

12 November 2020



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response
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Parliament Buildings
Wellington

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Dear Chris

A strong and effective Covid-19 response

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister for COVID-19 Response. A key role at this difficult time.

The PSA Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi is the union for most of the public servants working at the borders, in managed isolation and quarantine facilities and in the policy, technical and coordination roles supporting the response. This includes strong membership at MPI, AVSEC, Customs, MBIE (including Immigration), the Ministry of Health and in public health roles for DHBs.

Our involvement

We are contributing to a strong and effective response through our advocacy and engagement:

- At the workplace and agency level we are continuing to engage through our established processes.
- We are working across agencies, both through cross agency delegate groups including at Auckland Airport and through an Airport health a safety forum established at our initiative.
- We are working closely with other unions with members involved in the response and have taken a leading role in developing a common worker health and safety participation agreement to operate across agencies.
- We have ongoing meetings with Megan Main of the Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ) group within MBIE, and also with the Border Security Governance Group.

We would like to meet with you to discuss the response and how we can further contribute.

Current outstanding issues

There are several areas of the response where change is needed. These include:

- The recent cases of infection at the Christchurch quarantine facility have prompted some public calls for a review of the MIQ system. We do not believe that such a review is necessary. Rather we support taking a robust process continuous improvement approach that includes by design worker and union voice in identifying and resolving issues.
- While the Army has been doing a good job as security at MIQ facilities, this should not be an ongoing function of the Army and steps need to be taken to institute a public security service that can do this work, as well as other security work needed by agencies.

- The MIQ service brings is a collaboration of a number of agencies and, because of the absence of common terms of employment across the Public Service, this means that the people doing this work are on a wide range of terms and conditions and pay. We are not promoting structural change to address this, but it does highlight the very practical need to move with pace to more common and consistent approach to terms and conditions of employment.
- People working in the MIQ facilities are doing a difficult job under difficult conditions. To keep both the country and our members and their families safe, good facilities and compliance to enable the following further precautionary measures are needed:
 - Arriving and leaving work: Facilities to enable people to change from their “community” clothes and change into their work clothes. And then at the end of their shift, to wash in clean facilities, change back into their community clothes and leave their work clothes at work (where they will be washed).
 - In the case of infection at an MIQ facility, better and more timely communication between public health and the other employers with staff at the MIQ facilities
- It is likely that further lockdowns will be necessary and that measures such as the leave scheme and wage subsidies will again become important and any issues identified with these schemes need to be resolved. In particular, it is clear that the leave scheme, while invaluable, did not adequately provide for people who were unable to work because they had to self-isolate because of vulnerabilities such as age, health or disability.

Yours sincerely

Glenn Barclay
PSA National Secretary