

**POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: TUESDAY, 6 APRIL
HANSARD TRANSCRIPT**

PM: Kia ora koutou katoa. Good afternoon. I'm joined this afternoon by COVID-19 response Minister, Chris Hipkins, to make announcements on the opening of the trans-Tasman bubble. But, first, the week ahead. Tomorrow, I'm in Wellington for the House and Cabinet committees. On Thursday, I'm visiting Dunedin and will go to the Otago Polytechnic trade training centre, and I'll also be speaking to the annual South Island Whānau Ora symposium. On Friday, I'm in Auckland highlighting the Government's investment in health services, with the opening of a national telehealth centre and a \$60 million unit at the Mason Clinic for those with acute mental health needs. On Saturday, I'm looking forward to attending the Pasifika Festival in Auckland, which, of course, had been cancelled previously because of COVID.

Managing COVID and keeping it out of New Zealand over the last year has been a massive team effort, and while I know we're all familiar with how lucky we are, especially as we watch some countries only now just starting to gather with friends and family again, we still do not forget that the position we find ourselves in has still come at a cost. One sacrifice that has been particularly hard for many to bear over the past year has been not being able to see friends and family who live in Australia. Our health response now gives us the opportunity to connect with loved ones again, as we start a new chapter in our recovery. Cabinet was presented with advice today that the conditions for opening up quarantine-free travel with Australia have been met.

The Director-General of Health considers the risk of transmission of COVID-19 from Australia to New Zealand to now be low and that quarantine-free travel would be safe to commence. Cabinet accepts that advice and is confident not only in the State of Australia but also in our own ability to manage a travel arrangement. While Queensland has recently undergone an outbreak connected to the border, this too looks contained, and Cabinet believes any residual risk can be managed with additional precautionary processes, such as pre-departure testing, if needed. On that basis, I can confirm that quarantine-free travel between New Zealand and Australia will commence in just under two weeks' time, from 11.59 p.m. Sunday, 18 April.

This is an important step forward in our COVID response and represents an arrangement I do not believe we have seen in any other part of the world—that is, safely opening up international travel to another country while continuing to pursue a strategy of elimination and a commitment to keeping the virus out. But while quarantine-free travel to Australia and vice versa will start in a fortnight, it will not be what it was pre-COVID. While we absolutely wish to encourage family and friends to reunite, and visitors to come and enjoy the hospitality New Zealand is ready and waiting to offer, those undertaking travel on either side of the Ditch will do so under the guidance of flyer beware. People will need to plan for the possibility of having travel disrupted if there is an outbreak. But to help people plan ahead and make decisions around their travel, we want to share as much information as we can about our decision making.

Just as we have our alert level settings for managing cases in New Zealand, we will also now have a framework for managing an outbreak in Australia. In many ways, we will treat Australia as a region of our own when making decisions on restrictions—albeit one with the complication of multiple internal borders. To help make that work as seamlessly as possible, our officials are already working closely together, and our health teams will be part of calls that discuss new cases that may emerge both here and in Australia. Once we know about a case in Australia, we will have three possible responses when it comes to flights and access to our border. We've captured these with a framework based on continue, pause, or suspend.

As you'll see from the material provided, we've set out the types of scenarios that could lead to each response. They broadly follow the kinds of decisions that you'd see if there was a case here. For instance, if a case is found that is quite clearly linked to a border worker and a quarantine facility and is well contained, you'd likely see travel continue in the same way

as you would see life continue if that happened here in New Zealand. If, however, a case was found that was not clearly linked to the border, and a state responded by a short lockdown to identify more information, we'd likely pause flights from that state, in the same way we would stop travel into and out of a region in New Zealand if it were going into a short lockdown. And if we saw multiple cases of unknown origin, we would likely suspend flights for a set period of time.

In each of these situations, travellers in an affected state should expect two things: first, that they must follow the guidelines given to them locally; second, that when travel does resume and they're able to come to New Zealand again, they could be able to do one of four things depending on the risk: either simply monitor their symptoms on return; (2) take a test before they depart; (3) isolate on arrival; or (4) possibly, in some situations, go into managed isolation for up to 14 days. These precautions are all part of our preparation to keep COVID out and, of course, are not based on hypotheticals. Both countries have had border incursions, and I know neither one of us wishes to export COVID to the other country. These protocols will help ensure that we don't.

Many of us haven't travelled abroad for over a year, and I know we expect travel to be different in a COVID environment, and it will be. So I wanted to provide a snapshot of what a traveller coming from Australia to New Zealand can expect, both so they can see how important it is to us that they have a safe experience but also so Kiwis can hear about the protections that exist at the border.

When those in Australia currently make the welcome decision to come to New Zealand, they'll be making a booking on what is called a green zone flight. That means that there will be no passengers on that flight who have come from anywhere but Australia in the last 14 days. They will also be flown by crew who have not flown on any high-risk routes for a set period of time. Passengers will need to provide comprehensive information on how they can be contacted while in New Zealand. They won't be able to travel if they have cold or flu symptoms. When they fly, they will be required to wear a mask on the flight, and will also be asked to download and use the New Zealand COVID Tracer app for use while in New Zealand. On arrival, passengers will be taken through what we call the green zones at the airport, meaning there'll be no contact with those who are arriving from other parts of the world and going into managed isolation or quarantine facilities.

We'll also be undertaking random temperature checks of those arriving as an extra precaution—all of that, alongside, of course, the usual welcome that we like to give all those who are either our guests or who are returning to Aotearoa New Zealand.

As you can hear, quite a bit of preparation has been required by airlines and airports, and I thank them for that work. Final infection control audits for airports in particular are occurring over the next two weeks. The Ministry of Health expects to have completed these and to report on them on 16 April. We will confirm that this has been completed in the days preceding the opening of travel on the 19th. If any airport is found not to be ready, they simply won't be a part of the opening that will be occurring on 19 April.

The Director-General of Health will also give final confirmation of any conditions of travel that may affect Queensland, by next Wednesday.

Before I conclude, I want to make a final comment on the implication for managed isolation spaces. It is estimated the bubble will free up around 1,000 to 1,300 rooms per fortnight within managed isolation facilities. Of course there is a range, because there is no allocation to Australians or anyone travelling from Australia for rooms; they are just part of the general MIQ bookings.

We will retain roughly 500 spaces as contingency, should they be needed as part of the new trans-Tasman arrangements. We also have a small number of facilities that we consider to have only been suitable for travellers in quarantine from low-risk countries, and, indeed, in some facilities, that is what they have been used for alone. With the opening of travel, we will look to decommission these facilities, but in the meantime, we are considering whether they

could be used for other low-risk countries such as the Pacific Islands. As a result of this, we do not anticipate a large number of vacant quarantine spaces to come on stream. Minister Hipkins, though, will make further announcements on this in the coming weeks, and I should add it does not change the fact that we are separately doing work on whether or not we can enhance the arrangements for family members who have been separated by the border measures. That work continues and will not be affected by these MIQ decisions.

Let me be clear though: New Zealanders can still return home, and there will still be thousands of spaces in MIQ for those returning citizens and permanent residents. That's how we have helped 130,000 people safely return home through our managed isolation facilities, and at present we have vacancies for some of the first time since, I believe, October last year, perhaps a reflection of the season that New Zealand is about to enter into—as in, winter.

Finally, this is an exciting day. The trans-Tasman bubble represents the start of a new chapter in our COVID response and recovery, one that people have worked so hard for and that makes New Zealand and Australia relatively unique. I know families, friends, and significant parts of our economy will welcome it, as I know I certainly do. Happy to take questions.

Media: If people do find themselves stranded because of an outbreak, will there be any support from Government at all?

PM: Look, no. We're essentially telling people to prepare. Of course, while both Australia and New Zealand work very, very hard to prevent any outbreaks on either side, we are asking travellers to just simply prepare in case there is an outbreak that may cause a pause or a suspension in travel.

Media: We've been talking about this travel bubble—or the Government's been talking about it—for a year. Could you have done this any sooner?

PM: No, when we reflect on the fact that I cannot see or point to any countries in the world that are maintaining a strategy of keeping their countries completely COVID-free whilst opening up to international travel between each other. That means that, in a way, you know, we are world-leading. That's something that both countries, I think, should be proud of, and I think we're doing it at exactly the right time.

Media: Why has it taken so long?

PM: As you can hear from, you know, the preparation, the experience that a traveller will have coming into New Zealand, the work of airports and airlines but also us learning more about COVID and how to successfully manage it—I think we're opening at exactly the right time. We believe it is safe. We believe we can maintain an open and free flow between states and New Zealand, and it means that, ultimately, people can be reunited.

Media: What do you say to people who are feeling nervous about this announcement? There will be a chunk of people who feel safe in our little island nation and don't want to open up.

PM: The number one priority for us in making this decision has been public safety, and so we have made sure that we've taken the time to get it right, that we have precautions and protocols in place to prepare for any scenario that may occur in New Zealand and Australia, and safety will continue to guide our decisions around the way this bubble operates.

Media: Prime Minister, why is it more safe to open on 19 April than it would be, for example, at the start of the school holidays next week?

PM: The New Zealand school holidays or the Australian—Australian school holidays, I think, are later on in April. But, of course, school holidays have not been the basis of our decision; the basis of our decision has been: have we got the protocols in place; are our airports and airlines ready; can we be assured that we are collecting all of the information we need from travellers to adequately contact trace. And also I don't think we should underestimate: the amount that we have learnt through every outbreak we've had has allowed us to adapt our approach, even away from the original criteria, which previously was

28 days clear with no cases. We now feel confident enough, now, with the information we have, to make a different set of choices but, none the less, a safe set of choices.

Media: The airlines and others have said they've been ready for some time, so why can't we open sooner than the 19th?

Hon Chris Hipkins: The airlines, in the discussions that I've had with them, indicated that they would need around three weeks. When we made our in principle decision around the bubble a few weeks ago, we indicated to them that they may not get three weeks' notice and they should start preparing and scaling up, which is what they have been doing. Of course, as from today they'll be going live with the ability to make bookings and so on. They do need some time to operationalise that. And we still do have a bit more work to do with the airports, just to make sure that they are absolutely ready to separate green and red zone travellers. Now, we've done as much of that already as we could do without fixing a specific date. Now that we've fixed a specific date, we can do the rest of that that needs to be done.

Media: What are the relative disadvantages or advantages of working on a state by state basis as opposed to New Zealand and Australia, as was the initial plan?

PM: Yeah, and initially, as you're aware, we had been working to a New Zealand - Australia arrangement. I think it's fair to say that although this adds an extra layer of complication for us as we manage potential hotspots in different states, it also gives us a level of flexibility. It does mean that we have the ability, if we believe it's safe to do so, to potentially pause or suspend flights in one state whilst, if another state remains unaffected, continuing travel there. So that flexibility exists, but we will be using it cautiously and wisely.

Media: And you've talked about the communication at an official level, but with the state by state approach, is New Zealand in direct communication with those individual state Governments, or is it still very much at a national level?

Hon Chris Hipkins: No, absolutely, and what you'll find now, at a health officials' level, there's been a lot of ongoing communication around this to make sure we're prepared, to make sure those channels of communication are open. So we, basically, want to be able to get good, reliable information about anything that's happening over there, as they want to have good, reliable information about anything that's happening here.

Media: But decisions about, for example, if there's an outbreak in New South Wales, is that a state Government to New Zealand central government decision and conversation, or would that go through the federal system?

Hon Chris Hipkins: So the framework is still based on unilateral decision-making on either side, and I think that's important to note. So whilst we try to be as predictable as we can, in releasing the framework the Prime Minister has just set out, there's not necessarily going to be a guarantee that Australia will consult us over every decision that they make. So that's—

Media: Is that a problem, given the—

Hon Chris Hipkins: Well, that, of course, has been a talking point for us over the first part of this year, and that is one of the reasons why we've landed where we've landed today.

PM: Yeah, and look, as Barry—you've asked about "Why now?" I mean, previously, we had been trying to work to an arrangement that had a bit more predictability. That meant that you would be coming to decisions that were, broadly, a reflection of one another. There may well be scenarios where one side shuts and the other isn't shutting, or one state does and one state doesn't. That is just the reality of the arrangement that we'll have in place, but we do believe it can be managed.

Media: [*Inaudible*] given Australia, though, that we would give notice, and isn't that something you would expect to be reciprocated if the two countries are entering into an arrangement presumably based on good faith?

PM: One of the things I think, to be fair, is that we absolutely accept that speed is of the essence in an outbreak. You've seen, often, we have moved very, very quickly, and so we

accept that it may mean that Australia moves quickly on a decision, and whilst, actually, for the most part they're very good at giving us a heads-up, that may not always happen. That means that they expect and understand if we do the same. But I don't expect anything to necessarily be a surprise, because we have committed that we will be sharing information directly. We'll be on similar calls with one another where we're discussing new information, and we have the ability and power to make decisions in New Zealand's best interests.

Hon Chris Hipkins: I think there's a difference between good faith decision-making and joint decision-making. I fully expect there'll be a lot of good faith. We'll be in regular contact with one another, but each country is reserving the right to make its own decisions.

Media: It doesn't take that long though, does it—I mean, a text between two Prime Ministers, if you're talking about moving quickly.

PM: Yeah, and I imagine that will likely be the case. But what we're saying here is that whilst we anticipate that's exactly what will happen, there's no written requirement for that to be the case. But, equally, that means for New Zealand we can make those decisions at speed, if required. I did have conversations this afternoon with the Premier of New South Wales and the Premier of Queensland, and that was one of the points we made. We'll stay in touch. We have each other's numbers. We'll be making sure that our health—COVID-19 response level will do exactly the same thing, so I don't expect anything will be a surprise.

Media: When will Scott Morrison come here, and when will you go to Australia?

PM: So we have, as you'll know, been delaying the leader-level dialogue that we have usually at the beginning of the year because we wanted to carry it out face to face. When I spoke with Prime Minister Morrison last night to say today's the day that Cabinet will be making decisions, the first thing we talked about was when we would be able to convene those face-to-face meetings. Dates are being discussed. I expect that it will be relatively soon, and I'll be looking to use the opportunity to take Prime Minister Morrison to an area that has previously enjoyed high levels of international visitors and that we'll want to put back on the world stage.

Media: Can I just clarify on the point that was the question before?

PM: Yeah.

Media: As part of that written arrangement, have we said that we will give Australia warning formally—is that how it is—but they haven't given that reciprocally to us?

PM: No, no, no, not at all. I mean, look, firstly keep in mind we've already had an arrangement where there's been quarantine-free travel, and we have been given heads up of when decision have been made to close borders for periods of time. What we're now saying is we'll look to do the same. There is no requirement for either side to give written formal notice before a decision is made, because one of the important things we want to preserve on both sides is the ability for us to move quickly. That's how we protect our position and look after everyone's public health, and we expect that will happen on both sides.

Media: [*Inaudible*] not require a pre-departure test?

PM: Sorry, what was that?

Media: To not require a pre-departure test when the green light is operating—is that a capacity issue? What about the [*Inaudible*]

PM: So, actually, we haven't finalised that decision, so that's why today we are flagging that it is still potentially something we may ask for, depending on the health situation within Queensland at the time we make that final call next Wednesday. So the director-general will give us his health assessment on whether or not pre-departure testing is something we may require. It's already in the framework, though. One of the responses that we may require as part of travel at any given time, depending on need, could be a pre-departure test. But what we're saying is for most states on 19 April, we're not expecting it, with the caveat that it may for Queensland.

Media: You said in your earlier statement that you had got the sort of all clear from the director-general. I'm just wondering: has that question been asked of the director-general before now, and what has his response been if you have asked whether we have been ready to go before now?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, I've been in regular discussion with him about that over the last six months or so. I think his assessment that Australia is a low-risk country has been relatively consistent for some period of time, but his advice has been that the systems have not been in place to allow for safe green zone travel both ways between both countries.

Media: And just that question from earlier today that you were happy to answer now: in terms of the tourism versus reunification with families, do you have any sort of data or anecdotal evidence around how much is actually going to be tourism-based because of the flyer beware sort of message, and how much we're actually just going to see that reunification happening initially?

PM: Yeah. We can only draw back to 2019 figures, where roughly 40 percent of our arrivals in 2019 were coming out of Australia, and they were putting back into our economy over \$2 billion worth of spending. So that gives you a bit of a sense of quantum in 2019. Estimates are that by 2022—the beginning of 2022—we may get up to 80 percent of where we were pre-COVID when it comes to Australian travellers. But they're estimates, and it's relatively early days. What I wouldn't be surprised we see is that early travellers will likely be those who are travelling to see family and friends. We, of course, want to encourage people, though, straight off the bat, to come whenever they're ready, because we're here and ready to welcome them.

Media: Just on that, Prime Minister, the decision means that New Zealand is the only possible travel destination for a country of 25 million people who love to get out and travel. Why should Australians visit New Zealand?

PM: Oh my gosh, where to start! You know, you're asking me to give a promo for New Zealand. The first thing that I would say is that we are safe, and we cannot underestimate how important that is in this COVID-19 world. We are a safe place to bring your family to come and visit. Secondly, we're fast approaching ski season, and I know that that's something that Australians love to partake in, and that's rapidly coming upon us. But even if you're not a skier, I cannot begin with a list of beautiful places that we have to visit, and it is ultimately a change of scene that so many have been looking for. You may not have been in long periods of lockdown, but you haven't had the option. Now you have the option. Come and see us.

Media: Today's a great day for families, as you say, being reunited. It's also the end of a really tortured 11-month journey between when it was first announced in principle to today. Is the biggest regret of that journey for you that you didn't move to a state by state approach sooner?

PM: No. Do you know, in all of this, we have had to build our rulebook on everything as we've gone. What's been critical for us is to never lose the gains that New Zealanders fought so hard for as we have written the rulebook for the next chapter. This is the next chapter. But we've always wanted when we entered into it to be able to stay there. That means making sure that we feel confident that we're ready, that the system's ready, and that no matter what comes our way, even be it an outbreak on either side, that we can deal with it confidently. And we can.

Media: You said you spoke to Scott Morrison last night—

PM: Yes.

Media: —about making the decision today. When did you let Scott Morrison know that the date was 19 April?

PM: About 45 minutes before I came down. So I gave the Premiers a call and gave confirmation, but with the Prime Minister, I gave him a heads-up that Cabinet would be discussing and considering our options at Cabinet today.

Media: So you didn't tell him per se that it was 19 April?

PM: I gave him the things that we would be considering and the range of options that we would be discussing at Cabinet.

Media: So is he learning the date right now, with the rest of us?

PM: No, no, I sent him a message before I came down to post-cab today.

Media: Why has the Government decommissioned MIQ facilities when today we've had families, migrant families, protesting outside, desperate for those MIQ spots so that they can reunite with their loved ones?

PM: There are some facilities that we have only used for travellers that have come from low-risk countries—so the likes of Australia—and so that hasn't, potentially, been open for travellers from other countries because we haven't deemed it to be adequate for those needs. What I can assure those families is that we have asked for Immigration New Zealand to provide advice to us on whether or not we can broaden out some of the categories for family members who may have a loved one who is making a contribution here in New Zealand that is critical to us, but have been separated from their families.

Media: So is that a commitment, Prime Minister, that you will be reuniting those families and also bringing in more seasonal workers?

PM: We've already said that we would do the work on family reunification. What we need to do is make sure that when we do that, it's not giving false hope that we don't have the capacity to manage it. So we've been very careful in our consideration, but we accept that a lot of pain has been caused by those border closures, and in some cases we do have a bit of unfairness in the system, whereas you could have come as a critical worker, once the borders closed, with your family. But if you were already here, you were cut off, so that's what we're looking to resolve.

Media: What will happen to anyone who's travelled from Australia who's at MIQ when 19 April comes?

PM: Yeah, so for anyone who's currently there now, nothing's lost, essentially, so we'll be asking everyone who's currently there to finish up their time. For those, I would recommend those who currently are booked anywhere between now and 19 April—I'm told that airlines will be allowing either fares to be used as credit or to be re-booked on another flight, as I understand, with them only having to pick up any possible fare difference. And so, obviously, we would advise people to do that, and then cancel their MIQ space.

Media: So if you were due to arrive in Australia before 19 April, re-book your flights.

PM: Re-book your flights. You'd want to avoid MIQ, because ultimately you end up staying in there longer than you need to. You'd be better off just booking from the 19th.

Media: Just a couple of questions about the document that explains what would happen if an Australian state goes into lockdown. It says here that returnees may need to go into managed isolation and may need to self-isolate. When will we be told exactly what will happen, and why is it—

PM: When there's a case—

Media: —to convey, at this point, what may happen—

PM: Ah, I would just—because it will depend on the severity of the case and situation. So what we have identified is that, of course, for the most part, you will be either pausing or suspending so that people can stay where they are—in the same way that if we had, for instance, a level 3 lockdown in Auckland, what we ask people to do is stay where they are, isolate where they are, for the period of time that's required. Predominantly that's what we'll

be leaning on in this situation, because we physically will not have the ability to bring everyone back and put them in MIQ. We may, however, have mid-air flights, and if the situation is considered of significant enough risk or there's question marks over the information we have, we may use MIQ in those situations. But it will depend on the circumstance.

Media: So someone may be in lockdown in Australia for a couple of weeks, and then when they return, the lockdown ends, they come back to New Zealand, they may still have to go into managed isolation—

PM: No, no, so that's why you see there's four options. If you've already gone through a period of lockdown in Australia and it's deemed to be safe enough for that to lift, we'll consider at that point whether or not you need a pre-departure test before you return or whether we just want you to monitor your symptoms. In the same way that after we've had a level 3 lockdown, once we lift, we just ask people to look out for any symptoms; we don't ask them to go into another lockdown in another part of the country. So if you just think about it the way we deal with things in New Zealand, you'll get a good idea of how we'll respond.

Hon Chris Hipkins: I think one of the key messages from me is every case of COVID-19 that I have overseen—first as Minister of Health and then as Minister for COVID-19—has been different to any previous cases that we've dealt with. And so in every one of those cases, our response has been slightly different to the response prior, and the same thing is going to continue to happen if we do continue to see cases either here or in Australia. And so we have to allow for a framework that allows us to make decisions based on the risk, and it's impossible to anticipate every potential scenario and every potential risk.

Media: What's the impact, though, of removing 1,000 to 1,300 spaces from MIQ facilities and potentially decommissioning some—obviously getting the swap out of Australians, but are there any other impacts in terms of, you know, more pressure on labour or skill shortage? Are there any other consequences?

Hon Chris Hipkins: So we're not necessarily decommissioning high numbers of rooms. There may be some rooms that get decommissioned through this process. So there are a variety of things all happening at the same time, including the review work that we're doing around ventilation systems, for example, that will highlight for us whether some of the facilities that we're using aren't as suitable for MIQ facilities as other facilities. We have got some facilities at the moment where we only put low-risk returnees in there—so people coming from Australia or from the Pacific, for example. So we look at the logistics of that. Transfers between locations is another challenging area for us around risk management, and if we're dealing with higher-risk cases, then we'd have to factor that in—bearing in mind we're taking quite a lot of low-risk returnees out of the system.

So we're doing all of that modelling. We have been doing that. Cabinet's yet to make decisions on that, and we obviously are conscious of the fact that there's a lot of people who still want to come to New Zealand. Having said that, we've got spots available now. So if someone wants to come to New Zealand next week, there are spots available for them if they are eligible to come to New Zealand next week.

Media: Does this signal, though, you know, obviously, the desire—I mean, it costs money—but also the start of a winding down of MIQ as we carry on into the response phase, or is this just a practical kind of tweak?

PM: Yeah, look, I think what it's fair to say is that we're not anticipating the overall number for those who are coming in from high-risk countries to change. What we're being asked is: if you've got any spare capacity, do we expect that then to be apportioned across those remaining high-risk travellers that are coming in? And our answer is, well, actually, we are keeping some aside for trans-Tasman contingency. That takes out about 500. We're doing a bit of review work on whether or not some of the facilities are necessarily fit for purpose for alternate use and whether or not, actually, some of those travellers from within the Pacific could be used for some facilities. So we will come back, but we're not expecting a large shift in the quantum relative to what we have now.

Media: That 11.59 p.m., is that for flights departing after 11.59 p.m., or is it for flights arriving in New Zealand after that?

PM: I'll leave that to those drafting the orders.

Hon Chris Hipkins: Yeah—look, I imagine it will be that we will start accepting flights without quarantine from that time. In reality, that's usually some quite early morning flights that arrive—looking at the typical airline schedules. Most of the airlines who are flying the trans-Tasman try to do two return flights a day with each of their aircraft, and that means that there are particular times. We get very early morning flights, and we get flights in towards the middle of the day—you know, in that kind of midday onwards period—and then further flights late at night.

Media: Just back to the MIQ facility, is it an example then of them failing, essentially, because they're not to a standard where we can accept people from high-risk countries, where there is demand, and there is demand because there are families who are separated and they want to bring their family members over here, but you're saying that we don't have facilities capable of taking the more high-risk countries?

PM: No—not at all. We brought on facilities and use them for the best purpose we considered them to be, which was low-risk travellers. Keeping in mind, we have MIQ spaces now, but those who are asking for entry currently don't legally have the ability to access them, and that is what, as Cabinet, we will be looking at—keeping in mind, though, if you broaden those categories, there are literally thousands who wish to be able to come into New Zealand, and we do have to make sure we manage expectations over the sheer number that will be able to.

Media: Just following on from Jane's question about the decommissioning, how much of that is actually about the fact that so little revenue is being gathered from people that are going into MIQ, and actually taxpayers are probably getting a little bit fed up with paying the bill?

PM: No. That's not part of the consideration at all.

Media: Kind of a related question: if the MIQ is required for a mid-air flight coming back from Australia, is there an exemption on the fees for MIQ if people are put in there?

PM: Yeah. We're not anticipating charging people for those circumstances.

Media: And the other question: have you set up an ad campaign ready to go in Australia to get people over here? Because they're offering a hell of a lot of advertising.

PM: I know that that was something that Tourism New Zealand were always planning for, the fact that the trans-Tasman bubble was part of our work programme, so I anticipate that they have done work around that, absolutely. That's alongside of their focus on continuing to ensure New Zealanders enjoy New Zealand.

Media: Prime Minister, Virgin Australia have issued a statement saying they won't be getting involved in trans-Tasman flights in the short term.

PM: Until September-October, yeah.

Media: That's right—yes. You've seen that—great.

PM: Yep.

Media: Is that a concern to you? And are you concerned about price-gouging by airlines?

PM: No. No, that's not a concern. Look, airlines are going to make their own decision around when they choose to restart. Obviously, we know two major airlines that are very keen to start offering tickets to Australians and New Zealanders, and so I believe that that demand should be well met by those who will be operating.

Media: There's been some discussion—or there was some discussion—around the possibility of requiring people entering the country without quarantine to use the COVID tracer app. Have you got any updates on that?

PM: Minister.

Hon Chris Hipkins: Yes, we'll absolutely be doing that. We've been working very closely with the airlines to make sure people get good messages about that. We have to allow for the fact that not everyone travelling will have a phone that's capable of doing that, particularly some of our elderly population have been more reluctant to take up the use of the app. But, certainly, we'll be making sure that the messages about that are there. And we've also got some systems in place to make sure that we're able to share information backwards and forwards if we're contact tracing on both sides of the Tasman.

PM: Keeping in mind that the contact details that we can access for travellers is generally very good, because people need to be contacted by their airline should anything happen to their passage, and so that's information we can access for the purposes of contact tracing. We will be asking airlines in flight to advertise details around our contact tracing—our COVID tracer app. But we will not be asking any traveller to do any more than we do any other New Zealander—which is “Use it”, but without compelling people or fining people if they don't.

Media: With all the work you've done to get this bubble worked out, do you anticipate opening any other bubbles with any other countries other than the Realm countries and Australia, or are you just going to wait until the vaccines kind of come in and everyone's travelling normally again?

PM: We haven't made any definitive decision to close off any other opportunities. However, it is fair to say trans-Tasman has been a major focus. The next focus for us is opening two-way quarantine-free travel with the Cook Islands. You'll know that we're working towards May. Obviously, for Niue, it's a matter of when they consider themselves to be ready. Beyond that, we have no firm plans.

Media: So Taiwan bubble not really on the cards for anytime soon?

PM: We have no firm plans beyond that.

Media: If Australia starts negotiating with Singapore on a bubble, would it make sense for New Zealand and Australia to negotiate together?

PM: Well, ultimately it then becomes each country's prerogative as to how they deal with travel with one another if they choose to do that, and any effect it might have on the bubble. So no conversations have been concluded in that regard. Australia, as far as I'm aware, has not made a decision around Singapore. We haven't either. It is fair to say they have a different strategy than either of our countries, though. So I imagine that that would be something that would be given long and hard consideration before any decisions were made.

Media: Would we shut off to Australia if they went ahead with Singapore and we weren't happy with their arrangement?

PM: These are all hypotheticals. The idea of Singapore travel has been floated for a long time, but I've never seen anything definitive on it—keep in mind, of course, the states have quite firm views on how they wish to manage their borders as well. So at the moment, it's a strong hypothetical, but we will make all our decisions around the way we manage our arrangement based on public health. If we have concerns that it opens up a risk, we'll express that to Australia, and we may make changes based on it.

Media: What advice have you received about the economic impact of this decision?

PM: Well, essentially, everyone's trying to estimate how many we may see travel as a result of this, and at this stage we simply don't know how many travellers may, in the early days, take up the opportunity to travel. But, as I've said, the estimates are that we'll get to

potentially 80 percent of where we were in 2019 by the beginning of 2022, and that means potentially over \$2 billion worth of spending in New Zealand.

Media: But were you worried by talk that if you hadn't moved by about now, that parts of the tourism industry, particularly around Queenstown, would have just collapsed?

PM: This decision has been based on public health, and I can't put enough emphasis on that, because I'm aware that as much as I know that our tourism, cities, and towns really want the return of Australians, I know they equally do not want the return of COVID, full stop. And if we didn't get this right, they could have, you know, the worst of both worlds, which is an open arrangement but no open movement, because we have COVID outbreaks.

Media: Prime Minister, just quickly on another topic. Where are things at with the process of looking to remove Sir Ron Brierley's knighthood?

PM: And so, as you'll know, I've instigated the process with the Cabinet Office. One of the things that that requires is for contact to be made with the person in question to canvass the fact that we are considering the removal of their title, and to give them time to respond to that. My understanding is that a letter detailing that process is likely to be dispatched today.

Media: Is there anything that could be in that response that would make you think that that title should stay?

PM: You'll understand that, of course, whilst I'm moving into this process, I need to let it run its course. But you will take from the fact that we have moved very quickly that we're taking this issue very, very seriously.

Media: Could Mr Hipkins update us on what's happening with the number of positive cases from India on day zero testing? What are you trying to find out, and how far have you got.

Hon Chris Hipkins: So we've had a good look at that so far. We're still looking, and we've still got more questions back with officials to look at that. The first question was: have we seen any evidence that the pre-departure testing may not be robust, and that people may be presenting fraudulent test results? And the feedback that we've had so far is that there is not evidence of that. There is evidence of widespread and growing transmission of COVID-19 in India. Someone who is coming to New Zealand from India, if they're getting their test up to 72 hours before departure, if they were infected just before they got their test—that could be a day or two before they got their test—they still might not show up as a positive case on their pre-departure test. They could be five or six days post being infected by the time they arrive in New Zealand, and that would account for the higher number of positive day zero / day one tests that we're seeing coming from India.

So we're looking very closely at all of that—looking also at just making sure the airline arrangements are as robust as possible. The feedback that I've had so far from our public health team who are looking at this, though, is that if there is infection being picked up later in somebody's stay, it's most likely infection that's happened during their transit, not whilst on a plane. So the planes are often taking quite a circular route to get to New Zealand, so they may be travelling Dubai, Kuala Lumpur, etc., before arriving in Auckland, and that it could be at those airports that, actually, is the highest risk point of people being infected. So that's what we've got so far, but there's still more information—we are concerned about the number of cases coming from India, so we're looking at whether there are more things we can do there.

PM: We've also asked to look at whether or not are we seeing historic cases coming up in our testing—if so, what proportion, and particular emphasis on: are airlines playing their part in ensuring that they do not have symptomatic people boarding, that they are presenting their tests results as we expect, because, as the Minister has said, we are concerned by those numbers; they far and away outstrip any other point of departure for the positives they're presenting. But, at the same time, they have a very high infection rate at present too.

Media: Opening up the bubble is obviously a massive milestone. If you start to look to sort of, I guess, the post-pandemic post-COVID in New Zealand, what, I guess, are the next sort

of priorities, the next steps—like, you know, the next countries you want to look to open with? What do you see in the next sort of year?

PM: Undoubtedly, the thing that gives us the most flexibility and most protection is moving away from the barricades that our border controls offer us to the individual armour that we'll gain through our vaccine programme. So the roll-out of the vaccine really does present a game-changing opportunity for New Zealand, where, rather than simply plucking out countries that we believe we can safely open up to one on one, we can think about the wider world and our re-opening to the wider world. But it does mean people taking up the offer of a vaccine, so we will be encouraging every New Zealander to do that.

Media: Picking up on a question I think from before, obviously Scott Morrison's coming here shortly, and we'll understand that and that'll play out, but have you got any plans to visit Australia—or your Ministers—in the medium term, later this year?

PM: Look, nothing firm at present. But it is fair to say that I carry with me that weight of responsibility on behalf of New Zealand businesses and exporters to make sure that we are picking up the opportunity that our trans-Tasman arrangements offer and promoting New Zealand. I'll be doing a round of media in Australia tomorrow morning, acting as tourism promotion agent number one, and I intend to continue to do that on behalf of our exporters as well. And so I will be looking at possible travel through that lens.

Media: Would you want to be vaccinated before you went to Australia?

PM: No, because it's not contingent on anyone coming here or any New Zealander travelling either.

Media: Are you taking Scott Morrison to Queenstown?

PM: OK. Thanks everyone.

Media: Queenstown?

PM: Perhaps you should start a readers' poll.

conclusion of press conference