



# Te Kawa Mataaho

## Public Service Commission

17 January 2023

Mr Tuaopepe Abba Fidow  
Acting Secretary for Pacific Peoples and Chief Executive  
Te Manatū mō ngā iwi o te Moana-nui-a Kiwa /Ministry for Pacific Peoples

Sent via email:

Talofa lava Tuaopepe

### **Background**

Thank you for advising the Commission about the costs incurred by the Ministry for Pacific Peoples on the two day, all staff, Fono and farewell for the departing Secretary for Pacific Peoples, which occurred on 13 – 14 October 2022 ('the events').

The Public Service Commissioner (the Commissioner) at this stage, does not consider that an inquiry under the Public Service Act 2020 is warranted, but has decided to look into the matter.

I am writing to you as the Acting Chief Executive of the Ministry for Pacific Peoples to explain the next steps.

### **The purpose of this review**

The purpose of this review is to consider whether decisions about sensitive expenditure associated with the events aligned with your own agency's policies and guidelines, and the [Controlling sensitive expenditure: Guide for public organisations – Office of the Auditor-General New Zealand \(oag.parliament.nz\)](https://www.oag.parliament.nz).

The Commissioner's expectations are that public service agencies must always be accountable and transparent. Any spending must meet the standards of probity and financial prudence expected of a public organisation, so it can withstand parliamentary and public scrutiny and support trust and confidence in the public sector.

The review will focus on the decisions made by the Ministry at the agency level, so I would be grateful if you could reassure your staff that it will not focus on the actions of any individuals in isolation.

### **The matters within scope**

The review will look into the expenditure and decision-making associated with the events. This includes establishing details around the purpose and duration of the events, attendee information and any cultural considerations. The review will consider details of all costs involved, such as venue, catering, support, transport, accommodation, allowances, facilitation, speakers, koha, any farewell gifts and other additional expenses.

Specifically, the review will consider whether the expenditure decisions were:

- **for a justifiable business purpose** that is consistent with the Ministry's objectives;
- **impartial** - decisions were based on objective criteria, rather than based on any sort of bias, preference, or improper reason;
- **made with integrity**
- **moderate and conservative** when viewed from the standpoint of the public and given the circumstances of the spending;
- **made transparently** - being open about the spending, and willing to explain any spending decisions or have them reviewed; and
- **made with proper authority** - the person approving the spending has the appropriate financial delegation to do so, for the type and amount of spending and follows correct procedures.

### **Documents requested**

To support this review, I would be grateful if you could provide the Commission with an electronic copy of all the documents that the Ministry holds in relation to the events. This should include all internal and external communications about the events, such as invoices, approval confirmations, letters, emails, all internally generated documents, planning documents, and any other related material. Please also include a copy of any relevant internal policies including the Ministry's policies on sensitive expenditure, gifts and gratuities, and delegations.

Nicky Dirks, Manager Ministerial Services at the Commission will be managing the document collection process. She will be in touch with you separately to confirm the contact person for your Ministry for this review. Nicky will also provide a secure link to a shared SharePoint folder where the documents can be uploaded to. I would be grateful if all documents could be uploaded by midday 20 January 2023. I understand work has already started on collating these documents to meet this time frame and would appreciate documents being uploaded as they are collected to meet this timeframe. Please ensure you consider any privacy considerations when providing the review with the relevant documents.

### **The process of the review**

The review team will be led by acting Deputy Commissioner Dean Rosson, Integrity, Ethics and Standards, supported by staff from the Commission.

The first step will be for the review team to assess the relevant documentation and form an initial view that can be tested with your agency. As part of this first step, I would be grateful if you could ensure that key staff are available to answer any clarification questions that the review team may have. This is not an inquiry so we do not envisage conducting interviews, but it may assist the review team to check their understanding of key issues with those who were involved in the process.

Once the first step of the review is underway the review team will be in touch to confirm the process for the remainder of the review. I am conscious that this may be a stressful time for the Ministry and for the individuals involved in this matter. For that reason, my expectation is that the entire review process will be completed by mid to late February 2023. The final report will be published on the Commission's website, but it will not identify any individuals by name and your agency will have the opportunity to comment on the draft report before it is finalised.

### **Related Official Information Act and media requests**

It is in the public interest that the integrity of this review is not undermined by the partial release of documentation that the team is considering into the public domain while the review is underway.

The ordinary practice is for that kind of material to become public at the end of any Commission review. Releasing it earlier risks damaging public trust and confidence in the process.

Therefore, if your agency receives a request under the Official Information Act 1982 for any information or documents within the scope of this review, then please contact your Assistant Commissioner immediately so that we can provide you with advice. Similar considerations will apply in relation to media requests or parliamentary questions.

I appreciate that reviews can be stressful for the staff involved but there is a strong public interest in resolving these matters, and the team will complete this work as quickly as they are able.

Thank you for your ongoing co-operation.

Yours sincerely,



Heather Baggott

Deputy Public Service Commissioner