

# Pānui for Government statements following release of Whanaketia

Kia ora koutou,

This pānui/newsletter is from the Crown Response Unit – the team that responds to recommendations from the Abuse in Care Royal Commission of Inquiry.

We have attached some Government statements following the public release of Whanaketia – Through Pain and Trauma, From Darkness to Light the final report from the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care of the State and Faith-based Institutions.

## Announcement of a public apology 12 November 2024

Prime Minister Christopher Luxon announced he will deliver a public apology on 12 November 2024. The announcement was in a post-Cabinet press conference on 22 July that has been cut and pasted below:

“……, I just have one more announcement to make, and that is that three weeks ago the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith based Institutions delivered its final report to the Governor-General. This marks the end of the largest and most complex public inquiry ever held in New Zealand, and I do want to personally acknowledge the courage of nearly 3,000 survivors, who shared their experiences of abuse and neglect with the commission and contributed to this important work. There are two significant milestones I want to talk to today. Firstly, the report and its recommendations will be made public when the report is presented to Parliament this Wednesday, 24 July. And this will be a significant milestone for survivors of abuse in care and their families. And, secondly, it is important the Crown addresses and acknowledges the experiences of abuse in care at a national level. And today I’m announcing that I will make the public apology here at Parliament on 12 November. The Government, of course, will invite cross-party representation at the event, and more information will be made available in the coming months.”

## Prime Minister’s Speech in Parliament about Whanaketia – Through Pain and Trauma, From Darkness to Light, 24 July 2024

Mr Speaker, this is a day that many New Zealanders who were abused in State care never thought would come.

It’s the day that this Parliament accepts, with deep sorrow and regret, the Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care.

At the heart of this report are the stories of 2,400 survivors - many of whom are here today.

To every person who took part, I say thank you for your exceptional strength, your incredible courage, and your confronting honesty.

Because of you, we know the truth about the abuse and trauma you have endured.

I cannot take away your pain, but I can tell you this:

You are heard and you are believed.

Many of your stories are horrific and harrowing. They are painful to read, but not as painful as they were to endure.

The State was supposed to care for you – but instead many of you were subjected to the most horrendous physical, emotional, mental, and sexual abuse.

A number of faith-based schools, institutions and people in positions of authority who you should have been able to trust – failed you in the worst possible way.

When you tried to speak up those same people turned a blind eye, they covered it up, and they prevented you from seeking justice for far too long.

Māori, Pacific, deaf and disabled people disproportionately bore the brunt of a lot of what occurred.

Not only has this had a devastating impact on your life, but also on your families and communities.

We like to think that abuse like this doesn’t happen here in New Zealand. But it did and it is a shameful chapter of our history that we must confront.

Mr Speaker, this is a dark and sorrowful day in New Zealand’s history.

It is important that, as a country, we bring to the surface and understand the hard truths of what happened so we can try and move forward together.

I say to the survivors, the burden is no longer yours to carry alone.

The State is now standing here beside you, accountable and ready to take action.

Mr Speaker, the Royal Commission traversed many types of care as part of its inquiry.

It is my heavy duty to say that today, the Government is formally acknowledging that the experiences of some children and young people at Lake Alice Hospital did amount to torture.

Patients at Lake Alice were given electric shocks without anaesthetic, as well as painful and immobilising paraldehyde injections.

These so-called treatments were not administered for medical reasons. They were used for punishment and emotional control.

These experiences were nothing short of horrific and they happened in the New Zealand health system within living memory.

To the survivors of Lake Alice – some of whom are here today – thank you for your determination to ensure what you suffered was brought to light.

What happened was wrong. You knew then it was wrong, and all these years later, the State also acknowledges it was wrong.

Today, I humbly stand before you in this house to offer a long overdue apology to the survivors of Lake Alice. I am sorry that it has taken so long for this acknowledgement of torture.

I also acknowledge Paul Zentveld and Malcolm Richards who took cases against New Zealand to the United Nations Committee Against Torture.

Thank you for your courage, your bravery and your determination.

I know that for some Lake Alice survivors, the acknowledgement today that what happened to you was torture is something for which you have been waiting for decades.

For you, this is a day of great significance. For others who suffered torture, I know this acknowledgement feels hollow without the recognition that comes with redress.

I regret that that is not something that we can give you today, but it is a priority for the Government in the coming months.

We are here today because it was important to the Government that an acknowledgement and sincere apology be made with gravitas and dignity. It deserved to be made in this Parliament.

I know that some survivors are in fragile health and that a number have passed away during the inquiry, never hearing the State acknowledge the true extent of what happened to them.

To their families and whānau, I am sorry that they are not here to hear the State admit to what we should have owned many years ago.

Mr Speaker, not every child in state care was harmed and of course there are, and always have been, many dedicated and devoted foster parents and social workers committed to looking after children in their care.

But today is about acknowledging those who had their carefree childhoods cruelly taken away from them.

The tabling of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care report is of historical significance to New Zealand.

It is the result of the largest and most complex public inquiry ever held on our shores.

The report has taken six years to write and is almost 3,000 pages long comprising 16 volumes.

Because of this, the content needs to be considered with respect and with care.

It cannot be rushed.

The findings in this report need to be widely understood.

While we can never make right the harm survivors experienced, the Government must be accountable and support survivors.

Erica Stanford will lead a Ministerial Group to respond to the report’s findings and the 138 recommendations.

The first step is a formal apology which will take place on November 12th. This is a significant and important milestone, and we are working with survivor groups to deliver an event that gives it the dignity it deserves.

The apology will provide an important opportunity for the Government, and the leaders of other political parties, to take responsibility on behalf of the nation for the failures of the State across many governments.

I know survivors have been waiting a long time for changes to how the State and churches provide redress.

I want to assure you that we understand the urgency and importance of this work and we will provide clarity before the end of the year.

I do want to pay tribute to the Commissioners and all of the staff who worked on this Inquiry.

There is no doubt that those who have heard, written and read these accounts have been impacted by these horrific and harrowing experiences.

The care, sensitivity and dedication you have shown in compiling this report is greatly appreciated - thank you.

I would also like to acknowledge the previous Labour Government who commenced this important inquiry almost six years ago.

A terrible injustice was done in the name of State care. It is now the responsibility of the State to make redress and this Government will ensure it happens.

And as Prime Minister, I will ensure the State carries its care and protection responsibilities with great weight.

As difficult as it is, I hope all New Zealanders take the time to read this report to understand the abuse that you, the survivors, suffered and the lifelong impact it has had on your lives.

Through this, we will understand the obligation we all have to prevent it happening again and to speak up whenever and wherever we see the abuse of anyone, in care or otherwise.

I want to again acknowledge the survivors for their exceptional bravery and for sharing their stories.

I share your dream for the next generation where every child, young person and adult is loved, safe, and cared for in a manner that supports their growth and development into a thriving contributor to our society.

I will never lose sight of what you have endured to bring the truth to life.

I would like to close with an excerpt from a karakia written by Waihoroi Shortland who worked on the Inquiry:

“To you upon whom this inquiry has been centred,Resolute in your pursuit of justiceRelentless in your belief for lifeWe have only our highest regard and respect,May your peace of mind be assured.”

Thank you.

## Joint Press Release from the Prime Minister and Minister Stanford acknowledging torture at Lake Alice, 24 July 2024

For the first time, the Government is formally acknowledging some children and young people at Lake Alice Psychiatric Hospital experienced torture.

The final report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in State and Faith-based Care “Whanaketia – through pain and trauma, from darkness to light,**”** was tabled in Parliament today.

The Royal Commission found that most of the 362 children who went through the Lake Alice Child and Adolescent Unit.

“What the Lake Alice survivors went through was profoundly disturbing. It is reprehensible that this has occurred in New Zealand,” Prime Minister Christopher Luxon says.

“I want to thank the Lake Alice survivors for their determination to ensure what they suffered was brought to light. I am sorry it has taken so long for this acknowledgement of torture.”

The Minister responsible for coordinating the Crown Response to the Abuse in Care Inquiry, Erica Stanford, says throughout the 1970s patients at Lake Alice were given electric shocks without anaesthetic, as well as painful and immobilising paraldehyde injections.

“It is clear treatments were not administered for any medical reason. They were used for punishment and emotional control through terror. It is beyond heartbreaking.”

Ms Stanford says the Government will now consider options for redress for the torture of survivors of Lake Alice.

“Many of the Lake Alice survivors are in fragile health and some have passed away. To their families and whānau, I am sorry that they are not here to hear the State admit to what we should have many years ago.

“That’s why it was so important for the Government to make this announcement today so that we can finally acknowledge what these survivors experienced.”

Note to editors:

In 2001 the Government apologised to 95 former Lake Alice patients.

Two rounds of settlements were made to Lake Alice survivors in 2001 and 2002-2003. To date, 202 claims have been settled, averaging $70,000 each, with five more pending. Settlements remain open to Lake Alice survivors who have not yet come forward.

The Royal Commission produced an interim report on Lake Alice Beautiful Children – Te Uiui o te Manga Tamariki me te Rangatahi ki Lake Alice that the Final Report references.

Today the Government has, for the first time, acknowledged that some children and young people at the Lake Alice Unit in the 1970s were tortured as defined in the United Nations Convention Against Torture.

## Joint Press Release from the Prime Minister and Minister Erica Stanford acknowledging survivors, 24 July 2024

The Government has acknowledged the nearly 2,400 courageous survivors who shared their experiences during the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State and Faith-Based Care.

The final report from the largest and most complex public inquiry ever held in New Zealand, the Royal Commission Inquiry “Whanaketia – through pain and trauma, from darkness to light,” was tabled in Parliament today.

“I would like to acknowledge the 2,400 survivors. Thank you for your strength, your bravery and your honesty,” Prime Minister Christopher Luxon says.

“I know there is nothing I can do to take away your pain, but I want you to know you are heard and you are believed.”

The Royal Commission of Inquiry was established in 2018 to investigate the abuse of children, young people, and adults in State and faith-based care in New Zealand between the years of 1950-1999.

“This is a dark and sorrowful day in New Zealand’s history. As a society and as the State we should have done better. I am determined that we will do better,” Mr Luxon says.

The report made 138 recommendations which the Government will now consider alongside the 95 recommendations from the interim report which was released in December 2021.

“This report was six years in the making. The response cannot be rushed. It needs to be considered with respect and care,” Mr Luxon says.

The Minister responsible for coordinating the Crown Response to the Abuse in Care Inquiry, Erica Stanford says the Government is prioritising decisions around improving redress.

“Other recommendations will require more time to consider and respond to, particularly those involving legislative and major organisational change. We will provide an update by November,” Ms Stanford says.

The first step is a formal apology which will take place this year on November 12.

“This is a significant event, and the Government is working with survivor groups to deliver an event that gives it the dignity it deserves,” says Ms Stanford.

“The apology will provide an important opportunity for the Government, and the leaders of other political parties, to take responsibility on behalf of the nation for the failures of the State across many governments.

“To the survivors, I know we can never replace what has been lost. What I can commit to you is we will engage with the Royal Commission’s report and recommendations in good faith, with careful consideration and we will never lose sight of what you have endured to bring the truth to light,” Mr Luxon says.

**End of information: Pānui for Government statements following release of Whanaketia**

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