

Coronavirus: How Tindall, Morgan and Fyfe worked to ready country for Covid-19 fight

Rob Stock 15:20, Apr 09 2020

Stock, 2020

Covid-19 timeline
2 April 2020
5 April 2020

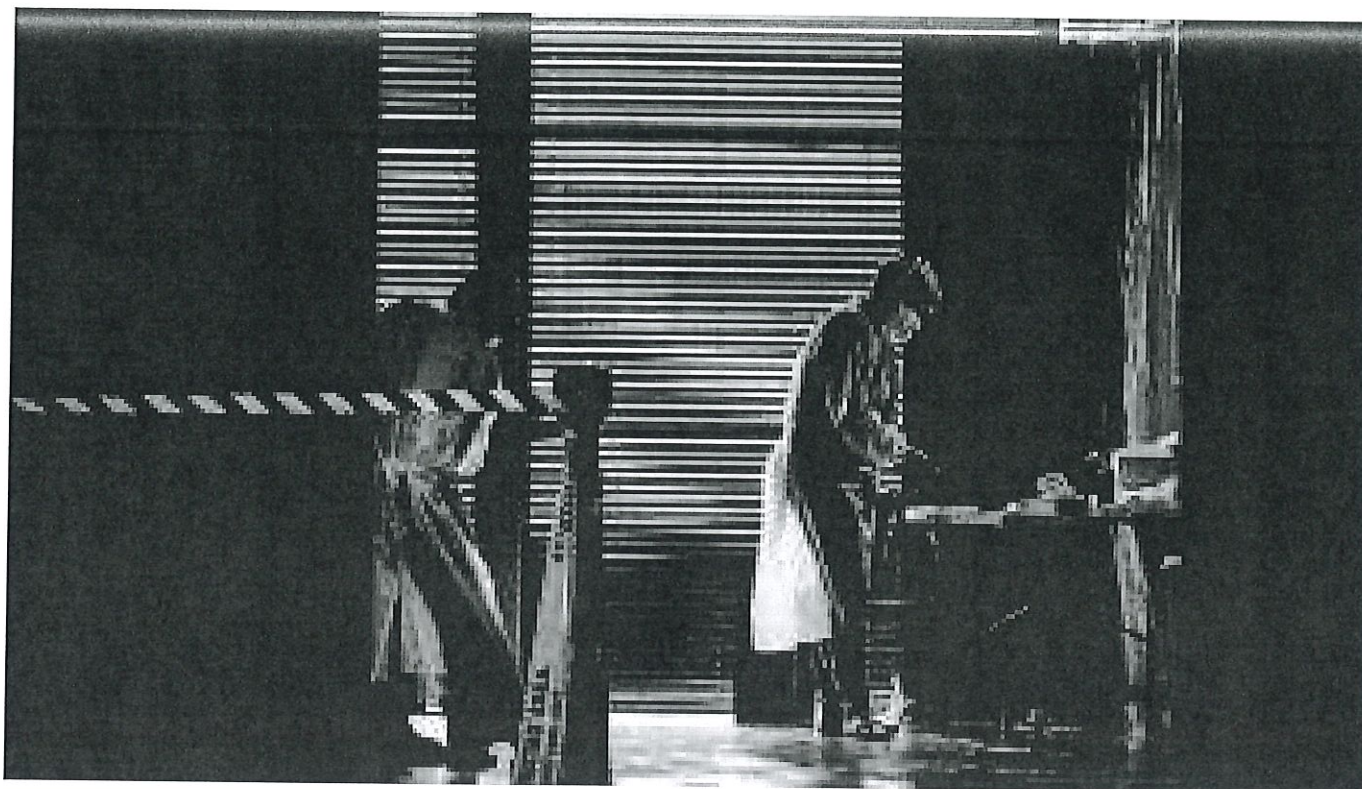
STUFF

Businessman and philanthropist Sir Stephen Tindall praises lockdown efforts. Video first published in April.

Warehouse founder Sir Stephen Tindall, Trade Me creator Sam Morgan and former Air New Zealand chief executive Rob Fyfe joined forces to help ready the country to fight Covid-19.

Together they ordered 50 intensive care ventilators, seven plane loads of PPE protective clothing and equipment, and met with the Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern the Sunday before lockdown was announced to urge the Government not to delay shutting the country down to try to limit deaths and eradicate Covid-19.

Also in the group of senior business leaders were the founders of toy-maker Zuru, Nick, Mat and Anna Mowbray, who have also been involved in raising money to keep Salvation Army foodbanks stocked, including by matching donations from the public with their own money.



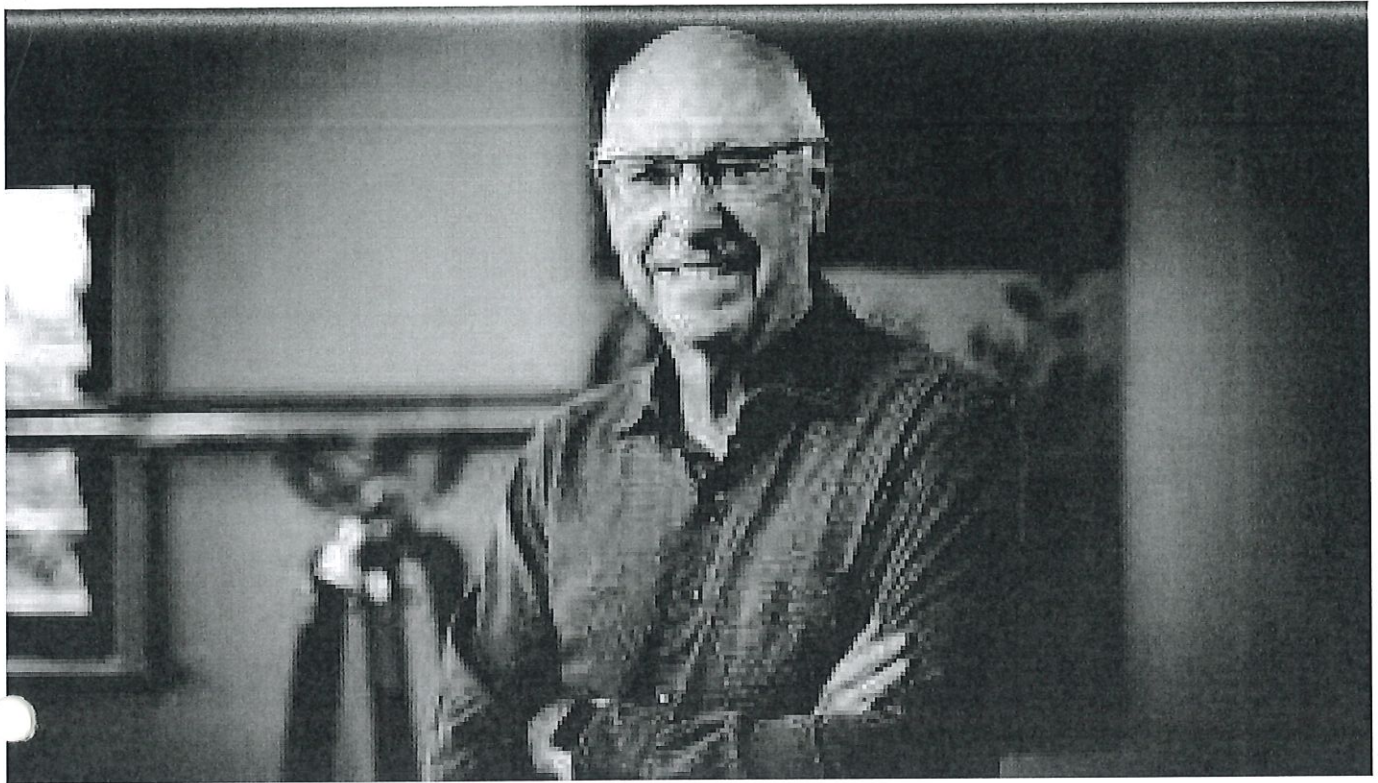
BRADEN FASTIER/STUFF

Sir Stephen Tindall believes New Zealand now has the testing capacity it needs to effectively monitor for Covid-19 outbreaks when the country emerges from lockdown.

Their efforts were outed in an opinion article in the Washington Post republished on *Stuff*, which praised New Zealand's lockdown, saying it had not flattened the curve towards the peak of Covid-19 infections, but effectively "squashed" it.

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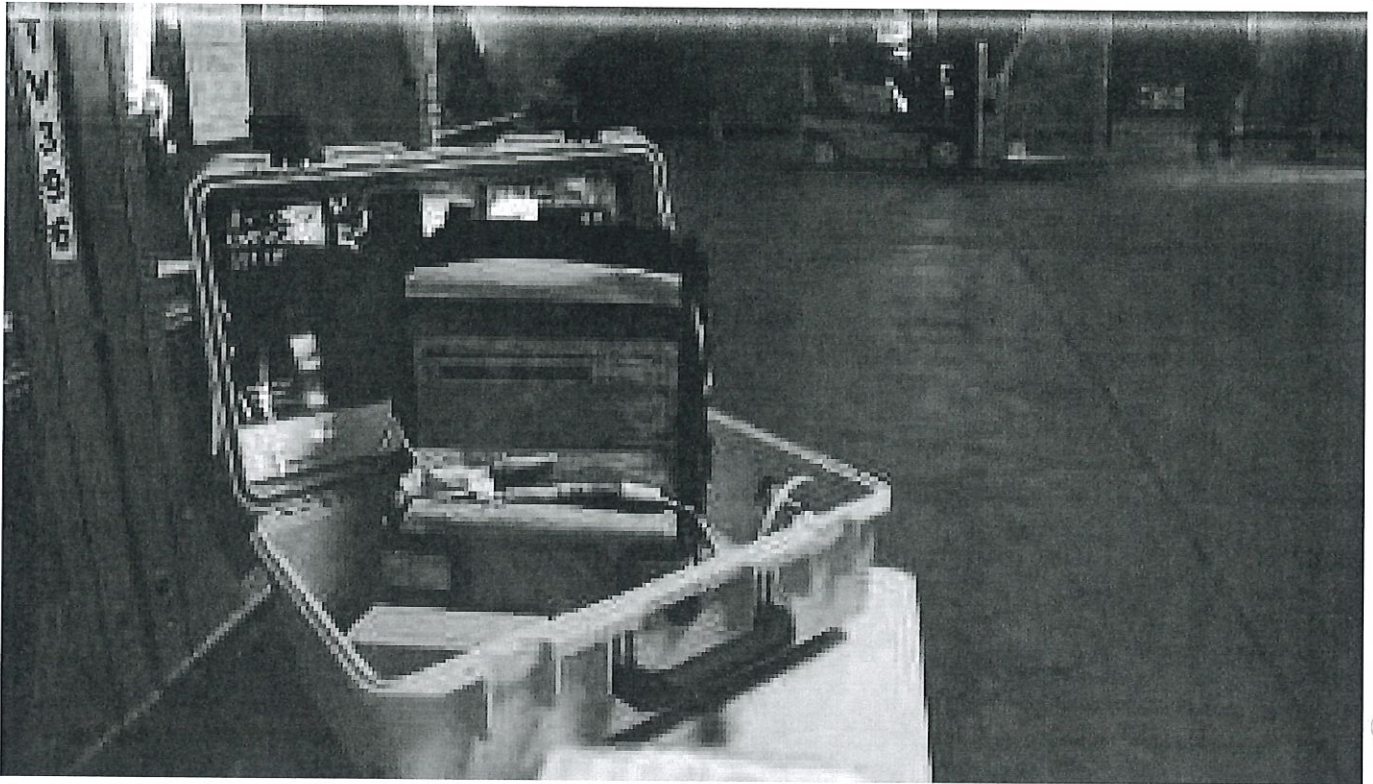
LAWRENCE SMITH/STUFF

The Warehouse found, investor and philanthropist Sir Stephen Tindall and other business leaders met with the Prime Minister the day before the lockdown began.

"A number of us guys had a meeting with the prime minister and Grant Robertson on the Sunday before lockdown," said Tindall.

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"Some of us, Sam Morgan and I in particular, realised there was a lot of stuff not getting done. We basically took the bull by the horns along with the guys from Zuru, and used our own money and ordered up a whole heap of PPE gear. There's actually seven planeloads coming. Two have arrived already."



MARK LENNIHAN/AP

Sir Stephen Tindall underwrote the order of 50 ventilators to be manufactured in New Zealand. Production begins next week, he believed.

They also worried New Zealand didn't have enough ventilators, and moved to source some to give as many severely ill people the chance of beating infection.

"Of course every ventilator manufacturer in the world was chocka," he said.

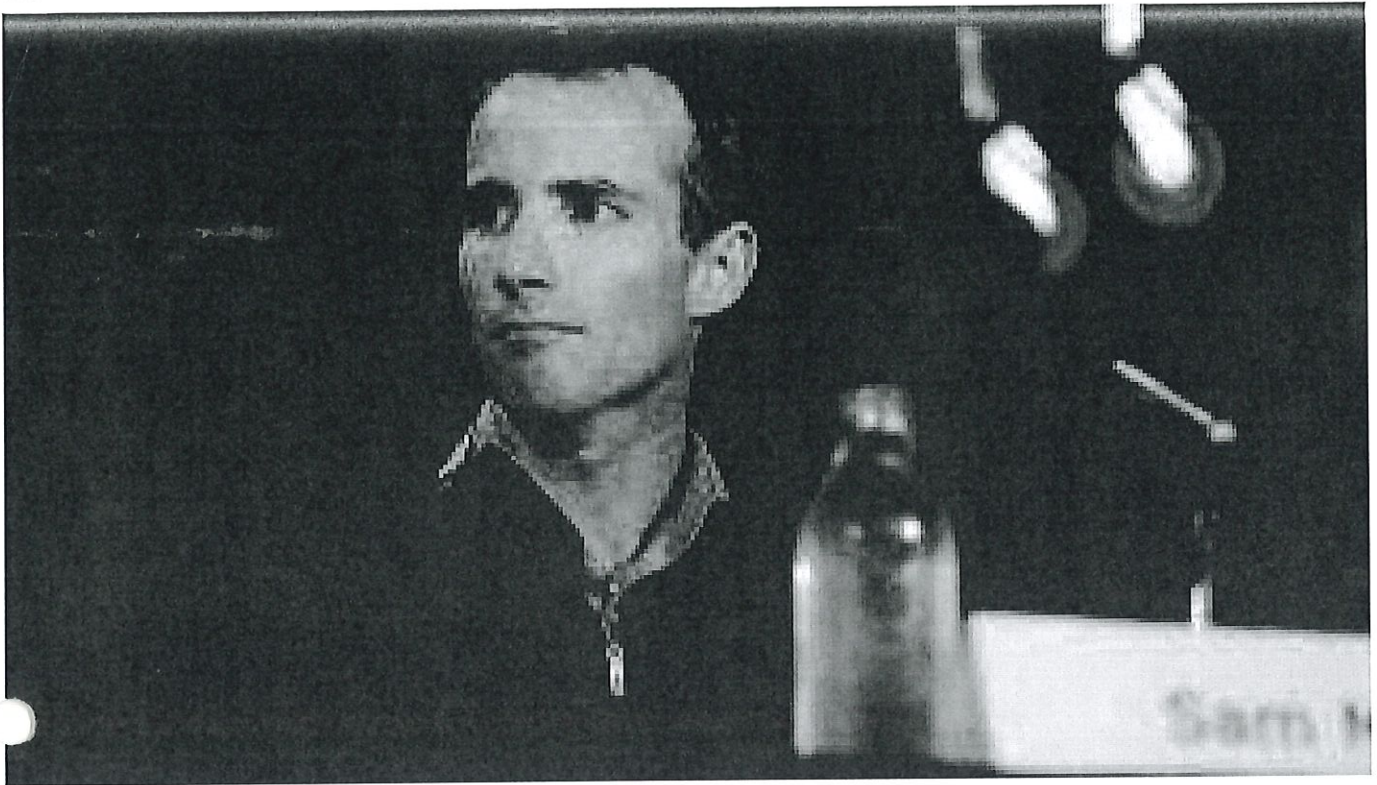
A little Kiwi ingenuity followed, and the group has backed niche New Zealand manufacturers around the country to begin manufacture once key parts can be sourced, though efforts to buy ventilators from overseas continued.

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Tindall underwrote the purchase of 50 New Zealand-made ventilators at \$60,000 each.

"I said to the agent, place the order, and you have got my word I will pay for them, if the Government doesn't," Tindall said.

The team of business leaders sent Fyfe into Wellington under the Police commissioner to find out what was needed that the team could help supply.



MAARTEN HOLL/STUFF

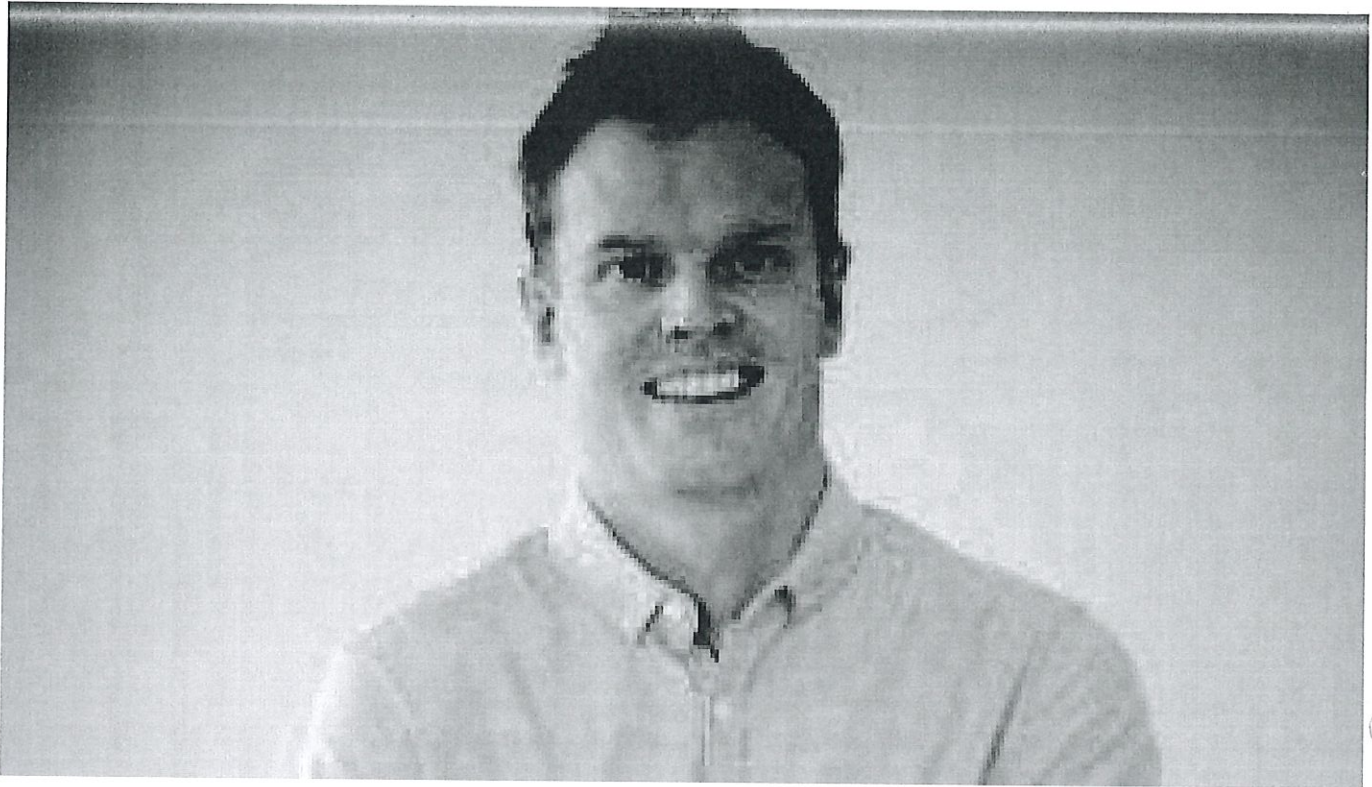
Trade Me founder Sam Morgan could see what was happening overseas, and knew lockdown was inevitable for New Zealand.

Though their efforts have helped the country's preparedness, when the group met Ardern and Finance Minister Grant Robertson, they found a Government in little need of persuading to begin a lockdown.

Tindall believed that the meeting may have sped up the decision to take the country into lockdown, but the Government had already decided a lockdown would be needed to avoid New Zealand following Italy, Spain and France.

○ "By the time we had the meeting, they had already made up their minds," Tindall said.

The businessmen went to the meeting armed with their reasons why New Zealand just had to get on with lockdown, but, Tindall said: "They said, 'Hang on a minute. Relax. You don't have to talk about that any more. We are on board and we are moving towards it'."



SUPPLIED

Zuru co-founder Nick Mowbray has been helping keep food banks stocked.

Tindall and Morgan became convinced lockdown was inevitable about two weeks before the meeting with the politicians.

"We were just watching the numbers, and comparing all those countries where it was starting to skyrocket, and it was so blatantly obvious that unless we shut down, we would see the same," said Tindall.

"So we got pretty agitated about it, and started to talk to the Ministry of Health and politicians about it."

"There didn't seem to be enough urgency, but behind the scenes there was."

Waiting longer to go into lockdown could have cost the country 10 times as much, Tindall said.

"The result for the country has been excellent," he said.

Some countries, including possibly Australia, faced much longer lockdowns, which New Zealand could not afford, he said.

"By stamping it out early, we can get back to work early."

"We were lucky as a country that our borrowings were low," he said.

But even so, he said: "We might rack up a hell of a big debt, which takes us 30 years to repay."



STUFF

Sir Stephen Tindall and other business people ordered seven plane loads of protective clothing to be delivered to New Zealand. Two had arrived by the end of Wednesday.

The group of business leaders, and others working with them behind the scenes, had not sought publicity or thanks for their efforts.

"There's a whole bunch of people doing stuff behind the scenes, which we don't really want publicity for," Tindall said.

They have had some public thanks already.

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The group developed the Government's WhatsApp Covid-19 channel, launched on April 2, for which Ardern thanked Morgan and Fyfe.

"I want to acknowledge the role the private sector has played in this development, particularly Rob Fyfe and Sam Morgan, and I thank them and the people who have worked with them at no cost on this," Ardern said.

"Now, more than ever, is a time for public and private sectors to work together as we unite to help keep New Zealanders safe and to protect their businesses and jobs."

Tindall said: "We did the WhatsApp for the Government. We're now working on one for the tracing."

