



December 2020, Newsletter

The People's Inquiry - Te Uiuinga a te Tāngata

The People's Inquiry into the Impacts and Effects of Toxic Chemicals and Poisons on our People, Wildlife and Environment – *Te Uiuinga e pā ana ki nga Pātanga me nga Tukinotanga a nga Matū Tāoke me nga Paitini ki ngā Tāngata, nga Kararehe Kōwao me te Taiao*

Dear Submitters,

We want to thank you so much for collecting your thoughts and writing your submission to the People's Inquiry. There is still plenty of time to write and send in your submission if you have not yet got around to it. You are also able to make amendments if you think of any necessary changes over the summer.

Many common themes are emerging, particularly around lack of consultation with landowners and communities over their serious and justified concerns about the impacts of poisons. We have also heard from many people who are suffering chronic ill health from exposure in various situations including occupational poisoning, neighbouring spray drift, Council spraying programmes and even exposure to toxic building materials. In each case people have gone unheard, been ignored and left without recourse or any kind of help. We feel collecting and sharing these voices, your voices, is very important and together will form a powerful force for change towards a poison-free Aotearoa.

2020 has not been an easy year. It has thrown many challenges at us all, but we are as determined as ever to progress this Inquiry and bring positive change. We will continue to keep you informed as the organisation of and dates for the People's Inquiry Hearings firm up, pending the availability of Commissioners and venues.

This year has brought with it many twists and turns and has taught us to remain flexible and open in our approach to this important undertaking. Further on you can read our individual reflections on 2020 and thoughts on moving forward.

Once again, many thanks and kia kaha, have a wonderful festive season. We will reconnect with you in the New Year and continue working together, building this People's Inquiry.

Asha, Hana, Hira, Stephanie and Ursula - **The Executive Committee**



Reflections on 2020 - Ursula Edgington

Wow! This year has certainly been a roller-coaster of ups and downs – and I'm not just talking about the global Covid19 pandemic. My volunteer role as an environmentalist has created new opportunities, with new connections that are developing strongly through plentiful hui. With hard work, determination (and a few tears), 2020 has led to my colleagues and I gaining many valuable insights into the New Zealand poisoning industry.



Back in February, colleagues and I, including local Māori, attended our first Waikato Conservation Board meeting. Conservation Boards are regional groups which, according to their website, have a duty to 'be a voice of the public in all things conservation'. However, we soon discovered that because members are appointed by the Conservation Minister and provided with a generous expense fund from the Dept of Conservation (DoC); any independence from the Government 'Predator Free' directive is inevitably excluded from this Board's discussions. We also learned about the multiple conflicts of interest these Board members have: from heading-up groups that are regular beneficiaries of DoC funding, to being representatives on Council [funding] groups. The pro-poison propaganda is propagated by a small circle of individuals.

Call me an optimist, but I am a strong believer that the majority of our fellow human beings on this Earth are good people: if someone understands they are causing serious harm, they are likely to stop. With this in mind, some really important learnings that we took away from these and similar hui, included how most Board members know very little of the scientific facts about poison and were shocked at evidence we presented about the negative impact upon us, and our environment. Disappointingly, our attempts at encouraging actions from the Board to reduce the poisons in our environment, were unfairly dismissed. However, importantly, meeting minutes recorded our serious concerns, including a full copy of the Poison Register detailing the growing numbers of poisoning incidents. Future accountability procedures will undoubtedly rely heavily on these public records.

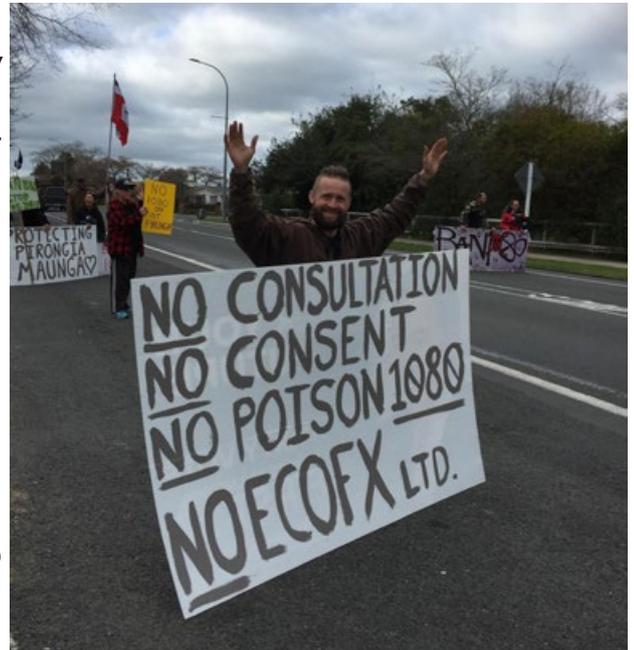
In August, colleagues and I met with the Medical Officers of Health (MOoH) in Wairarapa and MidCentral DHBs.

The proposed aerial 1080 poison operation over the Tararua Ranges is particularly large, covering 77,000 ha of some prime hunting and fishing land and numerous public and private drinking water catchment areas. The local Māori landowners have not agreed to the aerial poisoning operation. We presented details of the scientific data on the dangers of 1080 poison, the Poison Register and other evidence of harmful 1080 poison contamination in humans, wildlife and our environment.

Again, we were surprised by the limited knowledge of the MOoH, in respect of the toxicology science. We are hopeful we made a difference and that these healthcare professionals will now begin to take their duty to protect public health seriously. One part of our long discussion included the flawed 'risk assessments' created by the contractors undertaking the poison operations. The contractors were described by the MOoH as "cowboys" for reasons that are clear after reading the eyewitness accounts of the irresponsible actions of the helicopter pilots, paid to distribute the deadly poisons.



Numerous hui, petitions, letters and articles and even a sacred rāhui endorsed by six of the local marae was sadly not enough to prevent Mt Pirongia being aerially poisoned by 1080 for the seventh time, on Sept 20th. Out of 43 separate correspondences sent to the DHB, 32 were completely ignored and the remainder were either treated incorrectly as OIA requests or responded to with a copy and paste answer from the DoC propaganda. Attempts at communicating with DoC and the Waikato Regional Council were also largely ignored. But the efforts of numerous individuals and groups to try to stop the poisoning was not in vain. The newly-appointed Executive Director, Māori, Equity & Health Improvement at Waikato District Health Board, Riki Nia Nia, eventually agreed to meet with us, to talk about what went wrong. That initial meeting on 17th November alerted those senior managers to the seriousness of the risks to public health from the aerial poisoning operations and also the non-compliance of their Public Health Unit to the existing New Zealand laws and guidelines. Further, very productive meetings have happened subsequently, with future hui also planned with the Public Health Unit for early 2021.



In November, Steph McKee and I presented in person at the Social Movements, Resistance and Social Change Conference at Victoria University of Wellington, whilst our colleagues from the People's Inquiry joined us virtually from around New Zealand. It was a very positive experience and provided some additional new connections. Read Steph's reflections further on for more details of this event. It was great to repeat the experience recently for a wider audience with our webinar which you can watch [here](#).



Juggling whanau and work commitments around the ongoing complex campaign to raise awareness of the aerial poisoning of our whenua has been extremely challenging, especially with the added pressures of Covid19 restrictions and precautions. But this year has brought many positive steps in local and national ways: for example, our new Minister of Conservation, Hon Kiritapu Allan, presents an exciting opportunity for new conversations, within a genuinely Māori perspective. Without international tourists, so many New Zealanders travelling through our country (many for the first time) also provides new opportunities for a raised awareness of the extent of the poisoning and the risks that poison brings. The pending court case brought against Pest Control Research Ltd by Worksafe NZ after an employee was hospitalised in 2019 when hazardous chemicals used to make 1080 poison 'exploded', will also help expose the dangers from the irresponsible use of pesticide use in this country.

But if there's one single message I have learned from 2020, it is the power of kanohi ki te kanohi: being face-to-face with others (whether digitally or physically) is something we need to strive to do much more of. Face-to-Face we can communicate more effectively and make even more progress in 2021 towards our shared aim of a poison-free Aotearoa New Zealand.

Stepping Stones - Asha Andersen

This year has been challenging in so many ways. That we have managed to keep our eyes on the ball and keep pushing ahead with this Inquiry is down to the amazing and dedicated women on our committee, and of course all those generous and determined people who have been supporting us on this journey. This Inquiry was always going to be a huge task, but one that we all felt very necessary and long overdue. We are grateful to all those who have connected with us and shared their stories. Most of which are heartbreaking, frustrating and depressing at times, but that is the nature of what people are dealing with. It's our duty to be caretakers of those experiences and to make sure they are heard and acknowledged by those in power to the best of our ability.

Aside from spending time working on the Inquiry, my role as trustee of Flora and Fauna of Aotearoa has meant looking into practical solutions and creating pathways away from poisons. We are working on an initiative that encourages people to "take back their verge" and to return it to nature. We see this as a stepping stone to removing toxic chemicals from our roadsides and to raising our collective awareness around the problems of chemical poisons. Imagine if along every roadside you saw colourful signs saying "No Sprays" "No Poisons Please" "Poison-Free Zone" etc. Wouldn't that be a powerful message? So, with that in mind, we will be at Waitangi Day on February 6th helping people with everything they need to know to "take back their verge." Our People's Inquiry Committee will also be at the Waitangi Forum tent for a time sharing information about the Inquiry and connecting with people there.

At the start of this year Organic NZ magazine published an article by fellow advocate Stephen Torrington in which Steve shared his and his wife's experience of being chemically poisoned at work. You can read the full article [Chemical Poisoning A Survivor's Story](#) along with others on Steve's website More Wisdom, dedicated to pesticide information and support for those harmed.

Alongside the nature's verge initiative, we are also working with our local community to create an informational brochure on the problems, risks and solutions related to chemical sprays. Our intention is to create something that we can give our neighbours, friends, family and wider community - a gentle, positive message about community health and well-being that gets to heart of things. It's these kinds of small stepping stones that will help us along the way to a poison-free Aotearoa. Do you have a No Spray sign on your verge? Join us and put one up, let the nation know.



Top: No Spray sign on my verge

Middle: A friend at a recent meeting on spray issues

Bottom: Organic NZ featured Steve's story



No Place for Poisons in Nature

- Hira Hunapo O'Callaghan

We are begat of the Universal elements of the cosmos and earth, and are as much a part of the natural world that surrounds us as it is as much a part of us. We are related through whakapapa genealogy, beautifully and wonderfully gifted into form by IO Matua Kore who begat the Universe and all that exists.



Every element in our being can be found in the cosmos. Every part of nature is sacred and interconnected. We are as much a part of our natural world as it is of us. Hence we must have revered respect for our natural world.

We are a spiritual people, descended from IO. So, our duty is as kaitikai, guardians, protectors, preservers of those natural taonga handed down through the generations.

Chemical poisons have absolutely no place in nature or our lives. Yet fatally toxic chemicals, some banned in other countries have and continue to be approved by the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency). The EPA has breached every clause within the HASNO Act (Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act) and its committee responsible for assessing and approving the use of poisons and consents continue to ignore the wisdom on Mataranga Maori and how their negligent decisions impact on our natural environment, wildlife, people and other lifeforms.

The EPA have yet to be made directly answerable and accountable for their track record of sheer negligence and harm to our environment. The Department of Conservation, Regional Councils and Ministry of Primary Industries have failed to both acknowledge and admit to the widespread impact on our environment. The Ministry of Health have failed in its fundamental duty of care protecting and ensuring the health and wellbeing of people. All these government ministries and entities have directly breached the Treaty of Waitangi, the Human Rights Act and NZ Health and Safety Acts along with others. As Kaitiaki we have a duty to make these people directly answerable and accountable for their negligence, and we must stop the use of poisons and together work on alternative solutions here in Aotearoa.

3 things YOU can do, to help raise awareness of the risks from poison in 2021

1. Find out where/when your next local Conservation Board meeting is – and attend the 'public session' with a question or article about poisoning operations. (e.g. You could ask about the quality of any 'pest' monitoring data in that area)
2. Contact your local Public Health Unit at your regional District Health Board. Arrange to meet with your Medical Officer of Health who is authorised to 'sign off' the aerial poisoning operations. (e.g. You could ask about the lack of public health studies from 1080 poison-contaminated drinking water/food-chain).
3. Connect/volunteer with any local environmental community group and support them to adopt a 'poison free' philosophy. Whether it's tree-planting or trapping there is always a safer alternative to poison (You could ask your local Council Community Board and/or DHB to endorse this strategy as a positive public health initiative).

Reflections from the Conference “Aroha and Power – Social movements, resistance and social change” in Wellington, 11th-12th November 2020

- Stephanie McKee

Out the window I see the grey circular building of the NZ government called The Beehive.

It is so near, yet so far away. The People’s Inquiry project is about gathering the unheard voices of those affected by NZ’s addiction to the use of poisons in this beautiful, falsely-called “clean, green 100% pure” land.

The People’s Inquiry aims to be a welcoming place for the voices – the unheard voices that those in power, with a few exceptions, have no time or interest to listen to or consult with regarding the multiple poison operations across the country.

The conference is humming with animated conversations between people who are deeply engaged in social and political change. You have to be a certain personality type to embark on campaigns of change. You have to have hope, that no matter how bleak your issue may seem, no matter how large the forces of status quo or corruption or tainted science are, that there will eventually be a crack in the concrete, a chink of light coming through the gloom, a fragrant breeze of change in the air.

The People’s Inquiry presentation at this conference is partly online and part in person, with 2 members of the committee here, Ursula and myself. Hira, Asha and Hana are on the big screen beaming in from Auckland, Northland and Waiheke Island. The technology has no glitches thankfully.

My segment of the presentation was about the history of poison use in New Zealand going back to colonial times. Addressing the injustices and legacies of colonialism and looking forward to imagining the transformation of our society down to the core. If we don’t learn from history, we are going to repeat the same mistakes.

When you zoom out the lens to see the landscape of the decades, you see the poisons that were enthusiastically promoted to solve an often inflated threat - until growing evidence demanded that the poison be banned. This is a repeated pattern from strychnine to arsenic, from DDT and 245T.

Another pattern is the withholding of evidence of harm from the general public, eg. The Defence Department kept quiet about PFAS (firefighting foams) contamination of water with the public finding out only three years later. Thank goodness we have an Official Information Act which has enabled the uncovering of much information kept back from the public.

At the conference activist groups gathered in a session to discuss the impact of the Covid pandemic on their campaigns, and reflected on how lockdown impacted their work. A positive observation: at least in NZ politicians listened to and heeded the advice of the WHO and the Precautionary Principle!

To participate in this conference, sponsored by Massey University, the People’s Inquiry was vetted to make sure that we were not “conspiracy theorists”. This in itself demonstrates how far the normalisation of poisons has seeped into mainstream society, and how any questioning of the ubiquitous poisoning of our environment is viewed nervously, even by progressive groups like Action Station, Greenpeace, and the Green Party.



But when you survey the use of poisons that are sprayed, dropped, placed in almost every sector of society from horticulture, agriculture, conservation and roadside “weed management”, when you add up the list of poisons used, the quantities, the list of companies and state-owned enterprises who benefit financially, it becomes apparent that we are dealing with an “emperor who has no clothes” scenario. Those rural communities, tangata whenua and independent scientists who are naming this problem are calling out an abuse of our environment that has been normalised for too long.

One blessing of the Covid curse, is the awakening of awareness of the paramount importance of health, hauora, on all levels from water to our food systems to the air we breath. Our society is waking up more to the truth of the interconnectedness of all things, and that we need to approach nature with humility and not technocratic arrogance.

Attending the Aroha and Power conference was a great opportunity to reflect on the need for radical transformation of our society towards environmental health and social justice. The People’s Inquiry is one kaupapa in a circle of many groups working towards positive change.

To all the people who have registered in support and to those who have written your thoughtful and diverse submissions, many thanks. Wishing you all a relaxed and happy time with families and friends over the Festive Season. We all need to pause and recharge our batteries after this “unprecedented” year. We will be taking this People’s Inquiry to the next level in 2021!



Waikawau Bay Coromandel - Jonathan Clark photo / created by sand artist Andres Amador with help from 100 locals

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PI2020 Resources

Help us share knowledge of this Inquiry with people in your area. We need your help to let as many kiwis as possible know about this Inquiry and the opportunity to make a submission and have their voice heard.

Resources to promote and share information about The People's Inquiry are now on our [website for downloading, sharing online and printing](#). There is also a banner that can be downloaded and put on your website or newsletter. We have also printed cards, posters and flyers. For those wishing to help but are unable to print their own, get in touch and we will post some out to you.



If you are interested in doing a letterbox drop or putting up posters on noticeboards in your area let us know and we'll send you a stack of flyers/posters. Get in touch with Asha on 021 181 9919.

Submissions from people who have experienced harm

Thank you to those that have recently sent in their submissions and for the many messages of support and encouragement for the Inquiry. We have received submissions from around the country concerning harm from organophosphates, 1080 poison and agricultural chemical drift. They each recount the harmful impacts that these chemicals had on people's lives and health and the frustrating lack of accountability and concern from government officials.

Sitting down to write about, or even just recounting traumatic experiences that have left us feeling vulnerable and hurt can be a very difficult thing to do, but it can also be a step toward healing and empowering oneself. If you are writing your submission, take your time and remember there is always support available if you need it.

Find out more about [Support and Advocacy](#).



How to make your submission

Once you have prepared your written submission in word format, with any accompanying documents, go the [Submission Guide](#) for clear steps on what to do. It's simple and involves emailing your submission through to us then completing the relevant form linked in the Submission Guide. Once we receive your submission we will be in touch to confirm we have received it, along with your details. If you have any questions you can email us at - contact@peoplesinquiry2020.nz