REOPENING AUSTRALIA

How to ease restrictions as the vaccine rolls out

Part 2: International Reopening

Overview

Australia's goal for managing COVID-19 in 2021 should be to achieve a balance of positive health and economic outcomes. Governments have a duty to minimise both the direct virus health impacts, as well as the economic and social impacts of response measures.

To date, Australia's successful response to COVID has been managed through a range of significant restrictions: from the closure of domestic and international borders, lockdowns, social distancing and gathering restrictions to mandatory COVIDSafe practices in workplaces and public spaces.

These measures have mitigated the broader spread of COVID-19 and variants into the Australian community.

The introduction of COVID-19 vaccines further strengthens Australia's ability to control the virus and ease restrictions, altering the risk environment. An effective vaccine rollout will be key to easing domestic restrictions and implementing a staged reopening of international borders.

ACCI's extensive domestic and global business network and our policy expertise across work health and safety, economics, employment, tourism, trade and workplace relations provide a well-informed basis for recommendations that achieve stronger economic and jobs outcomes while continuing to manage health risk.

This document is part two of a two-part series on 'Reopening Australia'. Part 2 focuses on international reopening. It follows the release of *Reopening Australia, Part 1: Domestic Reopening and Living with COVID* which can be found at https://www.australianchamber.com.au/news/acci-releases-priorities-for-easing-domestic-restrictions/

The proposed recommendations In Part 2 cover:

- ACCI's national principles for reopening Australia
- Why we should open to other countries
- How we open up to other countries
- ACCI Four Stage Plan for International Travel Reopening
- Enablers for international reopening
- Risk factors to monitor against the plan
- Four Stages for International reopening
- Arrangements for specific cohorts

ACCI's national principles for reopening Australia

As covered in Part 1, the overarching objective for managing COVID-19 in 2021, recognising the new risk environment, is to achieve a balance of economic and health objectives. Governments have a duty to minimise both the direct virus health impacts, as well as the economic and social (including mental health) impacts of response measures.

1. **National Cabinet prioritises an efficient and expeditious Australian COVID-19 vaccine rollout and maintains the commitment to a consistent national vaccine strategy.**

2. **States and Territories manage community transmission consistently and in proportion to risk.** Governments act quickly and decisively in response to future outbreaks and commit to a nimble, targeted and localised response. Decisions and actions are informed by clear health advice, published data and modelling and are proportionate to the risk of harm and transmission.

3. **National Cabinet takes immediate action to build and maintain community and business confidence in relation to vaccine rollout and COVID responses:** Executed through various mechanisms including greater transparency, a clear joined up approach between both levels of government and targeted media campaigns.

4. **National Cabinet commits to providing a 'single source of truth' in relation to the vaccine strategy and reopening with clear and consistent communication:** Governments commit to transparent, consistent and well-communicated actions when COVID restrictions change or changes are made to the vaccine roll-out to ensure greater trust and certainty. This includes committing to communicate with an agreed common language and publishing data on the vaccine rollout in the same manner as COVID cases, testing and tracing (i.e. transparent data with sufficient granularity and regularity).

5. **Governments and agencies continue to build and maximise partnerships with the community and business:** Relevant authorities actively engage and consult meaningfully and in a timely fashion on decisions that impact people in business. Businesses, with their operational expertise and connection to workers and the community, can offer authorities solutions and access to existing distribution channels.

6. **Governments ensure ongoing readiness of response capabilities:** Review and monitor ongoing readiness, ensuring resources are adequate and available for vaccine roll-out, testing, contact tracing and quarantine in areas of virus spread and to prevent community transmission.

7. **Governments and agencies maintain and support COVIDSafe practices**: Governments act to avoid complacency during the vaccine rollout and engage in continuous improvement activities with a focus on ensuring greater consistency of measures at lowest cost proportionate to the risk and a review of ongoing need of bespoke COVID protocols as risk changes.

8. **National Cabinet reopens Australia to the rest of the world through a risk managed, staged process that is interoperable with other national systems.**

Why we should open to other countries

Australia is an open trading nation which derives enormous economic and social benefit from being engaged with other countries for business, trade, family, culture, leisure and sporting reasons. Some of our most lucrative and job-generating export industries are in the service economy, including tourism, international education, events and professional services. These are industries in which we have traditionally had a competitive advantage, but the partnerships that drive them need to be continually nurtured. Unfortunately, they need to be urgently salvaged due to our international borders having largely been closed for well over a year.

We need a path to reopen that manages the health risk while at the same time recognises that staying closed to the world is not an option we should contemplate any longer. Our long-term prosperity is at risk. The roll out of the vaccine in Australia provides us with an opportunity to reset.

It is unsurprising that the community remains concerned about the spread of COVID-19 virus. Images of what has been happening throughout the world have scared us, and by contrast, made us feel safe and reassured that it is not happening here. Support for this success has pushed government responses to the virus to an extent where even one locally acquired case can result in lockdowns and significant economic and community disruption. But resetting our thinking means that as the most vulnerable people in our community are vaccinated, the occasional locally acquired case of COVID should not scare us any longer – it does not need to be front page news. Our goal has always been to suppress the virus, but many of the community responses and government-imposed restrictions have been aligned with an elimination approach.

The community has also been reassured that despite the closed borders our economy is doing well, with job opportunities growing at a rapid pace. This is a positive result of our successful management of the virus, but the economic good news is being artificially fuelled by strong government stimulus, funded through borrowing which is not sustainable. We are already seeing drags on the economy, such as the loss of billions of dollars in international tourism and education and country-wide skills and labour shortages, particularly in regional areas. The lack of new international students and working holiday makers is exacerbating the difficulty in securing unskilled labour particularly for short-term and seasonal work. The inability to bring in skilled migrants to fill gaps in our workforce is limiting both the services provided to local communities as well as job opportunities for Australians. Our professionals including our international cultural artists are not able to travel overseas to undertake work that would bring back into Australia valuable export earnings.

Most importantly, we are who we are because Australia is part of a global community. Every effort must now be taken to put in place arrangements that will allow us to open in a planned, transparent, staged and safe way so that we can reconnect to that community.

How we open up to other countries

ACCI has developed a staged plan that centres around the principle that **Australia's reopening to the rest of the world should be a risk managed, staged process that is interoperable with other national systems.** The staged plan is not reliant on all States and Territories signing on, however we encourage any jurisdiction willing to operate in this way to do so in coordination with the Federal Government.

The key elements that underpin this plan include:

- Through effective vaccine rollout and relevant COVIDSafe management, risk is mitigated to acceptable levels which can be addressed by available health resources and protocols in each entry location.
- The process to restart is risk-based and staged, so that each step is sufficiently evaluated and controlled.
- The reopening protocols are interoperable with other national systems.
- Australians should be increasingly allowed to travel overseas respecting their right for free movement.

Australian Biosecurity Act

On 18 March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 outbreak in Australia, the Governor-General declared that a human biosecurity emergency exists. The declaration provides the Minister for Health expansive powers to issue directions and set requirements in order to combat the outbreak. The legislative instrument used is the *Biosecurity Act 2015* (Cth).

The Biosecurity determination is reviewed every three months with the most recent review on the 17th March 2021 and the next on the 17th June 2021.

The original purpose of this regulatory approach was to stop Australians defying the 'do not travel' warnings, travelling overseas and putting Australians at risk on their return. As we seek to gradually reopen international travel through a risk-based, phased approach as the vaccine rolls out, a plan to create further country exemptions and finally revoke the ban on outbound travel is needed.

ACCI Four Stage Plan for International Travel Reopening

The following table summarises the proposed plan to restart international travel in four stages. The plan overlays the three dimensions of risk: vaccinated or not, the country that the traveler is coming from or going to, and where Australia's vaccination program is up to. All travel would include a suitable testing regime appropriate to the risk.

	Stage One	Stage Two		Stage Three		Stage Four	
Australian Vaccine Rollout	Phase 1a and 1b commenced	Phase 1a and 1b substantially complete		Phase 2a substantially complete		Phase 2b (most of Australian population) substantially complete	
Vaccination Status	All Travellers	Unvaccinated	Vaccinated	Unvaccinated	Vaccinated	Unvaccinated	Vaccinated
Low Risk Country of Origin or destination	NZ Bubble only	Quarantine-free two-way travel	Quarantine-free two-way travel	Quarantine-free two-way travel	Quarantine-free two-way travel	Quarantine-free two-way travel	Quarantine-free two-way travel
Medium Risk Country of Origin or Destination	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine[1]	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Australians – unlimited departure and Suitable Other Quarantine[2] on return (No arrival cap) / Non-Australian arrivals - Suitable Other Quarantine (under separate arrival caps[3])	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Quarantine-free two-way travel	Australians- unlimited departure Suitable Other Quarantine (under separate cap) / Non-Australian arrivals - Suitable Other Quarantine (under separate cap)	Quarantine-free two- way travel
High Risk Country of Origin or Destination	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Suitable Other Quarantine (under separate arrival cap)	Suitable Other Quarantine (under separate cap)	Quarantine-free two- way travel
Very High Risk Country of origin or destination	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Quarantine-free two-way travel

[1] Government Managed Quarantine is hotel quarantine or specialist quarantine facilities such as Howard Springs

[2] Farm Quarantine, Home quarantine/self-isolation, Other approved quarantine where the time may be shorter than 14 days but subject to a second negative test after an appropriate number of days.

[3] There should be different caps for arrivals from high/very high and low/medium risk countries. From stage 2 there should be no cap on the number of vaccinated Australians travelling to and returning from low/medium risk countries. Where a traveller has been to more than one country the risk is rated according to the country with the highest risk that they have been to in the last 21 days before arrival.

Enablers for international reopening

The plan embraces COVID risk mitigations that need to be built into reopening stages including:

- The classification of regions / countries according to risk based on the number of cases reported, the effectiveness of testing and reporting of cases and the effectiveness of the vaccination rollout in that area (where possible consistent with international definitions)[4];
- Where a traveller has been to more than one country their risk is rated according to the country with the highest risk that they have been to in the last 21 days before arrival;
- Participation in a staged testing regime which recognises the risk level of the countries between which travel is occurring;
- Movement through airports, both landside and airside that separate passengers requiring to be quarantined from those that are not, and
- Reliability and availability of testing which will have a material impact on operations.

Categorising risk for countries

In order to facilitate a staged, risk-based international reopening plan, Australia must establish a system for classifying categories of risk for departure and arrival countries.

It is important that the levels of assessed risk of countries and regions are determined using transparent and consistent criteria and that the outcomes of the assessment are made known to potential travellers through media such as Smart Traveller.

ACCI proposes that the risk of the departure or arrival country is defined on a four-point scale from Low to Very High. This is consistent with the proposed OECD Blueprint Framework[5] although we note that ACCI's reopening plan is not dependant on that framework being adopted by Australia to operate.

It is acknowledged that health authorities in conjunction with DFAT will determine the metrics for risk classification.   ACCI encourages this to be informed by the OECD framework which proposes using the common epidemiological criteria for COVID-19 case notification rate, testing rate, and test positivity rate, as reported to the WHO under the International Health Regulations and reflecting WHO definitions[6] which is kept regularly updated and is easily accessible. We further note however that the OECD proposed metrics differ to the metrics AHPPC agreed to for the Common Operating Picture reporting for domestic purposes as seen over page and that if Australia chooses to use differing metrics, there will need to be resources allocated to ensure the risk ratings for other countries are kept up to date for travellers.

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[4] Blueprint Framework for Safer International Travel during the COVID-19 Pandemic

[5] OECD 2021, Blueprint Framework for Safer International Travel during the COVID-19 Pandemic

[6] WHO regularly publishes data in its Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard, available at: Data Table. https://covid19.who.int/

The table below shows the metrics used for categories of country risk by the OECD proposed framework and the current metrics used by Australian authorities (domestic common operating picture[7]). We urge Australian health authorities to consider a four-category system as it will allow for a more targeted management of the risk.

Categories of Risk	OECD[3]	Australia[4]
Low	• If the notification rate is less than 25 and the test positivity rate is less than 4%;	• <50 cases per day nationally, limited geographic spread • Rate of <0.2/100,000 population per week calculated into number per week for each state
Medium	• If the notification rate is less than 50 and the test positivity rate is 4% or more, or If the notification rate ranges from 25 to 150 but the test positivity rate is less than 4%;	• 50 – 100 cases per day nationally • Rate 0.2 – 0.4/100,000 population per week calculated into number per week for each state
High	• If the notification rate is 50 or more and the test positivity rate is 4% or more, or of the notification rate is more than 150;	• >100 cases per day nationally • Rate >0.4/100,000 population per week calculated into number per week for each state
Very High	• If the notification rate is 500 or if there is a high prevalence of new variants of concern;	

Changing risk rating of countries

Under this proposal, countries would be constantly assessed according to the metrics finalised by Australian health officials. Under the four-level risk rating system, they can be upgraded or downgraded with the Plan providing certainty for travellers as to what different arrangements they would be facing as a consequence of this change.

Quarantine Systems

Under the staged reopening proposal, Government managed hotel quarantine will continue to be required until the significant majority of the Australian population is vaccinated, and health authorities are confident that it is no longer needed. Given this, State, Territory and Commonwealth Governments should work constructively together to explore and implement more quarantine options for all international arrivals.

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[7] https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-common-operating-picture

The goal should be to expand the capacity and capability of the government managed quarantine system, both hotel and government owned and operated facilities, to accommodate more arrivals as well as ensure Australia is prepared for the potential for higher rates of, or spikes in, infection in overseas travellers.

This would be anticipating the need for hotel quarantine for unvaccinated travellers from medium/high/very-high until the end of the year if not into 2022 with vaccine immunity, variant uncertainty and global vaccination rates.

AHPPC should progress consideration of suitable other quarantine option protocols and criteria such as farm quarantine, home quarantine/self-isolation, off-shore quarantine (such as on-ship quarantine for crew) and other approved quarantine proposals.

A clear process that allows the private sector to apply to make its own flight and quarantine arrangements for specific cohorts outside of international arrivals caps should be developed.

COVID vaccine testing and passport system

The proposed staged reopening plan is based on the finalisation of a system to recognize vaccine certificates, COVID infection recovery certificates and test results internationally.

In Australia this would rely on the development of data systems to allow Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) data to be shared across third-party vaccination records (from foreign Governments and operators of vaccination / testing systems) and the recognition of data from other national systems.

Adopt ICAO general recommendations for travel

The following recommendations for travellers set out by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) should apply as baseline travel measures, including for vaccinated travellers:

- do not travel when sick;
- adhere to hand and respiratory hygiene practices;
- wear a surgical facemask or a filtering facepiece respirator properly covering mouth and nose (with exceptions as appropriate);
- practice physical distancing to the extent possible to lower the risk of disease spread; and
- adhere to instructions provided by port or carrier personnel.

COVIDSafe Aircraft Operations

The stages of reopening of international travel are based on COVID Safe operations on aircraft. This means there should be no further limitations imposed on numbers of passengers per flight. Port limitations on movements should be capable of managing carrier-determined aircraft capacity based on agreed arrangements that include wearing marks in airports and on aircraft.

Risk factors to monitor against the plan

The elements of risk will continue to evolve and change as we progress a staged reopening. The key risk factors that will need to be monitored and implications dealt with include:

- Vaccine effectiveness against transmission of existing and new strains;
- Vaccine effectiveness against infection and severe illness for new strains;
- Vaccine certification and vaccine inequity as transmission data evolves;
- Length of vaccine immunity;
- Global vaccination roll-out timeline;
- Australia's vaccination roll-out timeline;
- Australian community take-up of the voluntary vaccination;
- Australia's contact tracing and testing capabilities;
- Quarantine facility and 'suitable other' quarantine effectiveness;
- Interoperability of vaccine passports/certificates for international travellers.

Four Stages for International reopening

Stage 1: Initial Stages of Vaccine Rollout (current stage as at May 2021)

Stage one of reopening coincides with the commencement of Phase 1a and 1b of the national vaccine rollout strategy and will close when substantial completion of vaccinations to participants in phases 1a and 1b occurs.

	Stage One
Australian Vaccine Rollout	Phase 1a and 1b commenced
Vaccination Status	All Travellers
Low Risk Country of Origin or destination	NZ Bubble only
Medium Risk Country of Origin or Destination	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine[8]
High Risk Country of Origin or Destination	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine
Very High Risk Country of origin or destination	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine.

Outbound travel restrictions

Note the ban on travel to New Zealand was lifted in March 2021 with amendments to the Biosecurity Act Determination.

Quarantine-free travel/ 'safe corridor' travel

In this phase the quarantine-free travel between Australia and New Zealand was initiated in March 2021. As the only recognised low risk country, two-way travel was made possible by the modification of the Biosecurity determination at the March 17, 2021 review.

International mobility agreements

It is recommended that during this stage Australia will negotiate multi-lateral agreements in relation to international people movement to reflect the important shifts proposed for Stage 2. In addition, vaccine and testing records and testing frameworks need to be agreed and trialled by Australia and other countries.

Vaccine status

At the initial stage, the plan does not differentiate between individuals who are vaccinated or not given the low numbers of those in the initial vaccine rollout phase for Australia and the global pace of vaccination. Stage two is where a distinction in vaccination status is first made.

Vaccine passports

It is also envisaged that there is a need to develop data systems to allow Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) data to be shared across third-party vaccination certification providers in a way that allows interoperability of our systems and those of other countries in respect of both testing and vaccinations.

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[8] Government Managed Quarantine is hotel quarantine or specialist quarantine facilities such as Howard Springs

Stage 2: Substantial Completion of Phases 1a and 1b of the Vaccine Rollout

Stage 2 of reopening international travel will occur after phase 1a and 1b of the vaccine rollout has been substantially completed. By this phase of the rollout the vulnerable Australians and those on the frontline of the health system will have been vaccinated. At this point in the rollout there is a substantially reduced risk of an overload of health system through hospitalisations and ICU admissions, due to COVID-19.

At Stage 2, greater opportunities are created for returning Australians, migrant workers, working holiday makers, international students and maritime crew as examples, to return to or enter Australia because they meet the new criteria of entry set at this stage i.e., they are vaccinated from a country deemed medium risk, or their country of origin is deemed low risk.

	Stage One	Stage Two	
Australian Vaccine Rollout	Phase 1a and 1b commenced	Phase 1a and 1b substantially complete	
Vaccination Status	All Travellers	Unvaccinated	Vaccinated
Low Risk Country of Origin or destination	NZ Bubble only	Quarantine-free two-way travel	Quarantine-free two-way travel
Medium Risk Country of Origin or Destination	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine[9]	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Australians – unlimited departure and Suitable Other Quarantine[10] on return (No arrival cap)
			Non-Australian arrivals - Suitable Other Quarantine (under separate arrival caps[11])
High Risk Country of Origin or Destination	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine
Very High Risk Country of origin or destination	Outbound travel by exemption and into Government Managed Quarantine.	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine

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[9] Government Managed Quarantine is hotel quarantine or specialist quarantine facilities such as Howard Springs

[10] Farm Quarantine, Home quarantine/self-isolation, Other approved quarantine where the time may be shorter than 14 days but subject to a second negative test after an appropriate number of days.

[11] There should be different caps for arrivals from high/very high and low/medium risk countries. From stage 2 there should be no cap on the number of vaccinated Australians travelling to and returning from low/medium risk countries. Where a traveller has been to more than one country the risk is rated according to the country with the highest risk that they have been to in the last 21 days before arrival.

Quarantine free two-way travel

In Stage 2, building off the success of the New Zealand 'bubble' or green zone, we strongly urge the Government to establish quarantine free two-way travel arrangements with other low risk countries. We recommend these be gradually built up over Stage 2, and in the meantime low risk countries should be treated the same as medium risk for departing and arriving travellers. Low risk countries that could be considered include a number of Asia-Pacific countries such as China, Pacific Islands and Vietnam. By the end of Stage 2 there should be multiple green zones allowing for quarantine free travel.

The published criteria for low risk countries and a regularly updated system for checking the status of risk of different countries is critical to this step. Potential travellers need to be able to clearly identify low risk countries as defined by Australia and be able to monitor these in the event of an outbreak in that area and classification change to medium or high risk for example. The Smart Traveller website would be a suitable mechanism for communicating this information.

Protocol for coming into Australia by air from low risk (green)

At the national level, there needs to be greater transparency on what the Government's criteria is for a departure country to be categorised low risk, and then an active process to expand the number of countries that are declared low risk. Bilateral discussions can then commence on the travel arrangements for returning or Australian travellers to those countries so that travel can be truly two-way.

This stage also relies on negotiations with targeted state & territory jurisdictions, airlines, airports and local industry to focus on no quarantine or self-isolation or alternative quarantine options for arrivals from low risk countries where green zone arrangements have not yet been finalised. In particular, we urge consideration of these suitable other quarantine arrangements for arrivals from low risk countries that are yet to be formally recognised as green zones for cohorts that are important to Australia's economic recovery including migrant workers, international students, working holiday-makers and business people.

- Given COVID Safe operations on aircraft, there should be no limitation on numbers per flight.
- Port limitations on movements should be capable of managing aircraft capacity - ie. Social distancing and metered boarding and disembarking.
- Airlines and overseas airports to manage the separation of travellers to Australia according to risk profile prior to departure to Australia.
- Travellers must declare that they have not been outside regions defined as low risk in the 21 days prior to travel and do not have current symptoms.
- **Testing requirements**[12] – Travellers must provide proof of a negative COVID-19 PCR test result that has been provided by a laboratory. This test must be conducted 72 hours or less prior to the scheduled departure time of the flight

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[12] Progress in proving the success of rapid testing will impact the amount of time needed between test and travel.

(or first flight if one or more connecting flights booked for travel to Australia). Final testing arrangements and exemptions would be finalised in the country to country bilateral discussions that would precede the opening of travel.

- **Tracing** – contact information needs to be provided for the duration of stay in Australia. Travellers are required to complete Incoming Passenger Cards, are encouraged to download the COVIDSafe smartphone app and be notified of any government COVID-19 related QR code/sign in requirements for venues.
- **Quarantine** – not required for low risk arrivals under green zone arrangements. For low risk arrivals from countries where there is not yet a green zone arrangement, the protocols would be the same as for medium risk, ie. Australians able to self-isolate at home until they return a negative test and international arrivals could be accommodated in a second-tier hotel quarantine system or housed in alternative facilities, such as on farm or campus base arrangements in the case of seasonal workers and international students, or private sector managed facilities for migrant workers.
- Encourage the adoption of internationally recognised tracing apps such as the GoPassport to shift much of the risk offshore.[13]

Vaccine status

As a result of the progress of the vaccination program internationally and domestically, from stage 2 ACCI envisages a different approach for vaccinated and non-vaccinated travellers. This approach is supported by multilateral frameworks and growing evidence suggesting that people who are fully vaccinated are potentially less likely to transmit SARS-CoV-2 to others[14].

Vaccinated Australians

In Stage 2, ACCI proposes that vaccinated Australians be allowed to leave Australia unrestricted and on return from a medium risk country, enter 'Suitable Other Quarantine' outside of the passenger arrival caps imposed by States and Territories. Suitable other quarantine may include home quarantine/isolation or other approved quarantine arrangements as determined by health authorities where the time may be shorter than 14 days but subject to a pre-flight COVID-19 test and a second negative test after an appropriate number of days.

Vaccinated Non-Australian arrivals

In Stage 2, vaccinated non-Australian arrivals from a medium risk country be allowed to enter 'Suitable Other Quarantine' within a separate second arrival passenger cap program imposed by States and Territories. Suitable other quarantine in this instance may be farm quarantine, hotel accommodation or other appropriate facilities outside the government managed hotel quarantine system or a as a second-tier hotel quarantine program recognising the reduced risk

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[13] There is an increasing number of apps becoming available and this note is illustrative of options and acknowledges that digital tracing solutions will be an important component of improving COVID safe travel.

[14] See: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/fully-vaccinated-people.html

of vaccinated travellers from low and medium risk countries. The second cap on the number of arrivals under this category provides greater control and confidence to authorities whilst piloting a phased reopening for vaccinated non-Australians.

It is envisaged that in Stage 2 there will be proof of concept alternative quarantine program for groups from cohorts that are important to Australia's economic recovery including migrant workers, international students, working holiday-makers and business people. Concepts such as privately managed and funded facilities, on-farm quarantine for international workers, international student groups that quarantine on-campus and off-shore quarantine (such as on ship for crew) should be explored in order to ease the pressure on hotel and other government managed quarantine facilities.

Progressing this stage of the plan requires a clearly communicated Australian system for international vaccine recognition or 'vaccine passports'.

As Australia's only member of BIAC which is the business group to the OECD, ACCI strongly supports the OECD initiative for safe international mobility during the covid-19 pandemic and the proposed recognition of proof of having been vaccinated by one of the vaccines recommended by the WHO for Emergency Use Listing (EUL), or who produce proof of recovery from a prior COVID-19 infection.

Cruise

Operating under COVID Safe protocols, we propose that cruise operations be allowed to commence between countries where green zone arrangements are in place.

Stage 3: Substantial Completion of Phase 2a of the Vaccine Rollout

At the point at which phase 2a of the vaccine rollout is substantially complete, most people in Australia that would be at risk of serious COVID-19 illness would have been vaccinated. This allows for additional travel from a greater range of countries.

At Stage 3, even more opportunities are created for returning Australians, migrant workers, working holiday makers, international students and maritime crew as examples, to return to or enter Australia because they meet the new criteria of entry set at this stage i.e., they are vaccinated from a country deemed medium or high risk, or their country of origin is deemed low risk.

	Stage Two		Stage Three	
Australian Vaccine Rollout	Phase 1a and 1b substantially complete		Phase 2a substantially complete	
Vaccination Status	Unvaccinated	Vaccinated	Unvaccinated	Vaccinated
Low Risk Country of Origin or destination	Quarantine-free two-way travel	Quarantine-free two-way travel	Quarantine-free two-way travel	Quarantine-free two-way travel
Medium Risk Country of Origin or Destination	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Australians – unlimited departure and Suitable Other Quarantine[15] on return (No arrival cap) Non-Australian arrivals - Suitable Other Quarantine (under separate arrival caps[16])	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Quarantine-free two-way travel
High Risk Country of Origin or Destination	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Suitable Other Quarantine (under separate arrival cap)
Very High Risk Country of origin or destination	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine

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[15] Farm Quarantine, Home quarantine/self-isolation, Other approved quarantine where the time may be shorter than 14 days but subject to a second negative test after an appropriate number of days.

[16] There should be different caps for arrivals from high/very high and low/medium risk countries. From stage 2 there should be no cap on the number of vaccinated Australians travelling to and returning from low/medium risk countries. Where a traveller has been to more than one country the risk is rated according to the country with the highest risk that they have been to in the last 21 days before arrival.

Quarantine free two-way travel

In Stage 3, building off the success of the expansion of the New Zealand bubble to include several other low risk countries, we propose that the Government continue to broaden the list of recognised low risk and green zone countries beyond those originally considered (i.e. China, Pacific Islands and Vietnam). By the end of Stage 3, all countries deemed low risk should have been added to the green zone travel category and bilateral agreements in place.

Vaccinated travellers

In Stage 3, the proposal is that vaccinated travellers be allowed to leave Australia unrestricted and on return from a high-risk country, enter 'Suitable Other Quarantine' within the secondary passenger arrival caps imposed by States and Territories. Suitable other quarantine may include home quarantine/isolation or other approved quarantine arrangements as determined by health authorities subject to a pre-flight negative COVID-19 test and a second negative test after an appropriate number of days.

Vaccinated travellers (Australian and non-Australian) from medium risk countries would be allowed to travel quarantine free subject to a pre-flight negative COVID-19 test and a second negative test on return after an appropriate number of days. This shift recognises that at stage 3, more than half of the Australian population would have had access to vaccination including all those at severe risk of illness and all workers classified as critical and high risk.

Unvaccinated travellers

Coming into Australia by air (Source countries medium risk/medium risk – specific cohorts)
A strongly recommended element of the approach to medium risk travel which can be operated in a scalable but risk managed way is to dedicate some Australian international airports just to those from low risk (not yet green zone designated) and medium risk travellers. This would be a decision of jurisdictions and airports, but it would be highly beneficial to achieve commercially viable travel routes with medium risk countries over the six months or more until vaccine implementation is sufficient to change the risk profile of travel.

This approach would enable important cohorts that are yet unvaccinated such as returning Australians, migrant workers and international students from medium risk countries to be managed in much larger numbers and with less expense to both the traveller and the jurisdiction.

- Given COVID Safe operations on aircraft, there should be no limitation on numbers per flight.
- Port limitations on movements should allow for aircraft capacity - ie. Social distancing and metered boarding and disembarking.
- Origin of travel needs to be at Medium risk recognising an acceptable risk level whereby any outbreaks are still manageable by health authorities and can be adequately traced and cases isolated.

- Declare that the traveller has not been in a high-risk locality in the 21 days prior to travel and does not have current symptoms. Encourage or even require the use of internationally recognised tracing apps such as the ICC AOKpass, GoPassport or local apps such as Accenture/Australia Post to provide evidence to back up the declaration of where they have been.
- **Testing requirements** – Travellers must provide proof of a negative COVID-19 PCR test result that has been provided by a laboratory. This test must be conducted 72 hours or less prior to the scheduled departure time of the flight (or first flight if one or more connecting flights booked for travel to Australia). Final testing arrangements and exemptions would be finalised in the country to country bilateral discussions that would precede the opening of travel.
- **Tracing** – contact information needs to be provided for the duration of stay in Australia. Travellers are required to complete Incoming Passenger Cards, are encouraged to download the COVIDSafe smartphone app and be notified of any government COVID-19 related QR code/sign in requirements for venues.
- **Quarantine** – Customised based on cohort of travellers and local hotel quarantine arrangements.

Each proposal would require the support of jurisdiction, airport, airline and industry.

EXAMPLE PROPOSAL:
Cairns Airport/Singapore

This proposal would recommend that Cairns airport only accept arrivals from medium risk countries, e.g.

> Singapore
> Thailand
> South Korea
> Mauritius

- Cohort arrivals that would be particularly beneficial to Cairns would be **seasonal workers, migrant workers, tightly-controlled leisure tour groups, business travellers, business events attendees and returning Australians.**
- Travellers would arrive on direct flights or transit only through Singapore
- Use of commercial or charter flights, noting preference to use existing scheduled services with cohorts considered outside passenger caps, subject to state agreement. Arrivals may be limited by the jurisdiction initially or for practical reasons such as hotel capacity and associated resourcing requirements.
- Testing and tracing offshore monitored by app, eg. GoPassport
- Pre-flight testing according to current requirements.
- Pre-boarding screening and air travel requirements – pre-board screening of travellers by the airline, including administration of questionnaire and undertaking temperature checking, physical distancing on plane in line with AHPPC guidelines, masks to be worn on plane.

- Testing on arrival and entry screening processes on arrival.
- Transport – secure transfer to quarantine location.
- Quarantine 14 days or less (except where test is positive). Repeat testing and possible clearance after second negative test.
- Other jurisdictions may impose a requirement that these travellers do not cross into other jurisdictions until after 14 days from arrival date.

Stage 4: Substantial Completion of Phase 2b of the Vaccine Rollout

Stage 4 represents a significant shift in unvaccinated travel given the lowered risk profile for the Australian population with the majority of the adult population expected to be vaccinated.

	Stage Three		**Stage Four**	
Australian Vaccine Rollout	Phase 2a substantially complete		Phase 2b (most of Australian population) substantially complete	
Vaccination Status	Unvaccinated	Vaccinated	Unvaccinated	Vaccinated
Low Risk Country of Origin or destination	Quarantine-free two-way travel	Quarantine-free two-way travel	Quarantine-free two-way travel	Quarantine-free two-way travel
Medium Risk Country of Origin or Destination	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Quarantine-free two-way travel	Australians-unlimited departure Suitable Other Quarantine (under separate cap) / Non-Australian arrivals - Suitable Other Quarantine (under separate cap)	Quarantine-free two- way travel
High Risk Country of Origin or Destination	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Suitable Other Quarantine (under separate arrival cap)	Suitable Other Quarantine (under separate cap)	Quarantine-free two- way travel
Very High Risk Country of origin or destination	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Outbound travel by exemption Government Managed Quarantine	Quarantine-free two-way travel

Unvaccinated travellers

In Stage 4, unvaccinated travellers (expected to be minimal) be allowed to leave Australia unrestricted and on return from a <u>medium or high-risk country</u>, enter 'Suitable Other Quarantine' within the secondary passenger arrival caps imposed by States and Territories. Suitable other quarantine may include home quarantine/isolation or other approved quarantine arrangements as determined by health authorities subject to a pre-flight negative COVID-19 test and a second negative test after an appropriate number of days.

In this stage, even though Australians can leave and return from medium and high-risk countries unvaccinated and enter home quarantine/other quarantine, we are proposing that they still be counted within the secondary arrival cap. This is to ensure greater control on arrivals to allow for a quick testing and tracing response in the event of an outbreak.

Vaccinated travellers

In Stage 4, the proposal here is that all vaccinated travellers (Australian and non-Australian) from <u>High and Very High-risk countries</u> would be allowed to travel quarantine free subject to a pre-flight negative COVID-19 test and a second negative test on return after an appropriate number of days. This shift recognises that at stage 4, all of the Australian adult population would have had access to vaccination.

Arrangements for specific cohorts

Under ACCI's proposed staged arrangements there are various opportunities for Australians, skilled migrant workers, working holiday makers, international students and maritime crew as examples, to return to or enter Australia because they meet the criteria of entry set at each stage i.e., they are vaccinated, and/or their country of origin is deemed low or medium risk.

In addition, and independently to this movement of individual travellers, we also propose that a separate focus is given to facilitating travel to Australia of particular groups through cohort arrangements.

Pilot programs for cohorts should be progressed outside of the existing cap and proposed secondary cap. Given the demonstrated interest from both State Governments and industry groups to facilitate bespoke quarantine arrangements that meet the determined health authority standards, approvals at both State and Federal level should be granted to enable these groups to enter Australia and be safely quarantined under appropriate arrangements.

A clear process by which the private sector can request approval for plans to facilitate travel of specific cohorts should be developed. One of the challenges industry is facing is that while some groups have managed to get approval for their specific plans (e.g. Tennis Australia, Cricket Australia and the coalition of agriculture employers for the Pacific Labour pilots) for most, it is an insurmountable task to even know where to start and who to talk with.

The "*Protocols and Preconditions for International Student Arrivals*" document produced by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment is a good first step and could act as a template for the development of other protocols specific to other cohorts such as migrant workers and maritime crew. Further guidance and information could be provided on how best to facilitate coordination between all the named relevant stakeholders as well as checklists to ensure the required actions are taken and in the right order so as to ensure a valid plan meeting all the criteria is presented for approval.

Once it has been demonstrated these arrangements can be conducted safely, this should build confidence for other jurisdictions as well as in the community which hopefully could see an expansion of this important activity.