

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

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Title: Quarantine and Visitor Policy - Implications for Tourism

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Previous papers: 49-20
70-20
86-20
94-20
102-20

Appendix A: Passenger numbers and SAA arrivals from January 2020.

1. Issue

- 1.1 On 6th April 2020 ExCo(con) considered paper 49-20 in respect of non-essential visitors to the Falkland Islands and agreed to apply restrictions. In accordance with that decision on 7th April 2020, the Principal Immigration Officer declared that visitor permits would not be granted for non-essential visitors. The ExCo decision required that this refusal to admit non-essential visitors be reviewed every 30 days.
- 1.2 ExCo(con) has since reviewed the decision on 8th May 2020 (paper 70-20), 10th June 2020 (paper 86-20), where the types of individuals who approved for travel was extended and the most recent review was conducted on 13th July (paper 102-20), which excluded volunteers as a category. This latest authority requires a thirty day review by 10th August 2020.
- 1.3 On 24th March 2020, the Infectious Diseases Control (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 came into force requiring arriving passengers to quarantine on the direction of a Medical Officer.
- 1.4 On 6th July 2020, the Infectious Diseases Control (Coronavirus, Quarantine) Regulations 2020 came into force, these introduced a blanket requirement to quarantine without the assessment of a Medical Officer with a limited number of exemptions. ExCo Paper 94-20 refers.

1.5 In order to support future planning particularly for the tourism sector it is appropriate to consider whether both the quarantine and visitor restrictions should continue. Principally, whether we should continue to prevent certain categories of visitors (tourists) from arriving and also whether it remains that arriving passengers should be required to quarantine for 14 days, in order to minimise risk of Covid-19 and to reduce potential burden on KEMH resources.

1.6 Any decision must be considered in the context that the Falkland Islands have had no confirmed cases of Covid-19 for 100 days (data correct as 29/07/20) and globally this is a relatively unique position.

2. Recommendation

2.1 It is recommended that Executive Council:

- a) Signal that whilst it is unlikely that the Falkland Islands' visitor permit restrictions will change before 31 December 2020, it will remain the subject of monthly review;
- b) Authorise the Principal Immigration Officer to refuse visitor permits for a further 30 days with effect from 4th August 2020, without seeking further authority from Executive Council in accordance with current policy;
- c) Authorise the Principal Immigration Officer to refuse to grant visas to persons wishing to visit the Falkland Islands (where a visitor requires a visa);
- d) Note the current approved visitor list;
- e) Note that the Principal Immigration Officer will ensure that any necessary report is made to the World Health Organisation under International Health Regulations;
- f) Signal the intention to continue the requirement to quarantine until at least 31st December 2020 under the Infectious Diseases Control (Coronavirus, Quarantine) Regulations 2020 but note that this shall be reviewed regularly in line with the requirements of the Regulations.
- g) Require the Chief Medical Officer and Director of Policy & Economic Development to consider future policy options related to small cruise vessel operations in the Falkland Islands. This is to be presented to ExCo in September for consideration;
- h) Require the Director of Emergency Services and Island Security, together with the Emergency Planning Manager and the FIG Statistician, to develop an enhanced evidence-base to guide decision-making in respect of Covid measures and border controls and to support consistent communication to the public.
- i) Require the Director of Health and Social Services, together with the Chief Medical Officer, to report to ExCo in October whether one or both of the policies of quarantine or visitor restrictions should continue past the indicated date of 31st December 2020. Further that it incorporates the evidence-base on which the recommendations are made and options for alternative interventions.

3. Background

3.1 In many ways, the current crisis appears to be worse than the 2008 Global Crisis, especially for travel and tourism.

3.2 Research suggests that the tourist industry will be significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Scenarios developed by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation point to a decline of around 60% - 80% in tourist arrivals for 2020. Even if the Falkland Islands' borders are

open and tourists are allowed to visit, there would be a considerable impact on the local tourism sector from significantly deteriorated global conditions. The UNWTO sees signs of recovery in international tourism demand by the final quarter of 2020 – but mostly during 2021 with the outlook remaining highly uncertain, with scenarios for the Americas being among the least optimistic.

- 3.3 Many people will be less inclined to travel – as fear of contagion will depress travel demand at least until a vaccine is developed, which might take many months – and travelling could become considerably more expensive. Travel demand will also decrease because of a reduction of employment rates and income.
- 3.4 The conclusion is that removing travel restrictions will not be sufficient to restore demand to its pre-crisis levels. Lifting mandatory lockdown measures and restrictions, especially if the health crisis is still not fully under control, may not significantly restore expected demand as people would continue to voluntarily limit travel.
- 3.5 Within this overall context and given the need for regular review of policy, it is very difficult for the tourist sector to plan for the upcoming season.
- 3.6 Although there is a significant amount of data available internationally, most countries are still dealing with active Covid-19 outbreaks and therefore there are few nations that are assessed by WHO as “zero cases” of Covid-19, having suffered an outbreak. This means the opportunity to learn from others is relatively limited at this time, but could develop over the coming months.
- 3.7 Countries with air links to the Falkland Islands UK, Chile, Brazil and Argentina are suffering outbreaks to varying degrees, some of which are significant.
- 3.8 The UK still has some local lockdowns in place and other countrywide measures to prevent the risk of spread of the virus. The general trend is downwards, however there are some spikes in presentation and a significant number of new cases per day. Whilst measures are being eased internally, international connectivity with the UK has increased and there are over 70 countries from where arriving passengers are not required to quarantine on arrival, many of these countries have an active outbreak of Covid-19. This potentially increases the risk of the virus being able to spread in the UK and via air links onwards.
- 3.9 Chile, Brazil and Argentina are suffering community transmission outbreaks of the virus and South America generally is being significantly impacted. The borders of Chile, Brazil and Argentina are currently closed to anyone other than returning residents or spouses and children of residents.
- 3.10 LATAM has suspended flights to the Falkland Islands, and although there are no commercial air routes, our sea border continues to provide access.
- 3.11 On 7th April 2020, in accordance with an ExCo decision, the Principal Immigration Officer declared that no non-essential visitors were permitted into the Falkland Islands. The ExCo decision required that this refusal to admit non-essential visitors be reviewed every 30 days, reviews have subsequently been carried out at regular intervals.

- 3.12 From 7th April – 30th July around 140 applications were processed. The main categories were crew exchanges/repatriations, Marine Mammal Observers, individuals stranded as a result of the suspension of the LATAM flights and family visitors. Additionally, there were three refusals for tourists, a non-essential business visitor and a family member who was entitled to apply as a dependent.
- 3.13 The most recent review of this policy took place on 13th July 2020. This required a review by 11th August at the latest. The Assembly will be in recess from 6th – 21st August and therefore it is appropriate that this review is conducted slightly earlier than scheduled so the policy remains in effect through the period of recess; it would then be subject to further review in September 2020.
- 3.14 The existing visitor restrictions ensure that an additional uncontrolled burden is not placed on finite FIG resources. The only limitations on tourists travelling to the Falkland Islands by air, is flight capacity and no restrictions, that are manageable, can be placed on these numbers. The SAA is the only flight currently, however, this could still enable a number of tourist visitors to enter each week that could overwhelm FIG quarantine accommodation capacity. This situation would obviously be exacerbated when commercial flights re-commence.
- 3.15 Large cruise ships could place an unreasonable burden on FIG, most vessels carry over 1,000 passengers with the larger vessels carrying over 2,300 passengers.
- 3.16 The small cruise vessel industry involves vessels with passenger numbers ranging from 100 to 530. Although there is no current demand from this sector it is appropriate that work is undertaken that will inform future decision-making.
- 3.17 The Chief Medical Officer, as our public health lead, is well-placed to provide public health policy advice in relation to the small cruise vessel sector. The Director of Policy is in a position to identify other relevant policy considerations. These should jointly be presented to ExCo for consideration.
- 3.18 The existing visitor policy permits the following categories of visitor:
- Business visitors required for essential maintenance on equipment, which cannot continue to be operated without the maintenance i.e. KEMH visiting engineers
 - Crew from vessels associated with the Falkland Islands and SGSSI for the purpose of exchange and/or repatriation
 - Scientific and other maritime observers associated with the Falkland Islands and SGSSI for exchange and/or repatriation purposes
 - Individuals already present in the Falkland Islands when LATAM flights were suspended
 - Family members
 - Business visitors for the purpose of delivering projects within the Islands Plan
 - Other business visitors
 - Crew from vessels with no connection to the Falkland Islands for the purpose of exchange and/or repatriation where onward travel arrangements are confirmed and in place

- Conservation and environmental specialists

3.19 Since the essential visitor policy has been in place there have been three tourist visitor enquiries.

3.20 Globally it remains that there are still significant outbreaks of Covid-19, the existing visitor policy can be administered as the only flight is the South Atlantic Airbridge and therefore a single coordinating point is available for flight bookings to be managed through. Additionally, applications from vessels are received directly by the Customs and Immigration Service.

3.21 In relation to quarantine, on Monday 6th July 2020, the Infectious Diseases Control (Coronavirus, Quarantine) Regulations 2020 came into force. With the introduction of these regulations came a clear statement that the Falkland Islands Government would facilitate quarantine accommodation if it was not possible to appropriately quarantine away from other household members. This commitment places an additional burden upon FIG and therefore it is considered that whilst quarantine is still a requirement that a restriction on tourist visitors should remain.

3.22 Quarantine arrangements by their very nature discourage casual/tourist visitors. It is considered that whilst mandatory quarantine is in place that restricting the ability of tourist visitors to attend the Falklands will not have a significant detrimental impact either on visitor numbers or our tourism reputation. However, over the longer term the combined effect of quarantine and restrictions on visitor permits will impact on bookings for the 2020/21 tourism season in the Falklands.

3.23 The Falkland Islands currently have no confirmed cases of Covid and the Chief Medical Officer has recently assessed the risk as to be considered to be so low as to be virtually nil (now over 100 days without a confirmed case).

3.24 Effective quarantine arrangements are a key factor in preventing the virus from re-entering the Falkland Islands and supporting the Falkland Islands in remaining Covid free. Other elements support this such as testing and tracing and surveillance swabbing.

3.25 It is appropriate over the coming weeks and months that further data monitoring and analysis is undertaken so that Covid-19 presentation trends within those countries with air links to the Falkland Islands is better understood along with the global picture. As the Falklands continues to look forward, the development of a model that brings together a range of risk and impact indicators interacting between each other that can be used to show increasing/decreasing or stable external risks will evolve our understanding. The response to these external changes will be for the CMO to advise around public health options and interventions.

4. Reasons for recommendation

4.1 Retaining the non-essential visitor policy will allow for effective management of visitor numbers and reduce the risk of burden on KEMH. See appendix A for passenger numbers and SAA arrivals from January 2020.

- 4.2 Quarantine regulations are currently in place and new additional quarantine regulations have been introduced. It is unlikely that short-term visitors will wish to visit the Falkland Islands whilst there is a requirement to quarantine.
- 4.3 There are currently no commercial flights in and out of the Falklands, the only flight being the South Atlantic Airbridge, therefore visitor/tourist opportunities are limited. This will likely change in the future, but there is no firm date for either of the commercial routes recommencing at this time.
- 4.4 The Falklands is fortunate in that the geographical location of the Islands, combined with the limited number of ways visitors can travel here, allows decisive action to be taken, at the right time, to continue to safeguard the population against the Covid-19 virus.
- 4.5 The visitor restrictions have not created a significant burden on resources and the restrictions remain consistent with the Falkland Islands current quarantine requirements.
- 4.6 There have been reduced direct enquiries in respect of tourist visitors.
- 4.7 Proactive policy development work in relation to the small cruise vessel sector, will enable FIG to have a considered position rather than being reactive in its approach.
- 4.8 Refusal of tourist visitors prevents a potential additional burden on FIG in supporting suitable quarantine accommodation for some tourist visitors (where their booked accommodation is not suitable).
- 4.9 Business visitors and others are enabled to travel to and transit through the Falkland Islands thereby supporting the economy.
- 4.10 Ongoing analysis of data will enable informed decision-making. This will ensure that any easing of restrictions or measures considers the potential risk and impacts, mitigations and opportunities that each particular approach will deliver. Evidence-based defensible decision-making in the national interest.
- 4.11 Approving extended timescales with regular review periods for the measures in place will signal to various sectors potential timescales for future planning thereby providing a degree of certainty, particularly for the tourism sector. Additionally, the review timescale of end of October would enable planning time should there be a policy change and measures eased or alternative border arrangements introduced.

5. Implications

- 5.1 Tourists would not be permitted to travel to the Falkland Islands, most likely until January 2021, but subject to monthly review in line with existing policy.
- 5.2 Mandatory quarantine remains in place and likely to be so until January 2021, but subject to regular review in accordance with the requirements of the quarantine regulations.

5.3 By the very nature of the existing policy there is restriction of movement of some individuals into the Falklands. Freedom of movement is enshrined in The Falkland Islands Constitution, however this restriction is proportionate at this time.

6. **Communications**

6.1 The continuation of these measures will require sensitive communication through a press release, in addition to communication with the Falkland Islands Tourist Board, Falkland Islands Tourism Association, FIGO, travel agents, IAATO as well as international bodies involved in flight bookings.