



COVID-19 Inquiry Pānui

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A word from our Chair, Professor Tony Blakely



Kia ora koutou,

I want to update you on some changes at the Commission, and potentially, for the Inquiry more generally.

Firstly, we farewellled Commissioner Hon Hekia Parata from the Inquiry earlier in November. You can read more about Hekia's departure in this update, but I would like to reiterate the outstanding contribution she has made to our work. Her experience, expertise and energy will be missed. At the same time, we absolutely

recognise the demands on her time with the challenging situation in Tairāwhiti following the severe weather events in the region this year, and her decision to focus on matters closer to home. We wish her well with all her efforts to support the community.

You might also be aware that the new Government has signalled, as part of its coalition agreements, that it would like to review the Inquiry's terms of reference.

We welcome the opportunity to work with the new Government on what an expanded and clarified remit for the Inquiry might look like. We will provide updated information regarding any changes to our terms of reference as part of our regular communication.

Related to this, it was our intention to seek public input and submissions on the Inquiry from November this year. However, given the scope and Terms of Reference of the Inquiry may change, we've made the decision to delay public submissions until early 2024. We believe this delay will avoid any confusion for those who want to share their COVID-19 experiences with us.

We are very aware of the critical importance to our work of the people of Aotearoa New Zealand having the opportunity to share their experiences with the Royal Commission of Inquiry, Te Tira Ārai Urutā. I want to reiterate our commitment to actively encouraging and seeking public input, and I look forward to providing you with more details about how and when that will happen.

In the meantime, the wider work of the Inquiry continues. We continue to undertake direct engagements with key individuals, communities and organisations, and I want to thank those people we have met with – and will meet with – for their time and contributions. What we hear from these engagements is tremendously

valuable and adds a real richness to our understanding of the impacts, and response to the pandemic.

To date, we have undertaken over 200 evidence-gathering engagements and met with around 800 people across New Zealand, and we look forward to further engagements in the coming months. Alongside these engagements, we are making good progress in analysing all the information we have received to date and blending it with the large body of knowledge and insights from countries around the world, to generate lessons for Aotearoa New Zealand on how best to prepare for, respond to, and recover from the next pandemic whenever it occurs.

Heoi ano ra,



Professor Tony Blakely

Royal Commission Chair

Hon Hekia Parata stands down from COVID-19 Inquiry



The Hon Hekia Parata has resigned from Te Tira Ārai Urutā, finishing with the Commission on 15 November 2023.

Ms Parata informed the Minister of Internal Affairs in July of her personal reasons for stepping down. Since then, she has completed all duties of the role, in anticipation of the appointment of a new Commissioner by the incoming Government.

“It has been an honour to serve our Royal Commission with its forward-looking focus on lessons, and emphasis on strengthening our preparedness for the next pandemic. It’s been a privilege to hear from many individuals and organisations who did so much to protect our communities and country. They deserve our thanks, even as we identify how we can do better in the future. This will be assisted by hearing from the wider public who will have the opportunity to share their experiences too,” says Ms Parata.

[Read more.](#)

A busy month of engagements for the COVID-19 Inquiry

In early November, the Inquiry made our first visit to Kirikiriroa Hamilton. While there, the Inquiry met with local representatives from Te Whatu Ora, primary care and public health professionals, local government, and with local businesses.



The Commissioners with representatives from Waikato Public Health.



The Commissioners at the ethnic communities' forum in Tāmaki Makaurau.

From Kirikiriroa it was straight to Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. In Auckland the Inquiry met with the Auckland City Mission, Kainga Ora, representatives from Aotearoa New Zealand's many ethnic communities, Pacific community leaders and health and wellbeing providers, Air New Zealand, New Zealand Police, local businesses, and Whakarongorau (NZ Telehealth).

"I think there's a lot of lessons now being learned. I think what's now come out for me is the most important part is identifying who are the real Pacific leaders. I know the Government has to have their own idea of who the leaders are, but when it comes down to Pasifika people and the way they do things it is the churches

who are the mainstay for every community and I think they should be involved right from the beginning.” Reverend Dr Featunai Liuaana, historian, theologian, educator and minister at EFKS Sandringham

The following week, Commissioner John Whitehead and members of the secretariat travelled to Tāhuna Queenstown. As one of Aotearoa’s biggest tourist destinations and the site of some of the earliest COVID-19 cases, Queenstown businesses and local government had a unique perspective to offer.



Commissioner John Whitehead leading a business forum in Queenstown.

While in Queenstown, the Inquiry met with the Queenstown Lakes District Council, Ngāi Tahu Holdings, and with a ‘large business’ forum, and a ‘small business’ forum.

“The success of our activation and our response was built on our relationships, and we’ve continued to build those relationships... those are things that really support you. We also have a really strong community response network established, so that community resilience is huge.” Bill Nichol, Resilience and Climate Action Manager for Queenstown Lakes District Council.

As well as these visits, Inquiry engagements continued around the country, including community leaders, academic experts, business leaders, science and health experts, unions, government agencies, and many more.

Record of Inquiry engagements

The Inquiry regularly updates the Record of Inquiry Engagements on our website to share who we have met with and in what capacity. You can view last month's engagements [on the website](#).

Commissioners in the media

Professor Tony Blakely spoke with RNZ's The Detail about the Inquiry's work, achievements, and approach so far.

"This was an extraordinary event – 100 years since the last pandemic that was [this] large – and it's our responsibility to take the lessons from this pandemic so we can respond better to the next pandemic whenever it arrives."

He also spoke with [NZ Doctor](#) (paywalled) during the Inquiry's recent visit to Tāmaki Makaurau.

Commissioner John Whitehead also spoke with media during the Inquiry's visit to Queenstown in mid-November.

He [says] "one of the real privileges" of being a commissioner is hearing how communities stepped up — "just hearing some of these stories is very moving".



Royal Commission COVID-19 Lessons

<https://www.covid19lessons.royalcommission.nz/>

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