

## **COOK ISLANDS**

### **Second Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics 16-19 November 2021**

Honourable Ministers and Senior Officials, Distinguished delegates, Kia Orana and a warm greetings from the Cook Islands.

As Minister of Justice, I want to thank the organisers of this conference for allowing me to speak briefly on the Cook Islands.

Our Ministry of Justice administers our national registries for births, deaths, and marriages, pursuant to legislation enacted in 1973.

For many years the Cook Islands has had a high success rate at having births registered.

Certain incentives assist in ensuring birth registrations are done, including a new born allowance lump sum payment, and a Child Benefit, with payments twice a month until the child reaches the age of 16. Registration of the child's birth is essential in obtaining these payments.

Despite this success, the Ministry of Justice is exploring several initiatives, including:

- 1) modernising our 1973 legislation that governs births, deaths, and marriages;
- 2) exploring the implementation of national IDs; and
- 3) moving towards a more digital environment.

Fortunately, the impact of Covid19 has not significantly affected the administration of our births, deaths, and marriage registries. Lesser marriage licenses have been issued compared to before the pandemic started, and there has been a greater use of communication technology.

The Cook Islands closed its borders in March 2020 and was declared a Covid19 Free Zone the following month. Repatriation flights were arranged and travel was restricted until one way quarantine free travel to NZ opened in January 2021. Full quarantine-free travel between NZ and the Cook Islands began in May 2021 along with a vaccination rollout.

Travel was suspended again in August 2021, and vaccines for children 12 to 15 years of age was rolled out in October.

As at 30th October 2021, approximately 99% of our eligible population had been vaccinated with a first dose, and approximately 93% vaccinated with a second dose.

With great success in rolling out vaccinations, the Cook Islands is now going to re-open two-way quarantine free travel between the Cook Islands and NZ beginning 13th January 2022, provided intended travellers meet criteria, such as being double-vaccinated and providing a negative covid19 test prior to travel.

It is my hope that as we all push forward and meet the challenges before us, we will increase our opportunities for collaboration and success. On behalf of the Cook Island I wish you all the best during this important conference.