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Submitters ignored as immigration law rushed

It was disappointing, but not surprising, to see the Government ignore submissions and continue with its emergency immigration powers, says Road Transport Forum (RTF) chief executive Nick Leggett.

“This Government is anti-immigration and Covid-19 has provided the perfect setting for its agenda,” Leggett says. “There is a misguided view that the Government can shut us off from the rest of the world and that there are enough New Zealanders willing and able to do all the work that needs to be done.”

The RTF was one of 168 submitters on the Immigration (COVID-19 Response) Amendment Bill passed today, which extends for another two years emergency immigration law, put in place in May 2020 at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic.

“Emergency powers are only ever intended to be temporary – for the eye of the crisis as it were,” Leggett says. “They extend broad sweeping powers to the hands of just a few politicians and they are beyond scrutiny.

“Even if people are against immigration, they should be concerned about the lack of evidence and scrutiny that has gone into this law-making process. This law has been rushed through to meet a deadline, both in the first instance and in seeking this extension. Because it is allegedly temporary, it does not have to go through the normal evidence-based decision-making process.

“This law will now be in place for three years – the original year, plus the two-year extension. That cannot be considered temporary. It’s the length of a full Parliamentary term. And there is no guarantee it will not be extended again with a token process, as it was this time, and the time before.

“The RTF was not the only submitter to object to the two-year extension, most said it should be no more than one year. We have seen no rationale from the Immigration Minister as to why it is necessary.

“We believe the landscape is very different to 12 months ago and the time for emergency powers has passed. The Government needs to be very clear about its Covid-19 recovery strategy and vaccine rollout. We are still somewhat in the dark on both.

“Since this law has been in place, good workers who are settled in the community in New Zealand, working hard, now have uncertainty about their immigration status, possibly for years to come.

“Apparently Immigration New Zealand can’t handle the workload. Given the Government has no problem spending millions of dollars on contractors in other government departments, we think there is an urgent need to send extra workers into Immigration New Zealand to sort out residency applications and visas from people other than the rich and famous,” Leggett says.

The RTF’s written submission is available [here](#).

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About Road Transport Forum New Zealand (RTF)

RTF provides unified national representation for several regional trucking associations. RTF members include Road Transport Association NZ, National Road Carriers, and NZ Trucking Association. The affiliated representation of the RTF is about 3,000 individual road transport companies which in turn, operate 16-18,000 trucks involved in road freight transport, as well as companies that provide services allied to road freight transport.

The road freight transport industry employs 32,868 people (2.0% of the workforce), has a gross annual turnover of \$6 billion, and transports 93% of the total tonnes of freight moved in New Zealand.