

COVID-19 International Aircraft and Crew

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Aerial Firefighting in 2020-21 has the potential to be impacted by the nation's response to COVID-19. NAFC seeks to provide information and assistance to its members, their agencies and the aircraft operators to enable efficient and timely provision of aviation resources for emergency response.

The information contained in this document is intended to serve as a guide only. Best efforts have been made to keep the information accurate and updated.

Important Actions to take now in preparation for coming fire season

1. Develop a COVID Safe plan for your business to enable reliable and efficient aerial firefighting this season. Educate staff and subcontractors on the requirements of the plan. Perform spot checks to ensure the requirements are met. Include planning for the movement of aircraft and crew across borders if required.
2. Update aircraft, business and personnel information in ARENA.
3. Lodge requests with each individual agency for permission to enter the country, and cross state and territory borders. Lodgement requires providing supporting documents, so include your COVID safe plan in your request, as well as plans established to ensure social isolation is achieved.

Lodge early!

NAFC advises not to leave this till the last minute because the time to approval may be constrained by the volume of applications.

For enquiries relating to COVID-19 please email:

covid@nafc.org.au

Visit the below websites to learn more about current travel restrictions:

<https://covid19.homeaffairs.gov.au/travel-restrictions-0>

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) advice for travellers](#)

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International Travel to Australia

Australia has strict border measures in place to protect the health of the Australian community. Very limited flights are currently available to and from Australia and you may not be able to travel at this time.

Inbound international flight restrictions have imposed caps on the number of available airline seats, driven by the number of available quarantine spaces in designated facilities. Passengers may be prioritised over others based on the nature of their travel need.

There have been cases where people have had their flight cancelled due to changing priorities and/or lack of available quarantine spaces.

Cheaper airfares come with conditions that allow airlines to cancel or reschedule your fare. More expensive fares, including business class are far less likely to be cancelled.

Supporting documentation should highlight essential personnel are required for Aerial Firefighting/Firefighting/ Emergency Services. It has been found that in seeking travel exemption requests (as distinct from visa applications) it is usually most productive to highlight specialist firefighting skills used in delivery of emergency services, rather than standard Aircrew exemptions.

You cannot come to Australia unless you are in an exempt category (i.e. a diplomat), OR, you have been granted an individual travel exemption to the current travel restrictions AND have a current visa AND have obtained relevant state and/or territory health exemptions to cross domestic borders. Furthermore, even with individual travel exemption granted you must be prepared to quarantine for the required 14 days UNLESS you have obtained relevant state and/or territory health exemptions to carry out quarantine requirements in an alternative arrangement, approved by the same relevant state and/or territory health authorities.

The standing rule is that all travellers arriving in Australia, including Australian citizens, must quarantine for 14 days at a designated facility, such as a hotel in their port of arrival. You may be required to pay for the costs of your quarantine. The quarantine requirements and arrangements for entering the country, are administered by each state and territory health authorities.

Alternative quarantine models have been accepted by some State Health authorities , including the concept of 'operational isolation' whereby arriving crew and aircraft can travel into Australia and remain separate from the population whilst observing quarantine restrictions but still being permitted to carry out necessary activities to establish the aircraft readiness. At this stage, acceptance of alternative models is still on a case-by-case basis. Ensure that that the approval of any such arrangement is undertaken prior to your arrival into Australia. The approvals are solely based on approval from the relevant state or territory health authorities and can vary between the relevant state or territory health authorities.

Having your alternative quarantine models accepted has the additional benefit that the persons are not counted in quarantine cap numbers, thus improving the chances of them not being bumped from incoming commercial flights.

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Overview of Steps to obtain documentation

In order to secure the correct and full complement of documents required to enter Australia, there are 3 main bodies of work that need to be completed, each with their own detailed requirements:

1. **Travel exemption from the Australian Border Force to enter Australia.** It is recommended that travellers lodge for their travel exemption request and visa application at the same time.
2. **Exemption from each relevant State and Territory Health Dept to cross their borders.** Potentially including approval of the relevant State/Territory health department for alternative quarantine isolation in the workplace arrangements.
3. **A letter from Home Affairs to Foreign Governments** to facilitate approval for any transit and/or overnight stops whilst en route to Australia.

This must be completed for each individual traveller. Documents from one step will often need to be represented in subsequent steps. The aim of this document is to offer some guidance into the various steps required as well as share some learnings from successfully navigating the process in order to get the Q400 LAT into country.

Please note, all of these steps take time to process, so please planned carefully.

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Requesting Australian Border Force Travel Exemptions

All international travel restriction exemption requests must be submitted through the Borderforce portal.

The Australian Border Force travel exemption process will require:

1. A valid passport
2. A valid Visa (visa types will vary) or if recently applied provide the visa transaction reference number (TRN) e.g. EGOJZxxxxx
3. Completion of the online travel exemption request form via the portal:
<https://travel-exemptions.homeaffairs.gov.au/tep>

Both process 2 and 3 require a lot of supporting paperwork and are time consuming for the overseas and local operators. Be prepared and ensure enough time is available to complete the process. Some notes on requirements of each are as follows.

Notes on common Passport Requirements

- ✓ A valid Passport with at least 6 months remaining before expiration.

Notes on common Visa Requirements

Some common information required for Visa's may include:

- ✓ proof that the job cannot be filled in Australia (visa 482 needs this)
 - ✓ A scanned copy of each passengers Passport bio page
 - ✓ employer letter (proof you work for the business providing AFF services)
 - ✓ resume and licence details
 - ✓ proof of critical/essential need (NAFC can supply a letter to Primary/Secondary contractors if necessary)
 - ✓ police checks (may be require depending on how long you have lived in a third country or your response to the character declaration – refer to: <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/help-support/meeting-our-requirements/character>)
 - ✓ evidence of health insurance
 - ✓ health checks may be required (refer to: <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/help-support/meeting-our-requirements/health/who-needs-health-examinations>)
 - ✓ Other requirements as specified by the Department of Home Affairs to support your visa application.
 - ✓ For multiple applicants, it is recommended that a 'Group ID' be used.
- To access ImmiAccount, first time users of ImmiAccount will first need to create an account. (Refer to: <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/help-support/applying-online-or-on-paper/online>)
 - If you already have an account you will need to login through:
<https://online.immi.gov.au/lusc/login>

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Notes on Travel Exemption standard requirements

The following documents must be submitted:

- ✓ visa details (e.g. visa TRN: EGOJZxxxxx)
- ✓ copy of current passport
- ✓ employer letter (proof you work for the business providing AFF services)
- ✓ proof of critical/essential need (NAFC can supply a letter to Primary/Secondary contractors if necessary)
- ✓ need ASIC cards
- ✓ military passes for RAAF bases if applicable.

For information regarding travel exemption – <https://covid19.homeaffairs.gov.au/travel-restrictions-0>

To apply online for a travel exemption – <https://covid19.homeaffairs.gov.au/travel-restrictions-0#toc-5>

Enquiry form for businesses in critical sectors

Businesses can seek further information regarding the critical skills exemption process or progress of a travel exemption request – <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/help-support/departmental-forms/online-forms/enquiry-form-businesses-in-critical-sectors>

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Requesting State and Territory Health Department Exemptions

Note: this section is expected to be updated shortly, pending information.

- *AFAC is collating information from States and Territories to determine if a National Document can be created that outlines the requirements of transiting State and Territory borders*
- *QLD and NSW have established individual examples*
- *In the meantime, Operators should liaise with the relevant Member in order to facilitate the request for exemption from the State or Territory Health Dept.*

State/Territory Health Restrictions

Coronavirus (COVID-19) advice for travelers can be found on the Department of Health's website at:

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-travellers>

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Requesting Emergency Management Australia (EMA) Letter

A letter from the Director General of Emergency Management Australia to a Foreign Governments may be required to facilitate approval for any overnight stops whilst enroute to Australia.

To assist EMA and the International Policy Division within the Department of Home Affairs, in writing the official letter and corresponding cable, the following information is required:

Request Letter

1. You will need to write to EMA requesting EMA to create formal letter. The letter should include:
 - a. Purpose
 - b. Niceties about previous support
 - c. Number of crew?
 - d. Model and registration of plane
 - e. Flight Itinerary (times, dates and locations)
 - f. Accommodation
 - g. Transport
 - h. Adherence to COVID-19 Testing

CREW

2. Complete Crew List Excel file *International Firefighting Aircraft Operations* spreadsheet, tab "Crew", which requires:
 - a. Personal details
 - b. Passport details
 - c. Visa request
 - d. COVID-19 Negative Test (if overnighing in another country)
 - e. Department of Home Affairs Travel Exemption No
 - f. Health exemptions from relevant State and Territory Health Departments
3. A scanned copy of each passengers Passport bio page is also required

AIRCRAFT

4. Complete Aircraft list in Excel file *International Firefighting Aircraft Operations* spreadsheet, tab "Aircraft", which requires:
 - a. Proposed flight plan
 - b. Dates of flight and Estimated time of arrival
 - c. Plane registration

OVERNIGHT ACCOMODATION

5. Accommodation details offshore (for each overnight stop)
6. Ground transport arrangements (for transfer to/from arranged accommodation)

Note again that this information provides a means to get international government approval for flights and entry into Australia for crew (where appropriate)

All information should be emailed to

EMACOV19@homeaffairs.gov.au and emaplanning@homeaffairs.gov.au

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An example of what was done to get the Q400 LAT into Australia

Moving aircraft and crew in the COVID-19 environment is challenging. Below is an example of the approval requirements to get an aircraft from Canada to Brisbane, via Solomon Islands into Australia.

3 weeks beforehand:

Information provided to Home Affairs:

- Passenger list and proposed flight plan
- Plane registration
- Dates of flight
- Estimated time of arrival
- Passport details of all passengers – scanned copies
- Ground transport arrangement (arranged through accommodation)
- Accommodation details (Heritage Park Hotel – Solomon Island)
- Cover letter outlining the reason for the request, including niceties about previous support, future support and the importance of these planes to Australian bushfire efforts

Further checklists:

Information Aircraft Contractor requires from the Solomon Island Government (SIG):

- Formal permission to land
- Confirmation of coordination with SolAir for on-the-ground arrangements
- Solomon Islands Government approval
- Authority number or letter allowing entry/overnight
- Name of the handler that authorities want to use and the handler contact information
- Method of payment for handling and fuel services
- COVID-19 protocols that the Solomon Islands would like followed

72 hours beforehand:

Confirmation of negative test results (need to provide to SIG):

- The aircrew are required to return a negative test result for COVID-19 72 hours before entering the Solomon Islands.

48 hours beforehand:

- Confirm details of arrival
- Logistic Cable will be sent to Solomon Islands

Other requirements to consider:

- Are all the aircrew permanent residents? Previously there was red tape that needed to be overcome before the COVID-19 tests results were returned.
- Is a 771 visa application required for any third party company? This may be required for pilots engaged to ferry the aircraft.
- Are permits for the USA from the Federal Aviation Administration required?
- Exemptions from Government of NSW and NSW Health (if landing in Sydney)
- The aircrew will need to have travel exemptions, health exemptions and Visas.

The Department's International Section will put together the letter, with the attachments, and will send through to the operator to send onto Post. The letter will specify the period of whole flight, rather than for the individual flights. **All the required information should be sent to EMA as soon as possible.**