



PRIVATE SECTOR **TASKFORCE** COOK ISLANDS

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“We’d rather have NZ tourism dollars than its aid money”:

Growing calls for a shared NZ-Cook Islands travel bubble

Cook Islands business leaders are calling on the New Zealand government to prioritise a shared travel bubble between their Covid-19-free countries and lift border restrictions from June 19. The Cook Islands has never had a single Covid case and with New Zealand successfully stamping out the virus, it should now be possible to open up safe travel between the two countries without the need for quarantine restrictions, say the Cook Islands Private Sector Taskforce.

Taskforce Chair Fletcher Melvin said the Cook Islands economy depends on New Zealand tourism, and without it the Realm country’s economic outlook is severely challenged, echoing comments made by Prime Minister Henry Puna last week. A recent survey revealed Cook Islands businesses were projecting a 90% drop in revenue from the economic impact of Covid travel restrictions.

“We urge the New Zealand government to prioritise a shared border with Cook Islands and drop the unnecessary 14 day quarantine restrictions from one Covid-free country to another,” he said. “Every day our borders remain shut deepens our economic crisis and deepens the social fall out as businesses close and people lose their livelihoods.”

“We need New Zealand to amend its Cook Islands travel advisory and drop the requirement that travellers quarantine for 14 days on flying back into New Zealand.

“The hard truth is that if this drags on much longer, we’ll be coming to you for help one way or the other. Our community wants a hand, not a hand-out - we’d much rather have New Zealand tourism dollars than its aid money. There’s a big concern that we’ll see a repeat of our 1996 economic collapse, when thousands of people packed their bags and headed to New Zealand looking for work. That creates a whole set of new problems for both countries to deal with,” he said.

“New Zealand and the Cook Islands aren’t just neighbours, we’re family - that’s why Kiwis love coming here. Cook Islands is a Realm country, our people are citizens of New Zealand, we travel on New Zealand passports, our currency is New Zealand dollars and we’re only ...**MORE**

four hours away. There are around 60,000 Cook Islanders living in New Zealand today, four times more than those who live here. Family support each other in times of need.”

With both countries sitting on zero cases, the Taskforce said the Cook Islands can be kept safe from Covid with shared protocols with New Zealand. “Our stringent public health measures have successfully kept Covid out of the country. We’ve had time to prepare and protect ourselves and there are sufficient PPE supplies on the island. Our health officials are ready to work with their New Zealand counterparts to protect the public. We can do this,” said Fletcher Melvin.

Former New Zealand Prime Minister and UNDP Administrator Helen Clark backs the idea of including the Pacific in a Trans-Tasman travel bubble, saying on Twitter that tourism accounts for a significant proportion of GDP in Pacific small island developing states.



Helen Clark ✓
@HelenClarkNZ

Almost 2/3s of tourists to South Pacific island nations are from Australia & NZ. Tourism accounts for a significant proportion of GDP in a number of Pacific #SIDS. Trans-Tasman neighbours need to consider how Pacific inclusion in travel bubble could work:

Last week, Cook Islands Prime Minister Henry Puna said his government wanted New Zealand to open its borders to the Cook Islands, and the New Zealand Director-General of Health Dr Ashley Bloomfield has said there were "benefits both ways for us to be looking at opening up a bubble with a number of Pacific Islands.”

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The Private Sector Taskforce is the collective voice for the Cook Islands business community during the Covid-19 crisis. From relief to recovery: we’re focused on supporting businesses through the immediate disruption and uncertainty brought about by Covid and ahead to get the country’s economy back on its feet. Click [here](#) to learn more about our work.