



Third Quarterly Report: July – September 2023

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to provide a high-level summary of the activities over the period July 2023 to September 2023 of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Lessons Learned from Aotearoa New Zealand's Response to COVID-19 That Should Be Applied in Preparation for a Future Pandemic | Te Tira Ārai Urutā (the Inquiry).

Activity of the Inquiry this quarter

2. Over the July to September quarter, the Inquiry continued its focus on engaging with a broad range of stakeholders. This saw the Inquiry achieve a significant milestone – meeting with more than 100 organisations, individuals, and community groups across a wide range of topics and areas of interest including educational institutions, businesses, health providers, service providers, community leaders and government representatives.
3. Recent engagement points of interest have included visits in Tairāwhiti Gisborne to hear a range of voices and perspectives on the pandemic, as well as visits to several health providers to see firsthand how they responded to COVID-19 and to discuss what lessons they think we might be able to learn ahead of any future pandemic. In particular, these visits gave Commissioners insight into how the pressures of a range of emergencies and crisis events in recent years, including the COVID-19 pandemic, have impacted upon a community, as well as the opportunity to hear how the pandemic experience differed between regional and urban centres.
4. A full list of the organisations and individuals the Inquiry has engaged with can be found on the Inquiry's website.
5. These engagements have generated an important evidence-base, alongside the large volume of publicly available information the Inquiry has also gathered, drawn from individuals and groups with a wide range of perspectives on the COVID-19 pandemic. This growing body of evidence allowed the Inquiry to develop emerging themes and lessons, which will now help to shape the Inquiry's approach as it moves towards developing findings and recommendations, as well as identifying new lines of investigation and areas where further evidence is required.
6. Alongside these engagements, the Inquiry has also been preparing to seek input from the wider public. This has included developing how the Inquiry will ensure the public are aware of the opportunity to share their stories and experiences of the pandemic to inform the Commission's findings, and how it will analyse the responses it receives. In both areas, the Inquiry has elected to secure external partners to provide additional capacity and capability for this work. The Inquiry expects to begin seeking input from the wider New Zealand public by the end of November 2023, with submissions open until early March 2024.
7. The Inquiry's policy team has made significant progress on evidence gathering, including through the extensive engagement programme and the team is now fully engaged with analysing evidence against our terms of reference. Over the July to September quarter, this

work has focused on identifying qualitative and quantitative evidence, and developing a series of topic working papers which compile the evidence base for the Inquiry's analysis and deliberations. These working papers synthesise the evidence and identify lines of inquiry that will support the development of findings, lessons, and recommendations.

Finance

8. Up to 30 September 2023, the Inquiry has incurred costs for the 2023/24 financial year of \$2.108 million across all expenditure, against a full-year budget of \$9.846 million.

	2023/24 Spend YTD \$Ms	2023/24 Budget \$Ms
Controllable expenditure - operations	\$1.734	\$7.539
Uncontrollable expenditure - support	\$0.140	\$0.947
Commissioner Costs	\$0.234	\$1.360
Total	\$2.108	\$9.846

9. The above table does not include a number of changes expected to be made through the October Baseline Update, including transferring underspent funding from the 2022/23 financial year into this year to cover costs that were delayed from earlier in the year.
10. The Inquiry is currently forecasting to meet its budget for the 2023/24 financial year.

Challenges and risk

11. The challenges and risks the Inquiry has previously raised around managing the volume of information and the diverse public expectations for the Inquiry's work remain. The Inquiry continues to actively manage these through how it communicates with both individual stakeholders and the public more broadly.
12. The Inquiry has previously highlighted the impact of the uncertainty over the volume of public submissions it will receive on its ability to effectively plan its delivery. Over the last quarter, considerable work has been undertaken to understand the risks this poses and potential ways to mitigate that risk, culminating in the selection of a delivery partner to provide both external capacity and specialist expertise to support us with the analysis of public submissions. This work has left the Inquiry well placed to respond to a wide range of volume scenarios.

Next Quarter – expected activity

13. The October to December quarter will see major milestones on the Inquiry's external engagement and analysis work programme.

14. The Inquiry's analysis work will focus on completing the synthesis of evidence, including assessing the adequacy of the evidence base to identify any gaps in information and to support further engagement. This ongoing work will continue to develop the Inquiry's working papers, seeking to identify the common themes and distinct perspectives from the range of evidence the Inquiry has received. This will provide the foundation for work to develop findings and recommendations that will be progressed from early 2024.
15. Another key part of the next quarter will be to invite the wider New Zealand public to contribute their views and experiences via a public submission process which will open in late November 2023. The submissions process will be supported by a public information campaign that will commence in early December, that is designed to ensure New Zealanders are aware of the opportunity and encourage them to take it up.
16. The October to December quarter is also expected to see the completion of a substantive part of the Inquiry's direct stakeholder engagement programme, with a large majority of the initial external engagements to be completed prior to Christmas. However, groups or sectors where the Inquiry has not yet reached a wide enough range of views, follow-up meetings to further explore topics, and newly emerging lines of enquiry, will require further consultation and engagement into early 2024.
17. In July 2023, Hon Hekia Parata tendered her resignation as Commissioner to the Minister of Internal Affairs, with this to take effect from 15 November 2023. The remaining Commissioners will be expecting that a replacement Commissioner will be appointed to support the ongoing work programme, including engagement activity, analysis of evidence, and the writing of the final report.