



Report of the Petitions Committee

Petition of Greg Rzesniowiecki: Undertake a public inquiry into the national COVID-19 response

March 2023

Contents

Recommendation.....	2
Request for an inquiry into the COVID-19 response.....	2
Royal Commission of Inquiry into the COVID-19 response has been announced	2
Matters excluded from Royal Commission of Inquiry	3
Petitioner disagrees with the Royal Commission's terms of reference.....	4
Our response to the petition	4
Appendix.....	5

Hon Jacqui Dean
Chairperson

Petition of Greg Rzesniowiecki

Recommendation

The Petitions Committee has considered the petition of Greg Rzesniowiecki— Undertake a public inquiry into the national COVID-19 response—and recommends that the House take note of its report.

Request for an inquiry into the COVID-19 response

The petition was presented to the House on 15 November 2022. It requests:

That the House of Representatives undertake an inquiry into the COVID-19 pandemic and official response; terms of reference to allow a full investigation, including public disclosure of the New Zealand Government's actions, and encourage public input including testimony, evidence and research.

The petitioner said that COVID-19 has “been central to New Zealanders' lives and liberty, or rather, the denial of their individual liberty”. He believes that conventional medical wisdom was abandoned during the COVID-19 pandemic. He also believes that generic antiviral medicines should have been available from early in the pandemic. He said that the mRNA COVID-19 vaccine¹ is “inherently inappropriate for mass medication” and is “not safe and ought to be withdrawn from the market”. He suggests that there “might be a level of regulatory capture by pharmaceutical interests” in New Zealand.

The petitioner gives the following reasons for his petition:

- In November 2021, New Zealand and other World Health Organization member states began negotiating an international legal instrument on global pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response.² The petitioner believes a public inquiry into COVID-19 should occur before New Zealand enters into such an instrument.
- Mr Rzesniowiecki believes that New Zealand society has been divided by lockdowns and mandates.
- He wants an inquiry to consider the Government's contracts with the pharmaceutical company Pfizer and the availability of generic antiviral medicines.

Royal Commission of Inquiry into the COVID-19 response has been announced

On 5 December 2022, the Government announced a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the response to COVID-19. The scope of the inquiry is “the lessons learned from Aotearoa New

¹ mRNA stands for messenger ribonucleic acid. mRNA vaccines teach cells how to make a protein that triggers an immune response inside the human body. This immune response, which produces antibodies, is what helps prevent future sickness from that disease or germ.

² More information about the new pandemic instrument is available on [the Ministry of Health website](#).

Zealand's response to COVID-19 that should be applied in preparation for any future pandemic".³ The inquiry will examine the following areas:

- the legislative, regulatory, and operational settings required to support
 - New Zealand's public health response to a pandemic
 - the continued supply of goods and services in a pandemic
 - New Zealand's immediate economic response to a future pandemic
- communication with people and communities in support of health outcomes
- decision-making structures and arrangements
- the interests of Māori
- the disproportionate impact of a pandemic on essential workers and other population groups.

The inquiry may assess the effectiveness of the initial elimination strategy, the later minimisation and protection strategy, and any supporting measures. This assessment would have regard to "New Zealand's circumstances, what was known at the time, and the strategies adopted by comparable jurisdictions".

Matters excluded from Royal Commission of Inquiry

The following matters are excluded from the scope of the inquiry:

- clinical decisions made by clinicians or by public health authorities
- how and when the strategies and other measures devised in response to COVID-19 were implemented or applied in particular situations or in individual cases
- vaccine efficacy and the specific epidemiology of the COVID-19 virus and its variants
- the recent reforms to New Zealand's health system
- judgments and decisions of courts and tribunals and independent agencies (such as the Ombudsman, the Privacy Commissioner, or the Independent Police Conduct Authority)
- the operation of the private sector (except where the private sector delivers services integral to a pandemic response)
- decisions taken by the Reserve Bank's independent monetary policy committee
- court procedures, parliamentary processes, and the conduct of the General Election during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The inquiry will consider only the period between February 2020 and October 2022.

We understand that some matters are excluded from the scope of the inquiry to "help avoid duplication" and to ensure the inquiry can be completed within a reasonable time frame. The Department of Internal Affairs says "many of the exclusions for this inquiry reinforce the lesson-learned, future-focussed approach, and the preference to not duplicate the material already produced."⁴

³ The full terms of reference for the inquiry can be accessed [on the New Zealand legislation website](#).

⁴ Department of Internal Affairs, [Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19 Lessons](#).

Petitioner disagrees with the Royal Commission's terms of reference

The petitioner provided us with supplementary evidence after the Royal Commission of Inquiry had been announced. He disagrees with the terms of reference; he considers them “limited”. He wants them to be broadened to include, among other things:

- the emergence of COVID-19
- the efficacy of antiviral medications and vaccines
- the role of certain individuals and organisations and any conflicts of interest
- medical ethics and informed consent
- the effects of COVID-19 vaccines on donated blood
- adverse reactions to the vaccine.

The petitioner also objects to two of the three people chosen to be commissioners. He questions their ability to act independently, impartially, and fairly.

Our response to the petition

We welcome the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the response to COVID-19. We acknowledge the inquiry will focus on lessons that could be applied in a future pandemic. We do not consider that the scope of the inquiry needs to be expanded in the way the petitioner suggests. We are satisfied that the commissioners of the inquiry are well qualified for their role and will act impartially. We have no matters to bring to the attention of the House.

Appendix

Committee procedure

The petition was presented to the House and referred to us on 15 November 2022. We met between 8 December 2022 and 30 March 2023 to consider it. We received written evidence from the petitioner.

Committee members

Hon Jacqui Dean (Chairperson)
Rachel Boyack (to 8 February 2023)
Dr Liz Craig (from 8 February 2023)
Steph Lewis (to 8 February 2023)
Nicole McKee
Sarah Pallett
Jamie Strange (from 8 February 2023)
Teanau Tuiono

Evidence received

The documents we received as evidence in relation to this petition are available on the Parliament website.