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MEDIA RELEASE

Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Whātua - Iwi left in dark over Checkpoints

After building up a successful relationship with NZ Police over the last few lockdowns working side by side on checkpoints, Ngāti Whātua have been sidelined today and feel their contribution and expertise ignored.

“We are disappointed to be cut out of the conversation and left in the dark despite regular meetings with top NZ Police and Crown officials. The Crown maintain they want to work with Iwi but it seems, only when it suits them,” says Antony Thompson, COO for Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Whātua.

“We bring valuable expertise and experience to safely managing checkpoints which have the potential to be points of conflict,” he says.

“We can resolve and defuse matters where people are travelling between regions, especially during high stress times such as tangihanga, in a way that preserves everyone’s dignity, and we’re pretty good at spotting a tall tale when it parks up as well.”

“Ngāti Whātua have 23 years of health expertise as a health, mental health and social service provider to the Northland and Auckland regions which means we can advise travellers of the risk and the importance of not travelling right now.”

“Our clinical expertise means our nurses test our check point crews every five days. In the past we have extended this service to any NZ Police or NZ Defence check point staff although this hasn’t been their normal practice to date in my experience. All our crews are fitted with PPE gear, reflective roading gear to keep them safe while performing their duties. And they’ve all been vaccinated unlike some of our police officers.”

“Crews are isolated the entire time a checkpoint is operational, even to the point that the morning and afternoon crews are accommodated separately, to limit the possibility of transmission to their families or between teams. Iwi crews have traffic training and certification, health and safety, first aid, and Covid-19 training. These crews are currently working at vaccination and testing sites managing traffic and crowd control. This is a professional outfit.” says Mr Thompson.

Ngāti Whātua found out late Tuesday night from media and other sources that checkpoints would be stood up in its rohe. There was no prior notice from the Crown, its executive or its leadership despite being a part in a number of communication groups involved with coordination efforts for the current lockdown.

“Sadly, this lack of Crown collaboration is no longer a surprise, but it is still disappointing,” says Mr Thompson.

He says Ngāti Whātua believe the border between Northland and Auckland should have been set up when the lockdown was put in place regardless of Covid-19 levels to protect vulnerable Northland communities while vaccination is still relatively low across Aotearoa.

Antony Thompson - COO Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Whātua

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