

**POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 16 AUGUST 2021  
HANSARD TRANSCRIPT**

**PM:** Kia ora koutou katoa. Good afternoon. Today, I have Minister Henare and the Chief of Defence Force with me to provide an update on the situation in Afghanistan, but I do have a few other matters that I'll run through quite quickly and then I'll bring them up onto the podium.

First to the week ahead: it is obviously a recess week. Tomorrow, I'm in Auckland visiting the University of Auckland, Auckland Faculty of Education and Social Work rebuild project, which received shovel-ready funding to support our economic recovery in the vertical construction industry. I'll also be opening the new Shott factory, a company that has become an economic success story both here and overseas. On Wednesday I will be in Auckland where I'll be delivering the weekly 1 p.m. vaccine update along with Dr Bloomfield. Thursday sees me having a day in my electorate, and on Friday I travel to Ngāruawāhia for Koroneihana.

Last week was another record week for the vaccination campaign. Yesterday, we passed the 2.5 million doses milestone. Last Thursday was our biggest day ever with just under 50,000 vaccines administered, and in total 298,586 doses were delivered across the week—our largest seven-day total. This surge in vaccinations means that for all New Zealanders aged 16 and over, 40 percent have had at least one vaccine, and, of those, more than half are fully vaccinated. Since Friday, when we expanded booking eligibility to people aged 50-plus, we've seen 114,863 bookings made by this group. This means that two-thirds of all Kiwis aged 50 and over are now either booked or vaccinated.

I would urge anyone who is over the age of 50 who has not been vaccinated to go to [bookmyvaccine.nz](http://bookmyvaccine.nz) or call 0800 28 29 26 between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. seven days a week, and if you have any questions or concerns, talk to your doctor or someone who has been vaccinated. The greater our collective immunity, the more opportunities we'll have in 2022.

I'll now ask the Minister of Defence and our Chief of Defence Force to please join me at the podiums. As you will have seen, the situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated rapidly over recent days. We are gravely concerned by the advance of the Taliban and the threat that poses to those attempting to get out, including foreign nationals. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is in contact with a number of New Zealanders who remain in Afghanistan and are seeking to leave. Currently, we are aware of 53 New Zealanders in Afghanistan. All have been offered consular support. We are working through this with the utmost urgency. New Zealand remains in close contact with our partners in other Governments on the ground, and we'll be looking at ways New Zealand can also support their humanitarian response.

At Cabinet today we discussed three aspects of New Zealand's assistance: (1) getting New Zealand citizens and their family members out safely, (2) support for Afghan nationals who assisted the New Zealand Defence Force or other Government agencies during our deployment who may be at risk, and (3) New Zealand Defence Force deployment to the region to assist with evacuations. In addition, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade officials are currently assessing options for providing support to conflict-affected Afghans. This support will be finalised after confirming which international humanitarian agencies are best placed to deliver assistance following the dramatic changes to the operating context in Afghanistan and options are put to Cabinet.

Potential partners include the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the UN Refugee Agency. In relation to Afghan nationals seeking to come to New Zealand, Cabinet has confirmed that we will continue to make every effort to support the repatriation of New Zealand citizens and permanent residents and immediate family members travelling with them and their dependents. In addition, we also made an in-principle decision to assist in evacuating Afghan nationals who work directly with the NZDF, New Zealand Police, or

MFAT, or provided material assistance to the Operation Burnham inquiry, where there are reasonable grounds to believe that the safety of wellbeing of the individual or their immediate family has been put a risk from their association with New Zealand in Afghanistan and that no other partner Government would bear greater responsibility for their welfare. Agencies will be tasked with verifying the involvement of those individuals who may fit this criteria. This would apply to individuals and their immediate nuclear family only.

Afghan nationals who meet this criteria will receive expedited visa processing from MBIE and support from MFAT. We have shared, also, our consular list with Australia. In addition, longer term there may be opportunities to resettle additional resettlement applicants from Afghanistan. This would need to be coordinated with UN agencies and partners. At this stage, we are aware of 37 individuals who may have worked alongside the NZDF. This does not include immediate family members. There will then be those involved with Operation Burnham and those who may have worked alongside other agencies.

Finally, we have made a decision to deploy the C-130 and accompanying personnel to support the international efforts to evacuate foreign nationals and Afghan nationals, as described. Defence are in close contact with our partners in Australia to discuss operational decisions from here. We're not in a position to share further details at this point, in some cases because details are being worked through but also because some operational decisions we will not share for security reasons. I do, however, have the Chief of Defence Force with me here today. He will be able to determine what information we are in a position to share and what we are not. So you are open to ask questions of the CDF as well. We are now happy to take questions.

**Media:** Prime Minister and CDF, what is the specific mandate of that deployment to Afghanistan?

**PM:** That specific mandate, as given by Cabinet today, is to support the international efforts in evacuating what will be described as foreign nationals—so, New Zealanders on the ground but also those who we consider have an association with New Zealand's efforts in Afghanistan and who may be at risk because of those efforts.

**Media:** Will there be SAS soldiers included in that deployment, and will there be any combat role at all? Can you rule that out?

**PM:** It's personnel associated with the evacuation efforts, but I'll have the CDF speak to that.

**Air Marshal Kevin Short:** We'll have people there for security of the aircraft itself, not necessarily NZSAS. It could be; we're still doing the planning in that detail. But what we will deploy with is people to maintain and operate the aircraft for a number of weeks, and also have our own air movements, maintenance personnel, logistics support, medical, and security.

**Media:** How many troops all up, and how long are you expecting them to be there?

**Short:** Just when you go through those numbers, we think it'll be around 40; could be more than that.

**PM:** And any indication of length of time, CDF?

**Short:** At this stage, we're planning to deploy for a month, but we don't know whether the security situation will allow us to operate for that long, so we'll do as much as we can over the next few weeks.

**Media:** Why did you wait until the Taliban have overrun the country to offer these 37 Afghani nationals the opportunity to get out?

**PM:** You will have seen from the reaction of the international community there simply was not an expectation that we would see the security situation in Afghanistan deteriorate as quickly as it had. We were just discussing the fact that some estimates thought that

perhaps within 60 to 90 days there may be the potential of seeing what we've seen now, but it has happened rapidly, and so we have responded rapidly.

**Media:** Some of them have had to flee up into the mountains above Bamyan Province because they say the Taliban are going door to door looking for them now. I mean, is it really realistic that you're going to be able to get them out?

**PM:** Well, of course, we are making every effort to do so, and I would point out that MFAT have been aware there are New Zealanders on the ground there, working with them to provide consular assistance, and in some cases there were still commercial opportunities up until recently to get out. Those are gone, and so now we are looking to deploy an asset in order to facilitate the removal of both New Zealanders but those that we consider may be at risk because of their association with New Zealand.

**Media:** Where's the Hercules going? Where's it going to be based out of?

**PM:** I'll leave the CDF to determine what he shares there.

**Short:** We're not going to state where they're going to operate, because out of Afghanistan they will go to a number of countries—this is the refugees, those wishing to get out—where they'll be managed; in other words, where they'll go through the detail of who the individuals are and where they are trying to go. So there'll be a number of countries that we'll have to operate from.

**Media:** And is it primarily working with the US, or is it Australia? You know, is it a US-led thing?

**Short:** We're planning to work with Australia. Australia have indicated what their support and operations will be, and we'll dovetail where we can, but we can also do some individual New Zealand - only operations if required.

**Media:** Back to the 37 Afghan nationals, wouldn't "doing everything for them" have been not telling them on 5 July that there would be no further assistance for them?

**PM:** So just to track back a little bit, so you'll be aware that back in 2012, when the then National Government made arrangements for the resettlement of interpreters, they created a definition that has been used since that time. And so at that time there was an assumption that there might be roughly 65, at that time, that would fall into that category, minus dependants. There were then—they knew at that time there were other staff that may have worked alongside NZDF but who were not eligible, and that's the criteria that's been used since. Over the last three to four weeks we've had contact from those who would not have fallen in the category set by the previous Government seeking assistance. Minister Phil Twyford was receiving those. He, of course, at that time was having to work within that old criteria for applications. He was coming to the view that that would need to be changed. The decisions by Cabinet have now overridden that completely. So we are going further than we did in 2012—than the then Government did—but the circumstances have changed considerably, also.

**Media:** Have you spoken to any other world leaders or any of the other coalition partners prior to announcing this, such as Scott Morrison or President Biden?

**PM:** So I have had some discussions at the highest level with Australia, but that has predominantly been around some of the potential for operational deployment. Each country will make their own individual decisions around who it is that they're supporting and assisting. Really, for us it's about making sure that what we're engaging with on the ground—we're making the best use of our assets as we can together. Minister Henare and I have spoken since that time and made sure, of course, that everyone that needed to be connected at an operational level was.

**Media:** CDF, do you believe that had there been a more measured transition by the United States out of Afghanistan, that this escalating situation could've been prevented?

**Short:** I don't want to speculate on that. I mean, you've seen the same news as I have. What has occurred is the fall of the current Government, which occurred way quicker than any of the intelligence predictions were saying.

**PM:** I'm also going to hand over briefly to Minister Henare to also just give a little bit of context from his perspective on both our past deployment but also the rapidly changing situation in recent days.

**Hon Peeni Henare:** Thank you, Prime Minister. As has already been mentioned, the situation deteriorated faster than all of the intelligence was suggesting, and there are questions about—as we reflect upon our contribution to the province and to Afghanistan over many years, I want to be quite clear: approximately 3,500 of our personnel have been sent there and have served there. We have lost 10 personnel during that time, and we mourn their loss. If we reflect back on it, I am confident and I believe that our contribution is a positive one. I know there are comments and speculation about other areas there, but I think I take the words from the then Prime Minister who commented today that ultimately, when we reflect on it, it will have been considered a positive contribution to our time there.

**Media:** Can I ask a logistical question just in terms of MIQ spaces and the like when the New Zealand nationals and the Afghan nationals return to—

**PM:** Yeah, so, look, just to give a bit of context, this is not going to be a situation where, say, in the next week individuals will be evacuated and then brought to New Zealand immediately. There will be an element of processing and the involvement of third countries. That will enable us some time to work through the wider logistical arrangements around managed isolation. We also believe at this stage that the numbers will be small enough that we can manage that within the contingency that we have without having a significant impact on those more broadly seeking space through our MIQ facilities.

**Media:** What's been the Government's advice to the 37 that are on the ground while they wait to be evacuated to New Zealand? Do you have specific guidelines in place, or is there some sort of contingency that they were all—

**PM:** Yeah, Jason, I simply wouldn't be able to tell you what the communication—at the moment, that communication's predominantly coming through Immigration New Zealand. Obviously, they'll be made aware of announcements made today. What we'll need to work through with agencies is the information provided to individuals in order to really expedite processing of people in what is a very difficult environment. So of course we'll be seeking to verify their identity, match them against lists provided by agencies around who it was that were directly connected with our efforts, and then there'll be a processing point in a third country, as well.

**Media:** By employing those Afghan nationals, did we effectively put targets on their backs?

**PM:** Look, I don't think it's fair to characterise it in that way, keeping in mind that our operations at that time have spanned over a long period of time. In 2012, when this was first given consideration, the view was there was a specific group that was at the most risk, and they have been resettled in New Zealand. Now the security profile has changed dramatically, so we're casting more broadly at those who we may consider to be at risk. And also, we've had the Operation Burnham inquiry since that time as well, which adds an additional layer of risk for a new group of people.

**Media:** Are you just able to explain more broadly the sort of logistics around this? I mean, I understand these are people who are, sort of, fleeing to the mountains, or, you know, behind doors, not wanting to go out. Where do they get to in order to get these visas expedited? How do they make contact with people without being caught up by the Taliban, for example?

**PM:** So, look, just to be—I'll make one quick comment on the visa side, and then leave the rest to the CDF. We are not asking people, for instance, to attend an office in

order to undertake bureaucratic processing. We will try and make sure that what we're doing is streamlined with the evacuation process as much as possible. That will be our focus, because we understand the situation on the ground. So it does mean some processing will happen in third country.

**Short:** Yes, a number of these people have already contacted Foreign Affairs and Immigration. So they are in contact. We're waiting for some of the 37 to finish that communication, but a lot of the processing will be done, as the Prime Minister said, out of country. And so the process will be: turn up, identify the individual as much as we can, and allow them to depart. And it won't necessarily just be on a New Zealand aircraft; it will be on one of the number of countries that are evacuating citizens—their own citizens—and those who have been identified at risk.

**PM:** Because of the difficulty in the processing side of things, and the usual checks and balances we would run, this actually was something we had experience, or Government agencies had experience with, in 2012. So they've had an experience of having to try and verify people's identity and their involvement with agencies. We'll be using those learnings for this case, but we are asking those agencies—and they do carry lists of those who are being engaged—that they support us and assist us in verifying individuals.

**Media:** I mean, are you still going to question whether some of these people are valid, for want of a better description? So is there the potential that some will get taken to a third country, not meet the criteria or the bar, whatever it is, and then what happens?

**PM:** Oh, we're going to make every endeavour to ensure that as much as we can, that that's not the case. We are advised that agencies, for the most part, do have lists of individuals, so it would, in that case, mean it would be someone who fraudulently identified themselves incorrectly as someone on the list when they weren't.

**Media:** So a lot of these people—37 are already in hiding. Can you give them any sort of indication of how long they'll have to wait?

**PM:** Yeah, and, again, those kinds of descriptions—I do them a disservice if we expand too much on details in that regard in this environment.

**Media:** But it might be some time—you've said not next week, obviously.

**PM:** Yeah, one of the things that the international community is calling on the Taliban to demonstrate is a willingness to allow people to leave, and that includes foreign nationals, but it may include, of course, these individuals as well. You know, we're at a period here where the whole world is watching. The Taliban are making claims about the kind of administration they wish to be. Here, we would implore them: allow people to leave safely, and, secondly, demonstrate that you are going to be an administration that takes into account the wellbeing, for instance, of women and girls, the ability to be educated—all those things the international community have been calling on for some time, because the whole world will be watching. *[Interruption]* Oh, it will all come down to, you know, what's demonstrated. It's not a matter of trust; it's going to be all about the actions, not the words.

**Media:** There are Afghans in New Zealand, some who have sought reunification visas with family over there, and some who have family members who have had reunification visas granted but travel exemptions not given to come to New Zealand, as recently as—within days, you know. Will those travel exemptions be granted so these people can come to New Zealand?

**PM:** At this stage, we are prioritising those who have the greatest security concerns, based on the fact that they have supported New Zealand efforts and have a security risk attached to them as a result of those efforts, and that's who we're having to prioritise.

**Media:** I mean, what if they're family members of the last cohort of interpreters that came here, because—

**PM:** And again, as I say, who came in 2012. We are having to prioritise those groups here who I've identified, not only because there will be limited capacity for international groups to be able to come in and extract individuals quickly, the ability for us to process people through quickly, and get them out quickly, which is why we're prioritising those security concerns. The number of people that you're talking to are in their hundreds and hundreds, so it's not something that could be easily done.

**Media:** Sorry, there could be hundreds of people with reunification visas that have no way to get to New Zealand yet?

**PM:** Yeah, but also equally there are a number of others. I acknowledge that in Afghanistan the circumstances are very particular.

**Media:** CDF, for the evacuation deployment, will they need to be prepared for possible combat?

**Short:** They won't be prepared for what you might be thinking of combat. There'll be self-protection and self-protection rules, including individuals to protect the aircraft to make sure our asset can actually operate, but it'll be a situation where I know the US and UK have thousands of troops to actually secure the airfield itself.

**PM:** So we'll be focused on the deployment.

**Media:** CDF, do you have an estimate for the total number of Afghanis once the immediate families and others are taken into account?

**Short:** We're planning on hundreds of people, and to give you an example, with the 37 that have worked for us, we believe that the initial family grouping with that would be at least 200, but there's other individuals who have also been identified, such as those that helped in Operation Burnham.

**PM:** So it's really speculative at this stage. What Cabinet has given is a direction around those individuals, which, as you can see, is fairly tightly defined, but what we can't then make an assumption over is how many dependents, how many children they may have. But we have said nuclear family is where we'll be focused, because they face the greatest risk, and they also, of course, are reliant on one another to support one another.

**Media:** [*Inaudible*] looking in the hundreds?

**PM:** There or thereabouts. So 37—you can make assumptions over how many dependants there might be then. Then we've got Operation Burnham. The numbers there are quite small, but plus dependants. And then there is a small group who may have been working alongside MFAT for the delivery of aid projects, for instance, but again, they're smallish numbers. Really, the unknown is the dependents. The primary people themselves are relatively small.

**Media:** Outside the 37, how many primary people?

**PM:** It is a bit speculative at this stage—37 is the largest block number we have. The Op Burnham number as a group is smaller, and, again, the number of people who have worked alongside MFAT is smaller as well. So all less than 37 for those two groups at this stage.

**Media:** Would New Zealand recognise a Taliban Government, or could you just walk us through the logistics of how that would work diplomatically?

**PM:** Yeah, look, at this stage, as you can see, the entire focus of Cabinet was around the evacuation of New Zealanders and those Afghanis who have been associated with New Zealand in recent times. We did not have a discussion about the future recognition or otherwise of a future administration, but I imagine that the international community will be giving some consideration to these issues in the near future. Again, for us, New Zealand will always fall back on its values. What we want to see is human rights upheld. We want to see women and girls being able to access work and education. These are things that

traditionally have not been available to them when there has been governance by the Taliban. And so I would just, again, implore those who have made these moves in recent days to acknowledge what the international community has called for: human rights and the safety of their people.

**Media:** Can you just clarify whether the criteria has changed—the Cabinet decided today to change the criteria, that the 2012 criteria was too strict. Does that mean the 37 who you've identified previously didn't meet that 2012 criteria?

**PM:** Correct. So there were other staff. Perhaps Minister Henare could speak to this, but the 2012 criteria was very clear that it was, as I understand, interpreters who worked for the New Zealand Defence Force. They were considered to be the most at risk, but there were other interpreters who weren't directly employed and there were other personnel.

**Hon Peeni Henare:** Just to add to that. There were others who chose not to come back at that particular point in time, so that's where we find ourselves today with the 37 that we have identified with a slightly expanded criteria to allow us to give that consideration.

**Media:** The people in that group—it's been reported over the last two or three weeks they've already fled into the hills. Was there consideration before today to expand that criteria?

**PM:** There was some—as I understand, Minister Twyford was giving consideration. I can't be clear though, Derek. I think it would be unfair to say that he would necessarily have been aware of those individual circumstances at that time when we were receiving some of that correspondence. But, again, he certainly, as I understand, identified that there was a need for us to broaden, given the security situation; obviously, that's what we've done.

**Media:** Why was the decision made to send the C-130 over rather than relying on our partners that are closer and [*Inaudible*] easier—

**PM:** I'll give an initial response, and then to the CDF. You can see here that we have a number of New Zealanders who are on the ground—they're citizens, they're permanent residents, they have dependants—for a number of reasons have found themselves in Afghanistan in a situation where the security situation has evolved and deteriorated dramatically in a short space of time. Now, our view is that with that number, including, then, those that we feel a responsibility for because of their connection to the Defence Force and our time there, that we believe that we need to contribute. It doesn't mean that we will individually—everyone we will bring home will necessarily be a New Zealander. We might be supporting other countries with their evacuation of their foreign nationals in order to support them to get to their homes. But also availability.

**Short:** Yeah, I think it's important that, as the Prime Minister has said, we actually provide assistance. We have a C-130 available, we have the trained personnel, and we can obviously, we hope, fit in with the Australians as part of their uplift. But it's an international effort and we are providing an asset, as we should, for that international effort.

**Media:** There's been some reporting on the strain that running security-managed isolation has had on the Defence Force. Has that had any impact on responding to this? Has it made our response slower?

**Short:** No, it hasn't. I've made sure that those immediate response options for the Government have been retained, as well as doing the managed isolation facilities, and I know I have kept the Minister and the Government informed about where those stress points are. But this is something that we're prepared to do and have the assets.

**Media:** Prime Minister, are you confident that we—can you hand on heart say that we acted fast enough in the interests of those 37 Afghan nationals? Have we put them at undue risk?

**PM:** I believe, given the circumstances in front of us, we are doing everything that we can, you know, with the information that we had at that time. You can see here we have

broadened the criteria that's been used in the past. There are more people we're now trying to assist, and not only that; we're making our people available to try and get them out. It is not an easy endeavour, but we believe we have a responsibility to that small number of people who supported us to now support them. Keeping in mind that before today, there were even commercial flights coming and going—that changed in a very short time frame.

**Media:** Prime Minister, can I just ask you to reflect, 20 years on, when New Zealand joined the invasion, it was very clearly around terrorists and around al-Qaeda; Osama bin Laden was found in a different country—ancillary to that was, you know, we brought in a new Government when the Taliban left. That Government's now fallen—10 lives lost. Looking back, was it worth it?

**PM:** Oh, I think it would be a complete disservice, as the Minister of Defence has said, to somehow go back and rewrite history when those decisions at that time were made with the best information available and with a view that we could make a contribution for the better to Afghanistan and its people, and every single one of those Defence Force personnel who went in there went in there to do that very thing—to try and make life better for the people of Afghanistan. So I'm not going to rewrite history on that. Those decisions were made with the best of intentions at that time, and to those who were part of that, I want to say that you did make a difference. The circumstances in front of us now, however, have changed things dramatically.

**Media:** And what to you say to the families of those who lost their lives in Afghanistan?

**PM:** That every single member of the New Zealand Defence Force who went into Afghanistan did so to make the lives of those people better, and they did make a difference. Very unfortunately now we've seen a massive change of circumstances, and we need to continue to do what we can to support those who we owe support to.

**Media:** Just going back to my question before, how much more pressure does this put on the Defence Force at a time where it is already under strain—

**PM:** As the CDF has said, one of the roles of the Defence Force is to ensure that they have capability at all times to deploy at any time. So that's one of the incredible things about our Defence Force—that no matter whether there is a national emergency, a civil defence emergency, or a call for an international deployment, they're always focused on trying to ensure that at any given time, they're able to deploy quickly. And you can see that at work here, given that they're able to make themselves available for deployment at this turnaround.

**Media:** In your definition of the nuclear family, what does that mean? My understanding is some—

**PM:** Partners and dependants.

**Media:** Right, so—because many Afghan families, you know, they live with their elderly—

**PM:** Yes.

**Media:** —there's no social—

**PM:** There's definitions within our immigration policy that are utilised, and they're the same that we used in 2012.

**Media:** So could grandparents qualify as dependants?

**PM:** It's—no, nuclear family. So it is those who are in the immediate care—so, dependants and partners—and it's the same as what has been used for over a decade in that regard.

**Media:** Do we have any idea how many Australians need to be brought back given we're tripping into a wider effort to bring people back?

**PM:** I'm aware of some numbers, but they're not for me to share. That would be for Australia.



**Media:** Question for Mr Henare: [*Speaks te reo Māori*]

**Hon Peeni Henare:** [*Speaks te reo Māori*]

**PM:** OK, we're moving on to other subject matters now.

**Media:** Are we giving any support to Haiti?

**PM:** Look, I'd need to catch up on the latest brief there. That's something I haven't been briefed on by MFAT for this particular—but I'm happy to get a readout for you.

**Media:** Just on behalf of a sports colleague, SailGP in Christchurch has been—

**PM:** Ah, sorry—I'm happy to take other questions, but I'm just going to release our CDF and Minister of Defence. Thank you. OK, other questions.

**Media:** What are the reasons behind SailGP—sorry, Aaron—being denied managed isolation spots for their event in Christchurch in January 2022?

**PM:** I will look in your direction as I answer this, just for your own dignity!

**Media:** SailGP in Christchurch has been cancelled for next year. Organisers say their 160 MIQ applications was declined by central government. Is there any hope for these organisers?

**PM:** Look, to be frank with you, the readout I had was that whether or not that had actually got past Sport New Zealand and gone through the process in its totality or not. I also heard competing information and advice as to the flexibility of their timings for racing, because, of course, you'll know that we're very constrained through certain months, and in other months less so. I haven't had a chance to complete that brief, so I wouldn't mind doing that before I give you a final answer on that, because I think any other answer might be a bit premature. You'll forgive me that we had quite an evolving situation, so I spent most of my time on that rather than the sailing, so forgive me.

**Media:** So are you able to speak to the specific reasons why they were denied those—

**PM:** Not at this stage, no, but I will endeavour, perhaps, to get the Minister for sport to speak to you. There we go—how's that for a substitute?

**Media:** The IPCC report from last week, it found that every tonne of fossil fuels that we burn will make the world hotter. Is it time to ban onshore oil and gas exploration and set a phase-out date for coal use in New Zealand?

**PM:** Well, obviously, for coal use, you'll know that we're going through a process around coal use in New Zealand as we speak, and phasing out particularly the use in coal-fired boilers and so on. So, obviously, we're already making progress in that area and have intention to set out a trajectory for that in the future. For onshore oil and gas, we haven't made any decisions other than the current status quo in that area, but, obviously, our decision around offshore was a significant one. But I have nothing further to report on that for the immediate future. What I would signal to everyone to, of course, look to as the next decision-making milestone for us is our emission reduction plans that will demonstrate how we believe that we can meet our carbon budgets, particularly that first budget in the short term. Considerably harder in that first plan, because, of course, anything that you do in the short term less likely to have that immediately effect, but that'll be the place where you'll see our next tranche of decisions.

**Media:** Do you plan on returning the money that Troy Bowker donated to you in the 2017 by-election?

**PM:** Oh yes, the issue of—so, as you'll be aware, apparently in 2017, as part of my by-election campaign, I received a donation from Caniwi. I have no recollection of receiving that donation. However, I can tell you that when I receive donations I generally go through a process of familiarising myself with whether they're individuals that I know, so all that indicates is in 2017 I was not aware of Troy Bowker or any of his views that I am now subsequently aware of. Obviously, the money that was donated to me in 2017 was used for

the purposes of a by-election campaign, and was spent on a by-election campaign—which was successful. So, ultimately, I became elected as the MP for Mount Albert. I imagine that now Mr Bowker is probably quite unhappy with the outcome of his donation.

**Media:** Will you endeavour to reject any money that comes from him, or that—

**PM:** Yes, yes, obviously. I've obviously had that expectation of any of our members, and I of course would hold myself to that. Granted, at that time, I was not aware of him or, of course, his views, and so I can't speculate as to why he chose to give me a donation at that time. You'll recall I was in Opposition at that time, and a list MP.

**Media:** When Stuart Nash's one came in, did you not think to just go and check for yourself?

**PM:** Well, it was registered as Caniwi—so, obviously, not in the name of Troy Bowker. And it just did not occur to me, because it's not a name that was in my mind as having received a donation from. Although, as I said, at that time my usual process was familiarising myself with the nature of the company and/or individual. So I would do checks like that, but there was nothing that sent a red flag to me at that time.

**Media:** Sorry, just to stay on this one, did what he said amount to hate speech?

**PM:** No, just something that many people—myself including—found pretty appalling and backward.

**Media:** Prime Minister, do you think that we're going to have to vaccinate all children up to the age of 12 before we can loosen some of the restrictions?

**PM:** So all of the reconnection plan that we presented to you was based on our current eligibility. So, of course, that takes us to 16 and above. So we didn't bank in any of our assumptions the idea of vaccinating anyone else who had not yet been approved. So that was the basis on which we set out that reconnection plan. Because, of course, our reconnection plan should always be based on evidence and advice, we need to complete those processes before we make decisions on any other age group.

**Media:** Dr Rawiri Jansen has argued for a more urgent vaccination of younger people because of the lower median age group for Māori and Pasifika, and also some of the research from overseas seems to show that the Delta variant is hitting the youngest hardest and that they're coming sicker this time.

**PM:** Yeah, so some of you will have perhaps seen the research that came out of the Doherty Institute, and their suggestion was that—and you will have heard me reference this in our reconnection plan—that young adults are a particular focus because they do seem to be a strong point of transmission in Australia. And so that is why it will be important for us to look across each age cohort, not just the most vulnerable but those who may be a risk to the most vulnerable because they are a point of transmission. When it comes to children, our decisions there will be based on the evidence and advice around children, because we want to make sure that we make those decisions based on what the research and evidence and our experts are telling us. We have an expectation that we'll be able to share those views in the not too distant future.

**Media:** But how could we open up before our kids are vaccinated?

**PM:** This is why we maintain an elimination strategy. And that, actually, I found a really useful point that was made on the forum by the immunologist that was represented there, Maia. She made the point that people have claimed that we should just open up because those who choose not to be vaccinated should somehow just suffer the consequences. We don't seem to keep in mind that not everyone will necessarily be eligible for vaccination. So that's, again, another reason why an elimination strategy alongside a vaccination plan and cautious borders is the way to go.

**Media:** She also said that she felt that vaccinating children would be really important.

**PM:** But she wasn't suggesting that we go out of step with any of the international evidence and advice.

**Media:** Prime Minister, New South Wales Premier Berejiklian is saying that elimination is near impossible now in Sydney. Does that mean that there's no possibility of reopening the bubble?

**PM:** So what we were saying that we were looking for was containment, and so that continues to be criteria. You know, I don't think anyone in New Zealand would expect us to open up to a state that still had an uncontrolled outbreak. So that criteria we are firm on, but, of course, we will still assess what is happening in other states. But we'll always make a decision in the best interests of New Zealand, because it will be made at a time before we completed our roll-out.

**Media:** And what's the lesson from Sydney's outbreak?

**PM:** As you've already seen Professor David Skegg point out, Delta has completely changed the game when it comes to COVID, because all of the assumptions that we make around the effectiveness of isolation and contact tracing is based on sometimes longer periods of time. It doesn't mean that those things aren't important; they are. But to give yourself the best shot, moving hard and early is the way to go, which is why we've signalled if we had a case we couldn't identify, that a level 4 is what you could expect.

**Media:** Were vaccinations for 12- to 15-year-olds discussed at Cabinet this morning, and, if so, were decisions taken?

**PM:** You'll know that I don't get into the habit of identifying every single discussion and every single decision. However, as you've heard me just say, you can expect that in the near future we'll have more to say on that question. OK, thanks everyone.

**conclusion of press conference**