



PRIME MINISTER

Reference: MC20-176908

3 FEB 2021

Mr Andrew Macintosh
Chair
Australian Chamber of Commerce Hong Kong
3/F Lucky Building
39 Wellington Street
HONG KONG

Dear Mr Macintosh

Thank you for your letter dated 27 November 2020 regarding travel between Australia and Hong Kong and difficulties for Australian citizens seeking to return home.

As a nation continent, control of our borders has been a means by which we have kept Australians safe. These measures are essential to continue the success that Australia has achieved so far in minimising the domestic spread of the pandemic.

Nevertheless, we know these measures have made returning home more difficult for some Australian citizens and permanent residents, including those in Hong Kong. I understand and acknowledge how tough the uncertainty caused by the pandemic has been on individuals' mental wellbeing.

I can assure you that the Australian Government will continue to work with the states and territories to reopen borders once it is safe to do. Reopening Australia's borders depends on a number of health, transport and other preconditions to protect the progress Australians have made in the face of the pandemic.

Australia is a trading nation, and we recognise the importance of international travel to facilitating business across borders. Hong Kong is home to our largest commercial presence in Asia and the government values the important work of the Australian Chamber of Commerce in continuing to support opportunities for Australian businesses operating in Hong Kong.

The Australian Government is doing everything it can to help Australians who have faced difficulty returning, especially those who are most vulnerable. We are working with the airlines and state and territory jurisdictions to ensure that we bring them home as effectively, quickly and safely as possible.

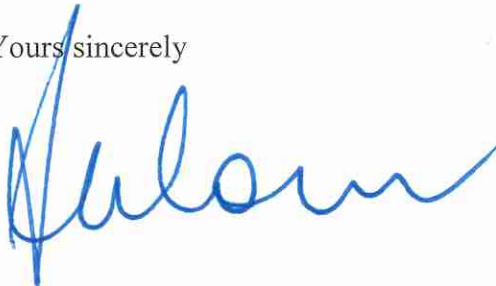
International air passenger arrival caps remain in place at major airports to protect against the risk of Australia's health and quarantine systems becoming overwhelmed. The caps are subject to ongoing review by National Cabinet, and we continue to work with state and territory authorities to increase quarantine capacity through major airports, as well as for further facilitated flights.

We are also continuing discussions to increase the number of airports receiving Australians from overseas. An additional, dedicated number of spaces for vulnerable Australians is being provided on existing commercial services under an agreement reached with the states and territories.

The requirement for international travellers to undertake quarantine is also managed by each of the states and territories. Given the substantial costs of operating hotel quarantine programs, the decision to charge fees is one of the many tough decisions states have had to make. In a commitment to helping those faced with unique and challenging circumstances, I understand states have also put in place hardship provisions in relation to these hotel quarantine fees. Further details are available on relevant state health websites.

I trust this information is of use to you and encourage you to continue to work with the Australian Consulate-General in Hong Kong. I have copied this letter to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator the Hon Marise Payne, and Australia's Consul-General to Hong Kong and Macau, Ms Elizabeth Ward.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Scott Morrison', is written over the 'Yours sincerely' text.

SCOTT MORRISON