

**HOME AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO  
AUSTRALIAN BORDER FORCE**

**PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY WRITTEN QUESTION ON NOTICE**

Select Committee COVID-19

**QoN Number: CV19-302**

**Subject: Travel banned**

**Asked by:** Kristina Keneally

**Question:**

On what date was travel between the Torres Strait Islands and Papua New Guinea banned due to COVID-19?

**Answer:**

On 19 March 2020, Prime Minister Morrison announced the closure of Australia's borders to all non-citizens and non-residents effective 9pm AEDT Friday 20 March 2020 and has been extended until Thursday 17 December 2020.

Papua New Guinea's Health Minister announced the closure of its international borders on 20 March 2020.

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**QoN Number: CV19-303**

**Subject: Support Materials**

**Asked by:** Kristina Keneally

**Question:**

What materials have been produced to support non-English speaking residents in understanding the rules under the travel ban?

**Answer:**

In March 2020, the Australian Border Force (ABF) produced information in Tok Pisin to support non-English speaking residents of Papua New Guinea Treaty villages to understand the Australian border closure and movement restrictions applicable in the Torres Strait. This information is regularly reviewed to ensure it remains accurate. The ABF also has several locally engaged officers, who are all able to communicate in indigenous tongue to local community members.

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**QoN Number: CV19-304**

**Subject: Assets and staff currently in the Torres Strait**

**Asked by:** Kristina Keneally

**Question:**

Please provide a breakdown of the assets and staff currently in the Torres Strait implementing the ban.

**Answer:**

See CV19-305.

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Select Committee COVID-19

**QoN Number:** CV19-305

**Subject: Military, police and ABF support**

**Asked by:** Kristina Keneally

**Question:**

What range of military, police and ABF support (assets and staff) are on hand to enforce the ban?

**Answer:**

*Australian Border Force (ABF) Staff:*

- Eleven deployed officers
- Nine locally engaged Border Monitoring Officers
- An additional ten ABF officers are available to be surged to the Torres region as deemed necessary according to threat indicators.

*Force assigned to Maritime Border Command Staff:*

- Ninety-four Defence personnel have been force assigned to the region and operate under the command of the Australian Border Force Commissioner.

The ABF cannot comment on Military operations in the region and this should be referred to the Department of Defence. Likewise, the ABF cannot respond on behalf of a state police department.

**Assets:**

The ABF uses a mix of Maritime Border Command and Defence assets to deliver operational effect and provide 24x7 presence with the following posture:

- three regional patrol craft
- one Landing Craft Medium 8
- two patrol vessels
- two fast response boats (only one deployable at any one time)
- two helicopters
- one Dash 8 aircraft
- one Unmanned Aerial System

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**QoN Number: CV19-306**

**Subject: Australian and Queensland Government agencies**

**Asked by:** Kristina Keneally

**Question:**

Which Australian and Queensland Government agencies are involved in enforcing the travel ban?

**Answer:**

- Australian Border Force
- Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment
- Department of Health
- Department of Defence
- Australian Federal Police
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

We also collaborate with Queensland state agencies, in particular:

- Queensland Health
- Queensland Police Service
- Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships

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**QoN Number: CV19-307**

**Subject: Enforcement of restrictions and exemptions**

**Asked by:** Kristina Keneally

**Question:**

How have the travel restrictions been enforced, and are there any exemptions for travel under the ban?

**Answer:**

Australian Border Force (ABF) enforces travel restrictions by deploying land, air and on water assets to conduct surveillance of the area. ABF then facilitates the rapid repatriation of vessels conducting border violations back through the Torres Strait to Papua New Guinea with all passengers onboard.

ABF, Department of Agriculture Water and Environment and Queensland Health jointly evaluate any vessel on arrival. If PNG nationals are assessed by Queensland health as requiring urgent medical treatment, the ABF support a discretion for the purpose of obtaining urgent medical attention.