme and who are eligible to transition to alternative support options by 1 July 2021;
- 13 **agreed** to increase spending to provide for the costs associated with the decision in paragraph 4 above, with the following impact on the operating balance and net core Crown debt:

	\$m increase/(decrease)				
Vote Social Development	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25 & Outyears
Operating Balance Impact	6.012	6.111	-	-	-
Debt Impact	-	-	-	-	-
No Impact	0.904	0.921	-	-	-
Total	6.916	7.032	-	-	-

- 14 **approved** the following changes to appropriations to give effect to the decision in paragraph 13 above:

	\$m increase/(decrease)				
Vote Social Development Minister for Social Development and Employment	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25 & Outyears
Benefits or Related Expenses: NZ Beneficiaries Stranded Overseas	6.916	7.032	-	-	-
Total Operating	6.916	7.032	-	-	-

- 15 **agreed** that the changes to appropriations for 2020/21 above be included in the 2020/21 Supplementary Estimates and that, in the interim, the increases be met from Imprest Supply;

- 16 **agreed** that the operating balance impact and net core Crown debt impact in paragraph 13 above of the expenses incurred under paragraph 14 above be charged against the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund established as part of Budget 2020;
- 17 **authorised** the Minister for Social Development and Employment to make minor and technical policy, design, and implementation decisions regarding the NZSOS programme.

Rachel Clarke
Committee Secretary

Present:

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern
Hon Grant Robertson
Hon Kelvin Davis
Hon Dr Megan Woods
Hon Chris Hipkins
Hon Carmel Sepuloni (Chair)
Hon Andrew Little
Hon Poto Williams
Hon Kris Faafoi
Hon Peeni Henare
Hon Willie Jackson
Hon Ayesha Verrall
Hon Aupito William Sio
Hon Priyanca Radhakrishnan

Officials present from:

Office of the Prime Minister
Office of the SWC Chair
Officials Committee for SWC