

5 May 2020



Epidemic Response Committee

New Zealand Parliament
Parliament Buildings
Wellington
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Inquiry into Government's Response to COVID-19

Faka'alofa lahi atu, Malo ni, Kia orana Talofa Lava, Tēnā koutou,

Thank you Members of the Epidemic Response Committee for your collective cross-party work to ensure Government decisions are scrutinised during this difficult time.

We write to you about an area of near future Government policy that we are nervous about, that is opening up our bubble to Australia before considering our obligations to those within the Realm of New Zealand. We note that this has made us as an organisation reflect on the important discussions taking place between Governments about the role of regional bubbles, and a number of key decision makers nurturing strongly for a 'Trans-Tasman' bubble with Australia.

We believe that New Zealand has an obligation to the countries within the Realm and have a strong ongoing relationship with them. We consider that Aotearoa should have a Royal Commission of Inquiry into Aotearoa's Pacific Colonial Administration and whether Aotearoa's ongoing relationships with these nations have been based on the principles of the relationship between those countries and Aotearoa, similar to the Waitangi Tribunal looking into the Crown's actions and omissions towards Māori. .

While opening the border to Australia may be an opportunity to Aotearoa, we ask that your Committee advocate strongly for the Government firstly honour our constitutional obligations towards the Realm of New Zealand - our free association ties with the Cook Islands and Niue, and the dependent state of New Zealand, Tokelau. It may be appropriate for New Zealand to consider its Treaty of Friendship to Samoa

A regional bubble with Australia may be an economic opportunity, however, if Realm nations and Samoan leaders are not deeply involved, and their voices not well heard in our upcoming decisions about any potential regional bubble this will be another example we are falling short of our obligations to them and are not following through on our promises, for example, the Government's policy of the Pacific Reset. .

One question this currently hypothetical Royal Commission would likely put forward is whether the same efforts that we have put into nurturing this potential 'Trans-Tasman bubble' are being put into creating a Realm and Treaty of Friendship bubble with Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau and Samoa too. Further to this, the economic reciprocal benefit across the Realm, and Samoa analysis should be completed. The Realm countries bring in trade and workers

to Aotearoa, plus, there is the ongoing wellbeing and interpersonal connections with some realm countries having more population within Aotearoa than in their country.

The words of historian Damon Salesa ring in our ears as we reflect on this, “our Pacific future is already here.” We ask that your important committee ensure that there is a proactive scrutiny on this, and we give equal weight and analysis across these parts of policy which are not-so-foreign-affairs.

Fa’afetai lava,

Josiah Tualamali’i
on behalf of the Voyagers NZ