

Executive Yuan Approves the Normalization of the “Lunar New Year Charter Ferry Program for Kinmen and Matsu”

MAC Press Release No. 004

The “Lunar New Year Charter Ferry Program for Kinmen and Matsu” (hereinafter the “Charter Ferry Program”) approved in the 3834th session of the Executive Yuan on December 22, 2022, will expire on February 6, 2023. Following a review and report conducted by the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) and relevant agencies, the Executive Yuan agreed on February 4 to continue implementing the program and normalize relevant services. This is aimed at facilitating travel by residents of Kinmen and Matsu between the offshore islands of Kinmen and Matsu, and mainland China, and consolidating the foundation for normalized passenger service under the “Mini-three-links.”

The MAC stated that the Charter Ferry Program was initiated on January 7; until February 3, a total of 34 roundtrips were made (28 trips from Kinmen and six from Matsu). The service transported 4,299 passengers, of whom 99% were Kinmen and Matsu residents and their spouses whereas 1% were travelers approved for humanitarian reasons consistent with program objectives. The saliva-based PCR tests for inbound passengers had a positive rate ranging from 14.8% to 20.5% in the early stage but recently down to 2.2%. The CIQS (customs, immigration, quarantine, security) clearance of passengers

proceeded smoothly without security breaches. No violations pertaining to African swine fever prevention were seized (detected) thanks to enhanced efforts on raising awareness and strict implementation of animal and plant quarantine controls. Other illegal items were either voluntarily disposed of by passengers or fined in accordance with the law.

The MAC stated that the program has been smoothly implemented with the full cooperation of relevant ministries and local governments. Local public opinion generally reflected hope that the program would continue. In view of the needs of Kinmen and Matsu residents and limited local medical capacity, relevant authorities conducted reviews and decided to normalize the Charter Ferry Program and increase the number of routes and trips. Relevant details are as follows:

- (1) Program duration: From February 7, 2023.
- (2) Service provision: The Kinmen-Xiamen route can operate up to 1 roundtrip per day whereas the newly added Kinmen-Quanzhou route can run up to 2 roundtrips per week. The Matsu route can operate 4 roundtrips at most per week (up from 2 in the previous stage.)
- (3) Traveler eligibility: Eligible travelers remain restricted to residents of Kinmen and Matsu and their mainland Chinese spouses. The Kinmen and Matsu governments will be responsible for compiling lists and managing the registration.

(4) Border quarantine & pandemic control measures: The competent authority remains to be the Ministry of Health and Welfare.

(5) Review mechanisms: The implementation of the present program and future developments of the COVID-19 situation will feed into the rolling review of future arrangements of the “Mini-three-links” passenger service.

The MAC supplemented that, the Matsu route of the Charter Ferry Program already covers the Baisha-Huangqi route, and the government hoped that mainland China would cooperate in the operations of this route. There have been voices from the public calling for “transfers” to be permitted under the “Mini-three-links” in line with cross-Strait air transportation. Considering the lack of information transparency about the pandemic in mainland China and the insufficient medical capacity in Kinmen and Matsu, this matter will be discussed in rolling reviews that factor in the implementation of normalized cross-Strait transportation afterwards.

The MAC reiterated that the government's policy is that, premised on the pandemic can be kept under control, it will gradually resume healthy and orderly people-to-people exchanges between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait and therefore ease cross-Strait tensions. Arrangements for the “Mini-three-links” passenger service will be determined based on comprehensive evaluation and continued review taking account of the COVID-19 situation and other developments as

the government resumes normal cross-Strait exchanges in a step-by-step approach.