

Premier Policy Briefing

Impact of COVID-19 Variants on Quarantine Arrangements

21 January 2021

QDMC in confidence

COVID-19 Variants

- Two SARS CoV 2 variants (B.1.17 and B.1.351) have been shown to have **higher transmissibility**
- Given the increase in transmissibility, **additional precautions** have been put in place to manage persons with any of the more transmissible variants, such as a:
 - Longer minimum period of isolation
 - Assessment of infectiousness by experts before release
- ***Policy discussion – given increased transmissibility of CoV variant B.1.17, does Queensland need to introduce additional precaution of quarantine away from major population centres?***

Background to Hotel Quarantine

Out of scope



Current Situation

- As at 8pm 19 January there were **2889 people** in hotel quarantine, occupying **2146 rooms**
- There are currently 20 quarantine hotels:
 - 12 in Brisbane (1338 people)
 - 3 on the Gold Coast (599 people)
 - 2 in Cairns (191 people)
 - 1 each at Townsville, Gladstone and Mackay (18 people)
- Daily resources stationed at quarantine hotels include **225 police officers** and **126 ADF personnel**

Halton Review of Hotel Quarantine

- Relevant recommendations from the Review include:
 - Rec 4 – “Options for new models of quarantine should be developed for consideration by National Cabinet including a risk assessment of these options and an analysis of traveler suitability”
 - Rec 6 – “The Australian Government should consider a ***national facility for quarantine to be used for emergency situations***, emergency evacuations or urgent scalability”
- **Policy issues of relevance for SARS CoV 2 variants:**
 1. Consistent with the Halton Review recommendations, Qld is actively considering new models of quarantine that may reduce risk of SARS CoV 2 variant higher transmissibility identified by AHPPC
 2. As the SARS CoV 2 variants arguably constitutes an “emergency situation” (noting Cth’s declaration of Greater Brisbane as a ‘hotspot’), what is the status of the Australian Governments consideration of a national facility for quarantine as recommended by the Halton Review (presented to National Cabinet on 23 October 2020)?

Qld Options for quarantine

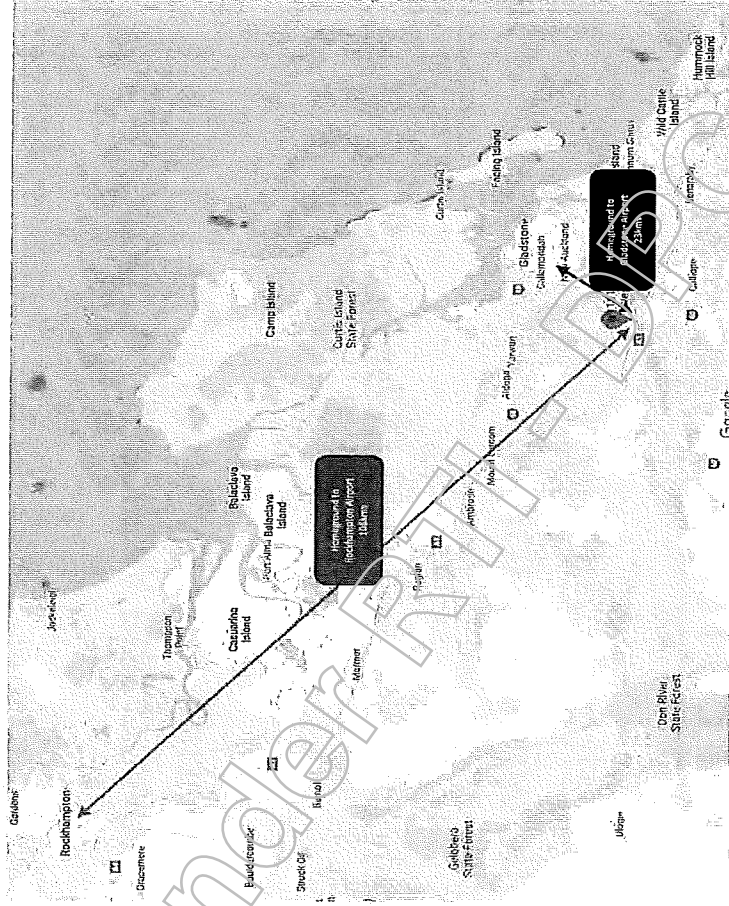
- Consistent with Rec 4 of the Halton Review, Qld is currently developing the following options:

1. **“Homeground”** – a workforce accommodation option located in Calliope
2. **“Wellcamp Dedicated Quarantine Facility”** (yet to be constructed) – located at Toowoomba Wellcamp Airport
3. **“Mining Camps”** (various) – including in proximity to Toowoomba Wellcamp Airport

Note – all options above require more detailed operational and financial analysis

Other options (1): Homeground

- Calliope (23kms to Gladstone Airport and 106kms to Rocky Airport)
- Currently used by resource sector
- 1000 rooms for quarantine + 300 for staff or additional demand

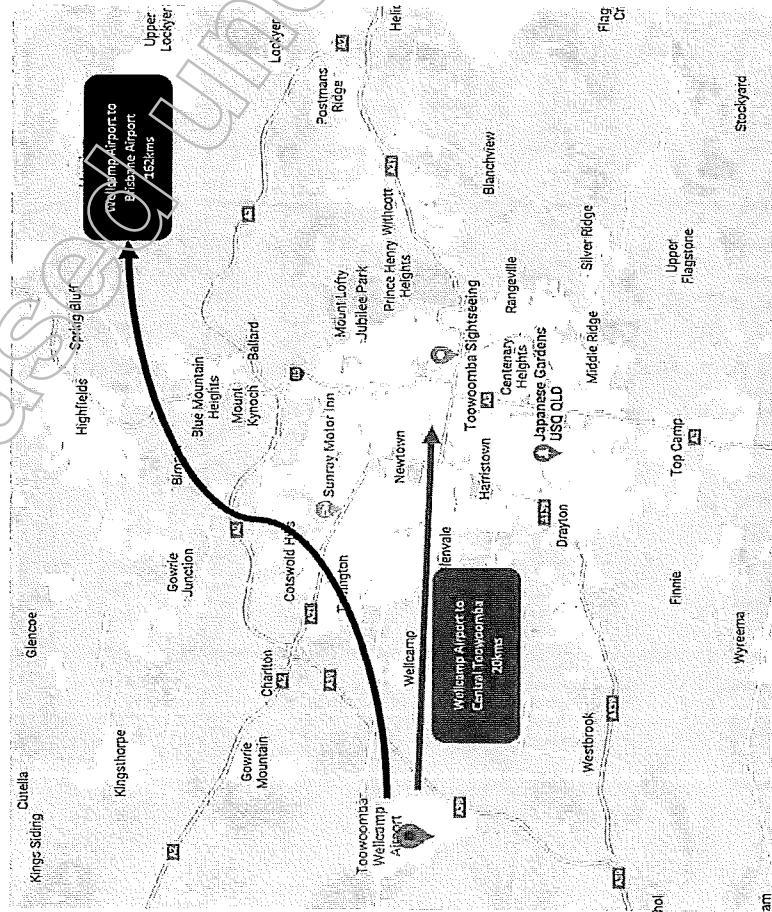


(1): Homeground (cont'd)

- Initial Quote – Out of scope over a 6-month contract.
- If the 1000 rooms are fully occupied over the 6 months, this would equate to an upper-level cost outlay of **\$25.5 million**.
- This cost does not include any necessary capital upgrades (e.g CCTV, security fencing etc), and significant costs relating to police, health, transport, communities etc, so must be treated with caution.

Other option (2): Wellcamp

- Proposed facility - Wellcamp Airport, Toowoomba (20km from central Toowoomba, 162km from Bris Airport)
- Initially 1000 rooms + 300 rooms for staff
- Initial quote not yet provided
 - Final costings must be calculated with police, transport, health etc



Other options (3): Mining camps including around Wellcamp

- Viability of other options, including mining camps, still being explored
- Critical features in search include:
 - proximity to airport infrastructure
 - availability, noting need of resource sector
 - ability to deploy significant government resources to location, including possible federal resources

Key considerations for all locations

- **Detailed and reliable costings are yet to be developed for any option**
- **Significant health resources will be required**
 - Initial QH advice - for all locations a 24hr on-site health centre will be required, as well as an increase in patient transport resources and the standing up of new dedicated health services (no capacity within existing HHSS)
- **Transport issues**
 - Federal support needed for international airlines to land at regional airports
 - Federal support needed to process travellers (e.g. Border Force)
- **Need to establish security overlay at each location and health facilities, airports and on transport**
 - **QPS and ADF** will be required

Alternative: for all locations

****Should Cth not agree to facilitate flights direct to regional airports****

- Flights land in Brisbane and Qld transfers pax. to regions
- Increased risk (**new steps**) for Qld from additional transfers and interfaces:
 - **possible overnight accommodation in Brisbane prior to transfer**
 - **domestic flight to regional quarantine facility**
 - **Second ground transport to quarantine from regional airport**

Stakeholder Issues

Homeground:

- Concerns from local community – including the **Gladstone Mayor** who raises concerns about risk in his community.
- **Qld Resources Council** indicate broad support for use of disused mining camps, but only if not required for industry.
- **APIA** does not support the use of Homeground as this facility is consistently used for workers on the Curtis Island LNG plants.

Wellcamp:

- Community consultation is yet to occur – similar community concerns to those in Gladstone may arise
- Not yet built – proposed facility. Wagners advise non-Code assessable (ie Council not required to approve).

General:

- AMAQ President cautiously welcomed the use remote sites for quarantine as a “*valid proposal as long as appropriate consultation, agreement and safety protocols are in place*”.
- Cth officials – consider flights to Brisbane essential for freight which supports commerciality of capped passenger flights

Issues for engagement with Cth:

- What is the status of consideration of a national quarantine facility for “emergency situations” as recommended by the Halton Review?
- Will the Cth facilitate direct flights to regional airports should Qld proceed with regional quarantine facilities?
- Will the Cth provide resources (Border Force, Customs, AFP and ADF) at regional airports and regional quarantine facilities?
- If no support for use of regional quarantine facilities for returning Australians, will the Cth support the use of regional quarantine facilities for other cohorts (eg Seasonal Workers)?

Premier's Meeting Briefing Note

SUBJECT

- The following information is provided to support your meeting with the Honourable Scott Morrison MP, Prime Minister of Australia

JOBS	n/a
FUNDING BREAKDOWN	n/a

DETAILS

- Date: Friday, 22 January 2020
- Time: 12.30pm
- Venue: Premier's Boardroom, Level 40, 1 William Street, Brisbane
- Attendee/s: Prime Minister the Honourable Scott Morrison MP

An agenda has been provided at **Attachment 1**.

KEY ISSUE/S EXPECTED TO BE RAISED BY THE ORGANISATION/INDIVIDUAL

Out of scope

2) Quarantine facilities

- As you are aware, two possible locations for a Queensland regional quarantine facility are currently being explored.
- This includes 'Homeground' at Calliope (23km from Gladstone Airport and 106km to Rockhampton Airport). This is currently used by the resource sector and comprises 1000 rooms for quarantine users and 300 for staff/additional demand.
- The other option is the proposed site near the Toowoomba Wellcamp Airport (adjacent to the airport, 20km from central Toowoomba, and 162km from Brisbane Airport). This site would be able to be constructed quickly and could initially comprise 1000+ rooms, with 300 rooms for staff.

PREMIER'S BRIEFING NOTE

Meeting

Tracking Folder No. TF/21/1390

Document No. DOC/21/12212

- There are a number of key considerations for the Queensland Government at each location, including ensuring appropriate levels of nearby health services, effective security overlays, and managing associated logistics issues.
- There are also issues specific to each location including considerations of key stakeholders. For instance, the Gladstone Mayor has written to you with several concerns regarding the possible use of 'Homeground'. Further detailed consultation would have to occur with the stakeholders on both options.
- Critically, neither option will be able to proceed without the active support of the Federal Government. In particular:
 - the Federal Government would be required to facilitate direct flights to regional airports should Queensland proceed with regional quarantine facilities
 - federal resources would be required both at regional airports and regional quarantine facilities (e.g., Australian Border Force, Australian Defence Force).
- Material on these issues has been prepared for your attendance at National Cabinet on 22 January 2021 and for correspondence from you to the Prime Minister seeking the abovementioned Federal Government support.

Out of scope

PREMIER'S BRIEFING NOTE
Meeting

Tracking Folder No. TF/21/1390
Document No. DOC/21/12212

Out of scope



Released under RTI - DPC

Comments (*Premier or DG*)

Dave Stewart
Director-General



PRIME MINISTER

Reference: MC21-007148

04 FEB 2021

The Hon Anastacia Palaszczuk
Premier of Queensland
Minister for Trade
1 William Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Premier

Thank you for your letters dated 22 and 29 January 2021 regarding the Queensland Government's proposal to establish a regional non-hotel COVID-19 quarantine facility.

I appreciate the Queensland Government's presentation of options to establish a regional quarantine facility to provide a means of supporting more Australians to return home, especially in emergency or overflow situation.

The Commonwealth Government's consideration of this issue is focused on delivery of supplemental capacity to hotel-based quarantine currently delivered by the Queensland Government with Commonwealth assistance. It is also important to recognise that it would service the quarantine needs for inbound charter flights arranged by the Commonwealth or other parties, rather than regular international passenger flights. I would again note that it is highly unlikely for regular commercial international passenger flights to be able to be redirected to particular airports. The Commonwealth would also need to ensure that any option for a new regional quarantine facility would provide a greater value for money outcome than alternative options, which expand the capacity of existing quarantine locations.

Following Commonwealth consideration of your proposal to utilise Homeground Villages as a quarantine facility, I am informed that there are several concerns which indicate it will not be fit for purpose as an additional quarantine facility. I note that Rockhampton Airport has limited capability to receive multiple wide-body aircraft, such as a Boeing 777, and lacks appropriate freight handling facilities. Further, the distance from Homeground Villages to an Intensive Care Unit and the availability of a clinical workforce makes it difficult to ensure appropriate clinical support for the facility. I am also concerned about the impact a loss of access to mining camp facilities would have on the resources industry and the unnecessary risk posed by the proximity of the camps to critical industry in the region.

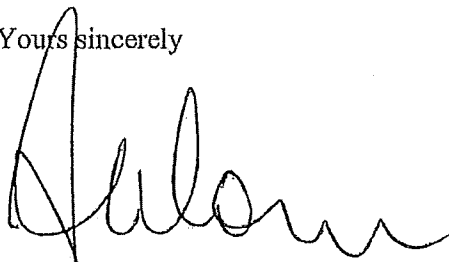
I note that the outline of the concept proposal you have provided for the Wellcamp option does not provide the detail necessary to make an assessment of the proposal at this time.

Parliament House CANBERRA ACT 2600
Telephone (02) 6277 7700
www.pm.gov.au

I have asked the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to work with relevant Commonwealth agencies to ensure that your officials have a comprehensive understanding of the information the Commonwealth would require to make such an assessment of the Wellcamp proposal. This will be provided to your officials through the established working group that has been meeting to discuss the viability of regional quarantine within Queensland.

I have provided a copy of our correspondence to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development, the Hon Michael McCormack MP, the Minister for Home Affairs, the Hon Peter Dutton MP, the Minister for Health and Aged Care, the Hon Greg Hunt MP, the Minister for Defence, Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women, Senator the Hon Marise Payne, and the Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management, the Hon David Littleproud MP.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Scott Morrison', written over a large, faint, diagonal watermark that says 'Released under RTI/OPIC'.

SCOTT MORRISON



Premier of Queensland
Minister for Trade

For reply please quote: SocPol/SK – TF/21/3745 – TF/21/36360

04 MAR 2021

The Honourable Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister of Australia
Parliament House
PO Box 6022
CANBERRA ACT 2600

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Website www.thepremier.qld.gov.au

Dear Prime Minister

As our nation contends with new and highly infectious strains of coronavirus (COVID-19), we must continue to work in partnership to examine and consider every possible measure to keep people safe. It is important that we explore sustainable and effective ways to manage the ongoing and evolving risks presented by this pandemic.

Further to my letter of 29 January 2021 and our earlier discussions, I write regarding the Queensland Government's ongoing consideration of the establishment of a regional non-hotel COVID-19 quarantine facility at Wellcamp Airport, Toowoomba.

The proposed quarantine facility at Wellcamp Airport provides a unique opportunity for both the Queensland and Federal Governments to work together to expand the capacity and increase the safety of the national quarantine network. Such a facility would allow the repatriation of more Australians, using a site and design that could provide effective protection for the Queensland community.

The proposed facility at Wellcamp Airport could operate on a similar model to the Howard Springs facility in the Northern Territory, including the critical safety measure of staff being accommodated on site. This safety measure, as well as direct international flights into Wellcamp Airport, could significantly reduce the risk of a COVID-19 community outbreak, particularly from the highly infectious strains of the United Kingdom, South America or South Africa.

I appreciate the cooperation from your department in working to progress the proposal with officials from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. However, it is not in the interests of Queenslanders that we continue to put resources into progressing to the detailed collaborative planning phase while threshold feasibility issues remain unresolved.

I appreciate that your department has now confirmed the Federal Government's willingness to progress to market testing to assess airline interest in flying into the Wellcamp Airport and to provide appropriate Federal Government officials to enable the facility to function. However, the matter of Federal Government financial support remains outstanding.

It is critical that we receive the Federal Government's specific commitment to provide funding support before progressing to approach the airline industry, as this is fundamental to the economic viability and ongoing sustainability of such a venture.

Queensland cannot progress with further detailed planning until a clear undertaking is received from the Federal Government to provide funding on similar terms as provided for under the *Provision of COVID-19 Quarantine Arrangements at the Northern Territory Centre for National Resilience for Organised National Repatriation of Australians Federation Funding Agreement* variation.

I believe the Howard Springs agreement provides a clear precedent and a sound basis to develop a funding model between the Queensland Government and the Federal Government for a facility that performs the same functions as that in the Northern Territory.

I can advise that the Wagner Corporation proposal includes building standard workforce-style accommodation with 1000 quarantine rooms and 300 rooms for onsite staff accommodation, as well as various facilities to support the operation of the facility (including kitchen, administration, communications, etc). The Queensland Government has received an initial quote from the Wagner Corporation, however the cost is expected to increase significantly once health and security considerations have been factored into the facility design.

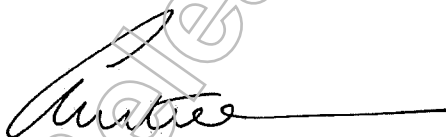
The Queensland Government will also contribute significant resources required to operate the facilities, including security, health and mental health support, and other critical support functions. These have not yet been fully costed but will also require Federal Government funding support.

The minimum operational term for the Welcamp Airport is one year. If the project is to proceed, I expect it will be operational from mid-2021 to mid-2022. For the facility to be financially feasible, it is important a funding commitment from your Government is for the full term of the agreement.

Without a clear and sufficient Federal Government funding commitment over this period, it is not possible for the Queensland Government to make any commitment to this facility and bring home more Australians safely.

I look forward to your advice about the Federal Government's funding commitment as soon as possible so our officials can move into collaborative detailed planning for this important initiative to strengthen Australia's quarantine system.

Yours sincerely



**ANNASTACIA PALASZCZUK MP
PREMIER OF QUEENSLAND
MINISTER FOR TRADE**



Premier of Queensland
Minister for Trade

For reply please quote: *SacPol/SK – TF/21/1285 – DOC/21/10509*

22 JAN 2021

The Honourable Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister of Australia
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister

Scott

As raised at National Cabinet, I write to you regarding the Queensland Government's consideration for the establishment of a regional non-hotel COVID-19 quarantine facility.

Currently, Queensland's hotel quarantine system comprises hotels in large, populated urban locations. Discrete regional locations, carefully vetted and with local support, may provide a viable option to further support our quarantine capacity, and ensure the continued return of appropriate numbers of Australians. This is also consistent with the Halton Review of Hotel Quarantine (recommendation four), which sought consideration of options for new models of quarantine.

Several regional options are being carefully considered by the Queensland Government. However, it has become clear that the operation of any such facility will require partnership between state and federal levels of government to overcome several critical challenges.

This includes confirmation that the Federal Government would be able to facilitate international airlines flying directly into regional Queensland airports such as Rockhampton Airport or Toowoomba Wellcamp Airport, to ensure passengers arrive in proximity to any proposed facility. In addition, international arrivals into regional airports would also require Federal resources for the passenger processing, as well as continued Australian Defence Force support at any proposed facility.

The Director-General of the Queensland Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Mr Dave Stewart, is available to speak to the Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Mr Philip Gaetjens, directly on this matter to provide further details. I look forward to productive discussions continuing as we look to strengthen our critical quarantine systems.

Yours sincerely

ANNASTACIA PALASZCZUK MP
PREMIER OF QUEENSLAND
MINISTER FOR TRADE

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Lucas Clarke

From: The Premier
Sent: Tuesday, 2 February 2021 11:40 AM
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: 'MCU - MinCorro'
Subject: TF/21/1826 - Message for Prime Minister
Attachments: SIGNED FINAL DOC2116810 - Message to the Prime Minister.pdf

Please find attached a letter from the Premier.

Yours sincerely

Office of the Premier

Please consider the environment before printing this email
To view and print portable document format (PDF) files attached to this email, you can download the free [Adobe Reader](#)

Released under RTI - DPC



Premier of Queensland
Minister for Trade

For reply please quote: *SocPol/SL – TF/21/1826 – DOC/21/16810*

29 January 2021

The Honourable Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister of Australia
Parliament House
PO Box 6022
CANBERRA ACT 2600

1 William Street Brisbane
PO Box 15185 City East
Queensland 4002 Australia
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Dear Prime Minister

As our nation contends with new and highly infectious strains of COVID-19, we must continue to work in partnership to examine and consider every possible measure to keep people safe.

Further to my previous letter of 22 January 2021 and our discussions on that date, I write regarding the Queensland Government's ongoing consideration of the establishment of a regional non-hotel COVID-19 quarantine facility.

It is our position that we need to ensure the future safety and security of our citizens.

We consider that regional quarantine facilities, such as those proposed at Wellcamp and Central Queensland, could provide a safe and secure means of not only quarantining returning Australians, but also best protecting the Queensland community.

A further advantage of a regional quarantine facility would be the ability to accommodate all staff onsite, drastically reducing the risk of a COVID-19 community outbreak, particularly from the highly infectious strains of the United Kingdom, South America or South Africa.

Specifically, I enclose further information, commercial in confidence, regarding the Wellcamp and Central Queensland quarantine options.

As you may be aware, this regional quarantine concept is consistent with the recommendation of the Halton Review for the Commonwealth to consider establishing a national facility for quarantine.

While our current hotel quarantine arrangements in Queensland have worked well, we must be ready for any scenario, particularly given the havoc wreaked by new strains of COVID-19 overseas.

The Queensland Government is continuing its detailed assessment of the viability of identified options, including undertaking risk assessments and engagement with key stakeholders. Officials from the Queensland Department of the Premier and Cabinet (DPC) have also had several detailed and productive discussions with their counterparts in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) on the matter.

I am seeking your in-principle agreement on a number of measures that allow for a regional quarantine facility in Queensland to be viable, subject to adequate community consultation.

Central to the viability of a regional quarantine facility would be your agreement to help facilitate a number of international flights diverting to previously discussed regional locations.

In addition, you may also wish to continue exploring Federal Government-facilitated flight arrivals of up to 200 passengers per week (400 passengers in total per week) arriving on a large aircraft, such as a Boeing 777, to bring Australians home to their families.

In implementing a regional quarantine facility, a number of requirements are needed from the Civil Aviation Safety Agency (CASA) advice, including:

- the safe capacity and capability at both Wellcamp and Rockhampton Airport to receive such flights
- whether there is a need for a new air traffic control tower at Wellcamp
- on ground capability (including from ABF, ADF and other Federal entities) to be established to facilitate these new flights at both proposed sites
- whether additional resources would be required to support appropriate fire and emergency service capabilities at the airports.

We also understand that the Federal Department of Infrastructure would be required to designate the airports as international airports, and that airport owner approval would be required.

As you can appreciate, these are critical issues that must be settled before the viability of options can be fully ascertained.

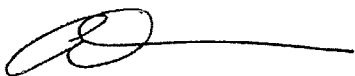
In addition, we are also seeking further information on what Federal Government support and resourcing, including financial contribution, will be made available at both the airport and the quarantine facility, including for:

- processing of international arrivals
- necessary capital works for essential service infrastructure
- health and welfare services (for example, hospital/primary care services and other health/welfare supports)
- facility operation (for example, health and security personnel, transport, catering, maintenance, ICT systems, financial administration/invoicing, data reporting, etc).

As you would be aware, the Director-General of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Mr Dave Stewart, will be meeting with the Secretary of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Mr Philip Gaetjens, shortly to further discuss these issues so that we may continue to progress the proposals.

The Queensland Government looks forward to your in-principle agreement on these important matters.

Yours sincerely



**ANNASTACIA PALASZCZUK MP
PREMIER OF QUEENSLAND
MINISTER FOR TRADE**