



Seventh Quarterly Report: July – September 2024

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Minister of Internal Affairs on the progress 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) towards delivery of its findings and recommendations as required under its terms of reference. This report covers the period 1 July 2024 to 30 September 2024.
2. This report only covers the activity of Phase One of the Inquiry - activity for Phase Two of the Inquiry, which commenced on 26 September 2024, will be reported separately. This will be the final quarterly report for Phase One of the Inquiry.

Activity of the Inquiry this quarter

3. Over the July to September 2024 period, Phase One of the Inquiry has completed the analysis of evidence, as well as finalising the findings, lessons, and recommendations the Inquiry wishes to reach in its Phase One report.
4. The natural justice and fact checking process has been a critical step undertaken in this quarter. The Inquiry distributed extracts totalling more than 1,800 pages to 30 key organisations and individuals and received over 550 substantive comments in response. By the end of September, Commissioners were well advanced in considering all the feedback and directing changes to the report in response to the feedback received where they considered that to be appropriate.
5. Overall, the feedback the Inquiry received through this process was constructive and well considered. The Inquiry notes its thanks to the many agencies and individuals who provided such extensive and helpful responses, especially given the short amount of time the Inquiry was able to allow for this process.
6. During this period the Inquiry has made considerable progress in drafting its final report. While these totals will change prior to completion as drafting and review is still ongoing, the Phase One report currently totals more than 800 pages, making findings across eight topics in support of more than 50 recommendations.
7. The Inquiry has also been working to prepare a design approach and templates that will be used for the final Phase One report and supporting documents, as well as developing a standard set of report material in anticipation of the report's public release (an accessible web version, for example).

Finance

8. The Inquiry has incurred costs for the 2024/25 financial year to date of \$2.024 million, against a full-year budget of \$5.006 million.

	2024/25 Spend (YTD) \$Ms	2024/25 Budget \$Ms
Controllable expenditure – operations	\$1.435	\$3.158
Uncontrollable expenditure – support	\$0.404	\$1.331
Commissioner Costs	\$0.185	\$0.517
Total	\$2.024	\$5.006

9. Funding for this period of activity has been provided from underspends during the 2023/24 financial year.
10. Phase One of the Inquiry is currently on track to complete its work within its appropriated budget and expects to end with a modest underspend.

Challenges and risk

11. The significant progress made through the natural justice and fact checking process this quarter has ensured that several key risks that could have impacted the Inquiry's ability to deliver its report by its due date have now been successfully mitigated.
12. Further direction from the Department of Internal Affairs on the two-phase approach to the Inquiry's work has largely addressed the risks regarding the transition between the two phases that were flagged in the Inquiry's previous Quarterly Report.
13. The Inquiry still faces some challenging deadlines to complete the remaining drafting and refining of its Phase One report, including production of a presentation-ready copy of its report by 28 November 2024. This challenge may be further exacerbated if the Inquiry experiences issues with staff retention as its deadline approaches.

Next Quarter – expected activity

14. The October to December 2024 quarter will be the final quarter of Phase One of the Inquiry's work.
15. During this quarter, the Inquiry will finalise the draft of the Phase One report. Three core documents will make up the Phase One Report including: the main report, a separate summary of the full report, and a document summarising the themes arising from the public submissions received by the Inquiry. By early November the report will be sent for layout and design and will then be approved by Commissioners to be delivered to the Minister of Internal Affairs prior to 28 November 2024.
16. A small amount of work is expected to continue after 28 November, to complete necessary archiving and close-down of the documentation, records and systems of Phase One of the Inquiry, including all work that is necessary to meet the Inquiry's obligations under the Public Records Act 2005 and support the Department of Internal Affairs public accountability requirements. This work is expected to be completed early in 2025.