



# Second Quarterly Report: April – June 2023

## Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to provide a high-level summary of the activities over the period April 2023 to June 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 April to June quarter, in line with our Terms of Reference, the Inquiry has made substantive inroads on gathering and reviewing publicly available information. The Inquiry has received and conducted initial analysis on more than 1,300 documents. This includes material provided by 43 agencies across the public sector, as well as material taken from the public domain such as research papers and reports.
3. This information provided the supporting evidence for the stakeholder engagement the Inquiry has undertaken during the April to June quarter. Initial engagement activity has focused on senior officials from Government agencies, who have provided additional context to the publicly available information we have received or sourced, as well as insights into wider government decision-making during the pandemic. These initial conversations have been constructive and informative, and the Inquiry has appreciated the time and effort that stakeholders have put into meeting with us. In the next quarter, the Inquiry will focus on engagement with academic, business and community stakeholders.
4. The Inquiry has also launched its public-facing communication channels. These channels include a dedicated website through which the Inquiry will communicate to the wider public, and that will host the Inquiry's digital public submission process. The website also provides guidance on the way the Inquiry is operating and the processes that are in use, such as how evidence will be treated. Alongside the launch of the website, the Inquiry Chair and Co-Commissioners made a number of media appearances and comments. This media activity aimed to communicate more broadly the approach the Inquiry is adopting, when it intends to seek wider input from the New Zealand public, and to inform the public around the scope and breadth of the Inquiry's terms of reference, and what the Inquiry is seeking to understand.
5. The Inquiry has now completed its establishment activity. The majority of Secretariat staff are now appointed, including a new Executive Director, Dr Justine Cornwall, with staff either in-post or starting in the coming quarter. Considerable progress has also been made on detailed delivery planning, with the Inquiry now anticipating that the collection of information (both publicly available information and from stakeholder and public engagement) will run into early 2024, to be followed by detailed drafting, natural justice processes, and report production from Quarter 2 of 2024.

## Finance

6. The Inquiry has incurred costs for the 2022/23 Financial year of \$1.945 million across all expenditure, subject to final end-of-year processes and auditing. This will result in an underspend of around \$2.912 million that will be carried forward into the FY2023/24 financial year.

	2022/23 Spend (final) \$Ms	2022/23 Budget \$Ms
Controllable expenditure - operations	\$1.324	\$3.507
Uncontrollable expenditure - support	\$0.374	\$0.539
Commissioner Costs	\$0.247	\$0.811
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1.945</b>	<b>\$4.857</b>

7. This underspend reflected the impact of the differences between assumptions made in initial planning in November 2022 and the actual timing of some establishment activities, as noted in the Inquiry's first Quarterly Report. It also reflects some activities that initial planning assumed would occur prior to June 2023 which will now take place in the second half of 2023, as well as internal budget reprioritisations the Inquiry has made as detailed planning develops.

## Challenges and risk

8. The challenges and risks flagged in the Inquiry's first quarterly report around managing the volume of information and the diverse public expectations for the Inquiry's work remain. The Inquiry is now taking active steps to manage these challenges, in particular the public communication activity noted in paragraph 4 above.
9. The recruitment of appropriately experienced staff has proven an ongoing challenge for the Inquiry, with the market for highly skilled policy and research professionals continuing to be competitive and constrained. While the Inquiry has now filled the majority of Secretariat positions with high quality staff despite the market conditions, this has created some challenges in progressing the initial phase of evidence analysis. The Inquiry has managed these challenges and made significant progress on the policy and research work programme.
10. The Inquiry is managing uncertainty about the level of response that the call for public submissions may generate. Given the wide impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Inquiry may receive a significant number of submissions once the digital public input process is opened in November 2023. Work is currently underway to investigate options that can scale significantly and quickly to assist the Royal Commissioners and Secretariat in triaging, organising, and understanding large volumes of public input.

## Next Quarter – expected activity

11. Over the July to September quarter, the Inquiry will be fully engaged with its analysis of publicly available information, as well as information sourced from targeted engagements with a growing range of key individuals, stakeholders, and organisations.

12. The Inquiry anticipates that by the end of this quarter its initial analysis of publicly available information will be largely concluded, allowing it to shift resource and focus on engagements with key individuals and organisations in New Zealand, and undertaking selected analysis of the large volume of international published evidence.
13. Over the upcoming July to September quarter, the Inquiry will progress engagement with a wider set of stakeholders, including NGOs, business, and community groups. The Inquiry anticipates that this engagement will be focused on stakeholders who were directly involved with pandemic decision-making, and those who can represent the views of (and later assist the Inquiry in directly engaging with) wider sectors of the community.
14. This quarter will also see preparatory activity ahead of opening up for digital submissions from the public in early November 2023, as well as public information activity to support this work.