TE TIRA ĀRAI URUTĀ
NZ ROYAL COMMISSION
COVID-19 LESSONS LEARNED

In confidence

30 July 2025

Hon Brooke van Velden
Minister of Internal Affairs
Parliament Buildings
WELLINGTON 6160

Dear Minister

Quarterly Report to 30 June 2025

On behalf of my fellow Commissioners, I am pleased to provide you with the quarterly report for Phase Two of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19. The report covers the period 1 April to 30 June 2025. This follows our previous report to you on 24 April, and the more detailed timeline provided to you on 17 June 2025.

Progress on priorities

The Inquiry has made positive progress during this quarter. As outlined in more detail in the attached report, in this quarter we have:

- Engaged with a broad range of groups including business, social, health, Māori, Pasifika, and other communities of interest, holding 47 key engagements in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, Christchurch, and online, largely completing our programme of engagements; and undertaken 21 individual interviews.
- Analysed all the documents received from government agencies in response to requests under section 20 of the Inquiries Act (more than 7,000, with some specific follow-up requests underway).
- Completed coding on the 31,418 public submissions received.
- Commenced research projects on impacts and consequences of Covid-19 and the response.
- Undertaken significant preparatory work to support the effective delivery of public hearings.
- Completed detailed planning of programme activity required to deliver the report to you by 26 February next year.

In the next quarter we aim to:

- Complete two weeks of hearings in July (for key sectors and communities of interest) and August (for decision makers and senior officials).
- Complete analysis on the public submissions we received and draft a summary report.
- Gather information from remaining decision-makers (in writing or through interviews).
- Prepare for Natural justice.
- Summarise and prepare reporting from our programme of engagements
- Finalise the analysis of key decisions, based on the evidence gathered to date (including public hearings), and hence begin drafting the 'findings' section of the final report.
- Begin work to prepare lessons, to provide advice about what could be done differently in future.

Financial Performance

The Inquiry has incurred costs to date of $4.835 million, against a full year budget of $5.889 million. We are confident that we will deliver our report within the agreed overall appropriation of $14.038m. More detail on our financial performance is provided in Appendix 1.

Risks

In our last letter, we identified a risk that there may be delays due to Crown Law becoming the intermediary for our interactions with the public service. In the main, this risk has proven manageable. Whilst it has created some delays, they have been able to be accommodated. The outstanding issue here relates to our access to the assessment of human rights in Cabinet papers and briefings. We will correspond directly with you on this matter.

To date, none of the five former Ministers have officially agreed to participate in the second week of hearings, scheduled to start 20 August. Discussions with their legal representatives are ongoing.

Ongoing programme planning

Our progress is consistent with the timeline we provided on 17 June 2025. Most work has been completed according to the timeline. There have been some delays (due to the factors as discussed above and analytical workloads), however we do not anticipate that they will affect the delivery date for the final report.

We have taken account of the risks inherent in the Crown Law approach to engagement with the public service in preparing and revising our plan. At this stage some pressures on timeframes remain.

Consultation and release of this quarterly report

In line with the previous quarterly report process, we have shared a copy of the quarterly report with the Inquiries team at DIA and we plan to publish this report on the Inquiry's website around 15 August 2025.

Please do contact me if you have any questions or wish to discuss anything further. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you again in relation to any feedback you may have, or to provide you with any additional information about the work of the Inquiry you may require.

Yours sincerely

JM Kavanagh.

pp Commissioner Judy Kavanagh

on behalf of G M Illingworth KC
Chair of the Inquiry

Appendix 1 – Financial Performance

As of 30 June 2025, the Inquiry has incurred costs of $4.835 million, including $0.563 million non-departmental costs for Commissioners. This expenditure is generally in line with normal bell-curve spend patterns for Inquiries.

We have underspent our budget for the current year by around $1.054 million which will be carried forward into the FY2025/26 financial year. This underspend mainly relates to delayed research and consultancy costs with an amount previously held for this purpose in contingency.

The following table provides a more fulsome breakdown of actual and forecast expenses through to end June 2026. The most significant costs are for personnel, evidence gathering research and submissions analysis, Commissioners and counsel assisting.

	YTD Actual (30 June)	Full year forecast	Budget	Whole of Life cost
	2024/25 $million	2024/25 $million	2025/26 $million	2024 - 2026 $million
Controllable expenditure – operations	**3.369**	**4.021**	**5.954**	**9.975**
Personnel	2.129	2.096	3.476	5.571
Other Operating Costs	0.259	0.403	0.743	1.146
Consultant, Outsourcing and Professional fees	0.684	1.204	0.856	2.060
Rental, Leasing and Accommodation Costs	0.240	0.254	0.766	1.019
Travel	0.057	0.065	0.114	0.179
Uncontrollable expenditure - support	**0.902**	**1.268**	**1.605**	**2.873**
Commissioner costs	**0.563**	**0.600**	**0.590**	**1.190**
Total Expenditure	**4.835**	**5.889**	**8.149**	**14.038**

The Inquiry is forecast to complete Phase Two work within the agreed budget envelope.

Appendix 2 - Delivery Timeline

This timeline shows key activities to deliver a final report by 26 February 2026. There have been no adjustments to dates since the timeline was last provided to you on 17 June 2025.