



NEW ZEALAND (/NEWS/NATIONAL)

Whakaari /White Island eruption: Round-the-clock medical care for victims

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One month on, victims of the fatal Whakaari /White Island eruption are still requiring round-the-clock medical care.



The memorial fence in Whakatāne after the Whakaari / White Island eruption. Photo: RNZ / Eden More

The explosion on 9 December claimed 17 lives - the bodies of tour guide Hayden Marshall Inman and Australian teenager Winona Langford are yet to be recovered, after police called off their search on Christmas Eve.

Twenty five people are still being treated in hospitals here and in Australia, six with critical injuries.

The chair of Ngāti Awa holdings which owns White Island Tours, Paul Quinn, visited those at Auckland's Middlemore Hospital today.

He told RNZ he spent time with the parents of tour guide Jake Milbank - who underwent another operation today.

"They're holding up, it's obviously a very testing time for them. It's going to be quite a long process, in terms of both the number of operations Jake will need and the recovery thereafter."

He said Milbank had already had a few operations and his parents have remained by his side all along.



Photo: AFP

"We're just working with them about how they might be able to tend to business back in Whakatāne."

Quinn also saw the nephew of American tourist Pratap Singh, whose wife, Mayuri, died in the eruption.

Singh, like Milbank, remains in intensive care and require round the clock attendance, Quinn said.

In a statement later today, Ngāti Awa said they continue to grieve with those who lost loved ones.

"Although there is little that can soothe such unfathomable pain, it is with heartfelt aroha and compassion we offer you our shelter, our tears and our embrace."

They also thanked the medics, emergency response and recovery teams for their efforts throughout.

Meanwhile, the holiday period has been a welcome distraction for some Whakatāne locals, who have struggled to come to terms with the tragedy.

Local radio station 1XX's Glenn Smith told *Five O'clock Report* that it had been busy in the area over the holidays, with both locals and tourists showing kindness towards each other.

He said some major billboards promoting Whakaari / White Island had now been removed from the town, as well as smaller billboards in other places.

However, Smith said some signs still remained visible, promoting the area as 'Gateway to Whakaari / White Island'.

(RNZ, 2020f)