

**ALL OF GOVERNMENT PRESS CONFERENCE: THURSDAY, 16 SEPTEMBER 2021
HANSARD TRANSCRIPT**

PM: Ki aku nui, ki aku rahi, tēnā koutou katoa.

[To my many illustrious personages, greetings to all of you.]

Today, I'll cover off how Aucklanders are going with vaccinations this week. I'll also do a forward look to the questions of whether any further changes will be made to our alert levels as we look to make decisions on possible moves at the next Cabinet meeting. Minister Robertson is also here and will make comment and take questions on our strong GDP results at the end of this press conference. You may have other questions also. But, before all of that, I'll hand over to Dr Bloomfield.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Ngā mihi e te Pirīmia. Kia ora anō koutou katoa. Kia kaha tonu ki te kōrero i te reo Māori i ngā wā katoa.

[Thank you, Prime Minister. Hello again to you all. Keep doing your best to speak Māori all the time.]

So there are 13 new cases of COVID-19 in the community to report today. All of these are in Auckland, and the total number in this outbreak now is 996. There are now 460 cases who have recovered, which is great news—15 of those in Wellington, and the remainder are in Auckland. There are also five border-related cases to report in recent returnees in our managed isolation facilities. As of late this morning, all but one of today's community cases are linked to known cases, with most being household contacts. The interview is under way with the remaining case, and this is a person who presented to Middlemore Hospital with no COVID symptoms but who was swabbed as part of the wider testing now under way at Middlemore. There are 19 people in hospital today, still, with COVID-19, and four of those are in intensive care units, all requiring ventilation.

We continue with our comprehensive testing programme, and yesterday there were 17,578 swabs processed around the motu. Across the Auckland region yesterday, more than 9,100 swabs were taken, which includes nearly 2,500 tests of both symptomatic and asymptomatic people in our seven suburbs of interest. In addition, around 2,300 essential workers were swabbed. I do want to acknowledge the excellent testing rates across those suburbs of interest, but in particular Papatoetoe, Manurewa, Māngere East, Mount Eden, Ōtara, and Māngere, and in all of those suburbs, around 10 percent of people have been tested since 1 September—so, over a two-week period—which is excellent.

Another of the new cases today is a truck driver who has travelled over the Auckland boundary as part of their work to make deliveries. This driver is being interviewed by Auckland Regional Public Health to determine whether there are any locations of interest. If there are, these will be put up on the Ministry of Health's website. There may well be exposure events, but they may not become locations of interest if there is just one or two, or a small number of people, and all those people are known. The driver was tested after isolating as a household contact of another case. This case does emphasise the importance of our approach to testing people travelling across the Auckland boundary.

Just a reminder that after 11.59 p.m. this evening, all permitted workers who cross the alert level boundaries must be able to show proof that they have had a COVID-19 test in the past seven days. This is in addition to the evidence they need to show that they are permitted to cross the boundary. As this is surveillance testing, permitted workers who have these tests are not required to isolate or stand down while awaiting a test result. Police will begin checking compliance with this requirement from midnight tonight, and people who cannot provide the required information will be turned back. I do want to thank the employers of permitted workers, who have been working closely with our teams across Government agencies to ensure that their workers will be able to comply with the requirements. Many

employers have made arrangements for onsite testing, and those who need to get tested, if it's not onsite at your place of employment, you can, of course, go to any of our community testing centres or a GP. There is also going to be a pop-up testing centre at the Mobil station on State Highway 1 at Meremere from tomorrow. As well, there are saliva testing pick-up and drop-off points throughout the country and, near the Auckland boundary, at Waitomo Bombay and the Waitomo Te Hana stations, operating from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday to Friday.

On rapid antigen testing, yesterday 100,000 rapid antigen test kits purchased by the Ministry of Health arrived in the country. These are being used in two pilots. The first is being used testing patients arriving at Middlemore Hospital's emergency department. In this case, samples for rapid antigen testing will be taken from people who are having swabs taken for laboratory PCR testing and who consent to an additional sample being taken. It requires another swab at the front of the nose. This will help assess the accuracy and usefulness of the tests in this setting and how it can be operationalised, as well as, if someone is positive, give an early indication.

The second pilot will be one that is being rolled out as part out of the reconnecting New Zealanders work for people arriving at international airports, and details of that pilot are still being worked through. These tests are being piloted to help work out now how we best use them in future to help identify new infections, support outbreak investigations through screening, and monitor disease trends.

Further testing, as you may have heard, is happening across Middlemore Hospital, across their wards for all in-patients, starting with their adult medical and surgical wards. This is not compulsory testing, but I'd encourage those who are asked to be tested to take up that offer.

And finally, I'd like to acknowledge today our district nurses who are working across Auckland in alert level 4. They are on the front line and doing great work every day. They continue to see patients, as essential healthcare workers, in their homes every day. There are extra referrals at the moment because GPs, hospices, and hospitals are delivering as much care as they can remotely. As one triage nursing clinician told me recently, imagine being a parent and having to care for a child with serious health concerns, including breathing difficulties, at home under alert level 4. In these instances, our district nurses can help with the often intricate and complex care that is required, and provide reassurance to both those children and their whānau that they are getting the care they need. District nurses, of course, work to all the alert level 4 precautions. It means keeping their patients safe and donning and doffing and disposing of used PPE all day long. So kia kaha and ngā mihi to our district nurses.

Heoi anō, ka nui tēnā. Back to you, Pirīmia.

[Anyway, that'll do. Back to you, Prime Minister.]

PM: Thank you, Dr Bloomfield. This morning, the first of our mobile vaccine buses were launched in Auckland before heading out to parts of the city where vaccination numbers have been lower, or people haven't been able to access vaccination centres easily. Three buses were launched this morning, with one heading to the supermarkets along Lincoln Road in West Auckland, one based at the Pukekohe Countdown, and the other at the Papakura train station. Another three are having their final kit-out today, and will be deployed over the next couple of days. And we'll be looking to build up the fleet even further over the next week to take full advantage of the 12 vehicles being provided, and special thanks to Auckland Airport.

We're working closely with our Māori and Pacific provider partners and community leaders to determine what locations to target, with a particular focus on suburbs where we want to ensure vaccines are accessible. While we're at alert level 4 in Auckland, they will be positioned in places that allow for people to be vaccinated at a safe distance from one another, and also for people to be observed at a safe distance from one another. In the future, though, we anticipate they will be a bit more mobile, and, therefore, a bit more residential in where they go and how they're able to perform their job.

Meanwhile, we've hit another milestone: today we hit 3 million first doses delivered nationwide, representing over 70 percent of our eligible population. This is a significant

milestone, so thanks to all those who have been vaccinated so far. But we have the capacity to do even more and even faster. We have the ability to get to 80 percent of Aucklanders vaccinated with their first dose by the end of the week. Nearly 37,000 first doses were delivered in Auckland in the last two days, but we need to do even better again. For those of you who are yet to get that first vaccine, I encourage you to get out there and to do it today. Head to your nearest drive-through or walk-in provider, and join the tens of thousands of Aucklanders who have done their bit this week. It's the most important thing you can do to help us as we work together to get out of lockdowns.

If you're not sure where to go, I want to explicitly mention the places where you have options. These are places where you don't require a booking. In the south, there is the Airport Park & Ride; the Papakura Marae vaccination centre; the Manurewa Vaccination Centre at 81 Finlayson Ave, Clendon Park; the Ōtara Vaccination Centre at 5 Ōtara Road; the Pukekohe Vaccination Centre at 6 Roulston Street; and the Takanini Vaccination Centre at 8 Great South Road. If you're out west, you've got the option of the Trusts Arena at Central Park Drive, the Henderson Vaccination Centre at 28 Catherine Street, or the Westgate Vaccination Centre on Westgate Drive. And if you're in central Auckland and looking for a walk-in opportunity, there's the vaccination centre at 35 Graham Street, our recently established CBD site; the Epsom Vaccination Centre at 382 Manukau Road; the Mt Wellington Vaccination Centre on Leonard Road, Mount Wellington; or the Tāmaki (Glen Innes) Vaccination Centre on Morrin Road.

If you're in the north, drop into the North Shore Airport drive-through vaccination centre on Postman Road, the Albany Vaccination Centre, or the Birkenhead Vaccination Centre. That one's at the corner of Highbury Bypass and Birkenhead Avenue, and, again, these are all available for drop-ins. If you're in the east, you can visit the Highbrook Vaccination Centre at 31 Highbrook Drive, and, of course, if you're in the south or the west, keep an eye out for the mobile buses. Remember, again, you can turn up at any of these sites—no bookings. There is spare capacity. Take your whole family bubble with you, and, of course, it's completely free. As I said, with COVID, our efforts to defeat the current outbreak, vaccinations are incredibly helpful both now and into the future.

Before I finish today, though, I want to touch on questions we've had on whether there will be any changes made to the alert system going forward. We all know Delta is more dangerous and more difficult, and because of that we have adapted our response. A few weeks ago, we stepped into alert level 2, and we made changes to reflect the risk we faced. We also said we would consider whether we needed to do the same to alert level 1. Cabinet has considered the settings at alert level 1, and we've received the advice of Dr Bloomfield and the public health team. We've reached the conclusion that alert level 1 will remain the same. At this level, we are prepared. And prepared means, of course, we scan, we wear masks in high-density places where it's hard to contact-trace, like buses, but we don't have COVID in the community, and so we otherwise have pretty normal lives. That remains the objective of level 1, and we don't believe it needs to change, even with Delta.

But the most important consideration here is that alert level 1 has always been for an environment where there is no risk of community transmission, where COVID or, indeed, Delta doesn't present a risk—when it's outside our border walls, not in it. That means so long as Auckland is in the higher alert levels of 3 or 4, we believe we will need a greater level of preparedness in the rest of the country. Right now, while Auckland is at alert level 4, the rest of New Zealand is in a very high-level state of precaution. We entered in on the top rung of Delta alert level 2. We do not believe that the rest of New Zealand will need to necessarily stay on the top rung. If on Monday we confirm our in-principle decision to move Auckland to alert level 3, we will consider specifically an increase in the number of people who can gather together, including in hospitality venues. We anticipate this would be lifted to 100 people. Essentially, as Auckland moves down, the rest of New Zealand can ease a little too, whilst remaining on high alert.

While final decisions will be made at Cabinet, we wanted to give a forward preview of our direction of travel. Businesses have rightly been asking if we can give signals in order for

them to best prepare. What is clear from our consideration, though, is that our alert level system served us very well over the last year and a half, but as vaccines become part of our tool kit, we need to integrate them into our alert level system. We're doing some thinking on this as we speak, and we'll keep you updated on that work. For now, though, we're happy to take questions.

Media: Prime Minister, can we get some more details about the truck driver who crossed the border? Was it north or south, how many places of interest they went to, and how nervous should people be just outside the borders of Auckland?

PM: So I'll give Dr Bloomfield just the opportunity to speak on some of the details, and then I'll speak on the more general questions you asked.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: So early information so far: the truck driver travelled to Hamilton, Cambridge, and Tauranga. However, we're not sure if this was during the infectious period, and that will come out of the discussion that's happening with the driver at the moment by our public health team. If there are any locations of interest, they will be made public. There may not be any, because it may be that the only potential contact that the driver had was with one or two or a small number of people. All those people are known at specific locations.

Media: Prime Minister, with the easing of the rules in hospitality places going to 100—

PM: Do you mind if I just mention—just briefly on that, look, this further reinforces two really important points. This is why we have put surveillance testing in place for those who are moving around our borders. But, of course, nothing is foolproof, and that's why continuing to have alert level systems and using level 2 as an extra precaution is also important.

One final extra titbit just to add: this is an individual who'd actually been previously tested, on 22 August, as well. So again, it just demonstrates even if you have testing on either side, it won't necessarily capture everything. Regular surveillance testing, yes, is important, but caution is too.

Media: Moving to 100 people in cafes and restaurants, for example, is that an admission that you've been too strict with places in level 2?

PM: No; it's an acknowledgment that when Auckland was in level 4 and while we were working on an outbreak that we were working very hard to put a ring around, we needed caution in the rest of the country. And that's what that entry into level 2 demonstrated: the need for that extra caution. But, as I've linked today, if Auckland moves to a 3, we feel more comfortable with lifting a few of those restrictions in the rest of the country. And we're indicating if that move were to happen, that would be the most likely adjustment that we'd see across the country.

Media: How concerning is it that the truck driver's gone to three different cities?

PM: It's someone who works for food provision—so stocking supermarkets, as I understand; so not unusual. But also, of course, as you can imagine, their contact is very limited to deliveries and drop-offs, and that will all be part of the contact tracing.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Yeah, I don't have a particular concern; we'll see what comes out of the interviews. I mean, the good thing is this person was tested and we found that case, as well as the other household member.

Media: Was the person vaccinated?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: I don't have any of that information yet.

PM: I can't answer that question, no. But, again, this person has been identified as part of the outbreak, so they're a contact. Unfortunately, though, of course, there's some work that's been undertaken before they've been identified as a contact. But no suggestion that they've done anything that they shouldn't have.

Media: Wouldn't it show that it would be better to have evidence of a negative test rather than just evidence of a test [*Inaudible*]?

PM: Well, of course, keeping in mind that if someone's coming back and forwards across the boundary, if you have to have a negative test every time, are you requiring them to be retested every time they cross, which will be daily in some cases? So that's why, for those who are regularly crossing, it's a test on a weekly cycle to factor in the fact if you said it had to be on every point of departure, you could end up requiring them to be tested every single day. And there literally are thousands of workers who move freight around the country. But, again, extra precaution's also being utilised to make sure that we're not just relying on one single tool here.

Media: Professor Michael Baker is saying that we need a temporary amnesty for overstayers in order to quash any fear which would prevent them from coming forward if they've had COVID. And I know that you've given assurances that people can get tested and vaccinated without that fear, but what's your view on a temporary amnesty?

PM: That implies, somehow, that there's a link between people who are accessing our health services and their immigration status, and there is none. I will say, time and time again, everyone who is in New Zealand right now, regardless of their immigration status, is able to be tested at any time and is able to be vaccinated at any time. It is no way linked to your immigration status.

Media: That is, though, based on a high trust model. Are you confident the community trusts in the system enough?

PM: No, I think that actually there's work to be done just generally because of, in some cases, generations of there potentially being mistrust with Government agencies. And I don't think any one thing fixes that; I think it's about relationships, the work we do with providers in communities, and continually sending that message that this is available for everybody and it is not a question of having a particular immigration status.

Media: Last question: wouldn't a temporary amnesty give guarantee, though, to that community, and, therefore, avoid a potential public health risk?

PM: My concern is that it implies that there is a link between your immigration status; there is not. Also, we have had amnesties in the past; not everyone utilises them. What I would rather is that we clearly send a message that this is not linked in any way at all. The final point I would just make—I know that you've done a story on deportations and people from the Pacific—the number of individuals who have been deported is heavily weighted towards those who have been deported after they've finished serving sentences; and so for assault, sexual offending, and so on. That represents the vast bulk of those who have been deported, rather than just those who are in the community.

Media: The virus doesn't discriminate, though, based on criminality, though, does it?

PM: But the important point here is these are individuals who are at the end of a criminal sentence, of course, not necessarily having places within the community. It's always been determined that once they end their sentence, they're deported. No one from Fiji, however, has been deported since April, given the status of what's there. And these deportations are always in conjunction with the place they're being deported to. So there's conversations with the Government about receipt of those individuals, and so if that can't be accommodated, they're not deported.

Media: *Newshub* last night had story about the accused MIQ escapee. He was let out of MIQ after just 10 days and without a test. Is that best practice?

PM: That's actually what happens, because, of course, people continue, even when they're not infectious, to shed. But I'll let the clinician speak to that.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Yes, so we don't do testing once people are diagnosed and whether they're in quarantine—which they all are—except for a very few at the moment. So

the procedure around release is overseen by the medical officer of health. It's a clinical assessment. The minimum is 10 days and at least 72 hours asymptomatic. We are moving to that 10 days being 14 days. That's still being put into operation in Auckland at the moment, but in the case of that individual, of course, they were asymptomatic right throughout. Our clinicians do an assessment. Some people are kept longer than 10 days if there's any sense that they could be possibly infectious.

Media: Is it a problem that Auckland, given it's the epicentre, is still operating at 10 days when there's clearly a greater risk?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: No, I think that the current protocol is very good and I have a lot of confidence in our clinicians in Auckland. They're the ones who've been dealing with COVID-19 cases, actually, for the last 20 months, and, of course, they're involved in the release of even people who arrive from overseas and turn positive and are in Jet Park. So they have a lot of experience in judging whether someone is no longer infectious and therefore recovered and able to be released. And remembering also those people in Auckland are being released out into an alert level 4 environment, so they're back in their own homes.

Media: Just on the same topic, Dr Bloomfield, when exactly did the 10-day rule come into effect, because all of the documentation says 14 days, dating back to this time last year, and—

PM: Fourteen days for someone's period of MIQ, as opposed to length of time from someone being diagnosed.

Media: Specifically on your quarantine information, it says "you'll need to stay in quarantine for 14 days", not managed isolation. So when does that 10-day—

PM: Sorry, what I'm distinguishing is someone who's diagnosed with COVID. So, sorry, go ahead.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: So the clinical guideline for the release of someone who is a case is, and has been for well over a year, 10 days and 72 hours. In fact, initially it was 48 hours; we extended that out to 72 hours symptom-free. More recently we've worked with the public health units across the country to update that to include a move to 14-days plus 72 hours, and that was agreed towards the end of August. In Auckland, the team—and I spoke with the clinical director of the public health unit about this this morning. She said that their main focus, of course, is on dealing with the outbreak, and so they're in the process of implementing that policy. But, in the meantime, every person who's judged recovered is on the basis of a clinical assessment by the medical officer of health.

Media: Why introduce a rule that is meant for Delta, saying that someone needs to be in quarantine for 14 days, and then not implement it in the middle of a Delta outbreak?

PM: So every single person who is released from a managed isolation facility goes under a clinical assessment to determine whether they're ready to be released, and that's the most important thing. We've had the same guidelines for a long period of time. We're putting in new ones that are being implemented across the country. But it is a change in protocol, so Auckland is the last one to come on board with those, in part because it would be a change-up in protocol right in the middle of them doing quite a bit of hefty work at the moment.

Media: On AUKUS, was New Zealand approached at any point about playing some sort of role in that alliance, and what do you think this means for New Zealand's relationship with those three countries and the Indo-Pacific more widely?

PM: On the last point, I would say I anticipate absolutely no change in our already strong relationship with the United States, the UK, and, of course, Australia. On the first question, no we weren't approached, but nor would I expect us to be. The centrepiece of this arrangement is the building of nuclear-powered submarines to be based out of Australia, and Prime Minister Morrison and indeed all partners are very well versed and understand our

position on nuclear-powered vessels and also nuclear weapons. That, of course, means that they well understood our likely position on the establishment of nuclear-powered submarines and their use in the region.

Media: It's broader than that, though, isn't it? They're also covering cyber-defence, AI work. Are you concerned that that could supplant some of the existing frameworks where New Zealand is involved?

PM: No, I'm not—no, I'm not. I'm not concerned by that. And, of course, it doesn't change—this is not a treaty-level arrangement. It does not change our existing relationships, including Five Eyes, or our close partnership with Australia on defence matters. I was advised of this proposal on the same day as Australia's Cabinet. We stay in close touch on matters of importance to both of us, but, as you can imagine, Prime Minister Morrison was also very well aware that New Zealand was unlikely to be interested in building nuclear-powered submarines.

Media: Are you concerned that this is going to heighten geopolitical tensions—you know, China's already responded—

PM: Yeah. Look, I would say that we have worked hard, as Australia has done, to ensure greater engagement by the United Kingdom and the United States in our region, but our lens will always be from that of a Pacific nation in our view on what is best for our region. We want peace, we want stability, and we want a rules-based order that is preserved in our region, and that is the position we'll come at on all of these issues. But I do want to see greater engagement in our region more generally.

Media: On that, I mean how can you say it won't change our security and intelligence relationship when they've, effectively, formed another group that we are not part of?

PM: Oh, it is not unusual for countries to have a range of different security or defence partnerships, and there are a number, of course, that Australia belongs to, and, of course, we engage at a bilateral level also. But this is not at the level, for instance, of our existing partnership that includes the United States, the UK, Australia, and Canada, and this does not diminish the existence of that arrangement. The one thing I'd say is that I'm—again, the centrepiece, the anchor, of this arrangement are nuclear-powered submarines, and it will be very clear to all New Zealanders and to Australia why New Zealand would not wish to be a part of that project.

Media: Given that it is the anchor, but it is part of a broader structure, as Sam mentioned, aren't we missing out on that, and couldn't we have worked out a way that we could still be part of it without having that as the centrepiece?

PM: And, indeed, if we were, that then would probably look something like Five Eyes, which we are already a part of.

Media: Just on the centring of New Zealand as first and foremost a Pacific nation. Are you sort of—does that diminish the role New Zealand plays on the world stage, or is it an acknowledgment that we just simply can't play in the big leagues that Australia seems to want to?

PM: No, you misunderstand me. I'll refer you to my speech on the Indo-Pacific at Te Papa not so long ago, where, first and foremost, we anchor ourselves in the Pacific, but, equally, we see the value of understanding the role that we have to play within the Indo-Pacific. But it does lend us, then, to have a slightly different lens, as members of the Pacific. It does not change or diminish the role we have to play. And I would be the last to ever imply that New Zealand does not have a strong role to play in our region, and that we very much pull our weight in the region.

Media: Does it give you—on pulling weight, though, does it give you—

PM: I think it really just gives a sense of the perspective that we have, though.

Media: Does it give you cause to—you know, there's been talk of a re-evaluation of defence spending promises or commitments or plans. You know, from what I understand, the finance Minister might be running a ruler over it. Does that give you—

PM: I'm sure the finance Minister will be very happy to correct you on that himself.

Media: Well, does it give you cause to re-evaluate where New Zealand might be heading in defence spending?

PM: No. In fact, we've had an extraordinary investment as you've seen us moving between P3s and P8s—an extraordinary investment in lifting our capability and increasing what we have as assets within our defence force. So I would disagree with that. Again, I'd push back on the sentiment that in any way New Zealand is doing anything other than its bit, but we have an independent foreign policy. We take our own view on foreign policy issues. We'll continue to make a contribution, but our lens is very much peace, stability, and a rules-based order, and that will always be the case.

Media: On AUKUS, in line with that independent foreign policy, will you fight for nuclear subs going into the Pacific?

PM: Sorry, could you—could you—

Media: In line with that independent foreign policy, will you be against Australia's nuclear submarines going into the Pacific?

PM: Well, certainly, they couldn't come into our internal waters. Our legislation means that nothing that is wholly or fully powered—no vessel that is wholly or fully—partially or fully powered by nuclear energy is able to enter into our internal waters. So that is, in fact, a position that has been held across parties for a long period of time. I'd be very interested to see if any other party is changing their position, given the comments I've seen from the National Party.

Media: But the Pacific, please.

PM: Oh, look, again, we've got to make sure that we're consistent. For us, it's our internal waters, and so that's where we have jurisdiction, and that's where, obviously, we're taking a position on that. But, again, I am pleased to see that the eye has been turned to our region from partners that we work closely with, because, of course, this is a contested region. There is a role that others can play in taking an interest in our region, but the lens we'll always look at this from will include stability.

Media: Cases for the last fortnight have been stuck between about 10 and 33. There have no doubt been less cases in the community—

PM: It's where you cut it—I mean, I would have called it a steady decline recently, Ben.

Media: Yes, but the last fortnight it's stayed between 10 and 33. There's no doubt there was more before that. So I guess—are we reaching the limits of what this lockdown can achieve, or are you confident that cases will drop to single figures next week?

PM: Well, we've certainly seen the role that level 4 has played. We've given an indication that based on the trajectory we were seeing, we believed that we would be in a position next week to move to level 3. So that's us giving an indication that level 4's doing what we believe it needs to have done. But that's a decision we've made in principle, and we'll take a look at the health advice that we get on Monday.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Just one thing to add to that is, yes, the cases are still in the teens at the moment, although we're seeing them trend down. Just taking again to our public health colleagues in Auckland this morning, their sense is—and their, you know, almost exact words were—look, the outbreak in wider Auckland is very much under control. There's just some groupings of households in South Auckland, and the good thing here is they know the connections, and therefore they're aware of where other cases may come up, and they're able to rapidly link new cases back to those households. And that's, of course, where the

focus is for further testing, contact tracing, isolation, and so that's, I think, giving us increasing confidence that the outbreak is becoming controlled.

Media: Thank you. How are you going to convince Kiwis who are unsure or unlikely to get the vaccine to get it—that's going to be some pretty hard mahi, you know?

PM: Yeah. Dr Bloomfield, do you want to go first, and then I'll have a go.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, we're going to keep using every effort and every channel we've got. I just want to make two quick comments. One is it's increasingly clear from overseas that vaccination is highly protective of people getting unwell and dying from COVID-19. The evidence could not be clearer. In countries with high vaccination rates, COVID-19 has become a pandemic, or an epidemic, of the unvaccinated.

The second point is it's not just any vaccination level; it's a very high vaccination level. We need to be at or above 90 percent, and that is where everybody needs to be thinking about, and that is why we have geared up our system to make sure we can deliver to that level, and every New Zealander—this is mission critical: every New Zealander needs to take up that opportunity.

Media: So that's it—that's the number? Ninety percent?

PM: Oh, you would have seen Dr Bloomfield just said "or above". The higher we are, the more protection we have, the more likely it is that we, you know, don't have overly restrictive rules around us, because everyone who could be vaccinated hasn't been. My reason, if I could pick one—I've got a whole list of them, but if I could pick one—I would say: do it for kids. There is a whole group of children that cannot be vaccinated right now. They're not eligible. And yet, we are increasingly seeing COVID-19 reach our children. Now, unless every adult who is eligible to be vaccinated is, they risk passing it on to a child. So if you don't feel like doing it for yourself, do it for our kids.

Media: Could you please just clarify: should someone who's had an allergic reaction to the COVID-19 vaccine have to pay for the treatment?

PM: Oh, they would be covered by ACC.

Media: So they shouldn't be charged if they need some sort of medical attendance?

PM: No. No. There's already provision if, for instance, someone has a reaction to a flu vaccine. There's already provision under ACC for that to be covered. So, yes, if anyone's having any issues with that, reach out to ACC or to a local MP to support you. But, yes, that should be covered.

Media: Just on those level 1 settings, how much consideration did Cabinet give—and I'm interested in your advice too, Dr Bloomfield—around mandatory masking and mandatory record-keeping, because we know that if something becomes normalised, then that's better, and you don't get the issue of people, kind of, not doing it and becoming complacent. So what consideration was given to that?

PM: Yep, so you will have heard us say that, of course, what we're matching is risk, and so if Auckland continues to be in these high alert levels, that's because there's risk of COVID and therefore there's risk of COVID to everyone. And so that's where we actually do need to keep up the mask wearing and the scanning. That's best achieved with alert level 2 settings, although if Auckland's moving down, we feel more comfortable making adjustments. If you are in an environment where there's actually not risk of COVID, then the mask use—yes, we're keeping it in public transport but less so day to day, but scanning, yes. Scanning applies all the way through. So those changes that we've made come down and apply at level 1, because that is the precaution you want in place, if you have an outbreak, to retrospectively go back and find out where your contacts are. So that continues, and that's been part of the policy decisions we took some time ago, so that's not new.

Media: Did you have a particular view on the masking, Dr Bloomfield?

PM: Yes.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Yes, I did, and it concurs with the Prime Minister's. The thing about alert level 1 is it is—and this is what our team's advice is—alert level 1 is alert level 1, and that means, essentially, we can enjoy all the freedoms we've enjoyed for much of the last 20 months. Of course, what we're now thinking about is, when we go back to enjoying all the freedoms we have had, and as we get our vaccination rates up, what are the other measures we might need, but not the community; also at the border, and in particular that then segues into the work around reconnecting New Zealand. So—

Media: And just lastly on that, I guess in a Delta environment, and when everyone can agree that the border isn't perfect, is there not that sort of underlying risk all the time? How is level 1 really a risk-free zone?

PM: Well, we've had 170,000 people come through that border with those precautions, and we've continued to use precautions all of—we've increased precautions as we've learnt new things and we've ramped up that system to make it tighter and tighter as we've gone. But, essentially, remember we've had long, long periods of no cases, and what you're suggesting is that people should wear masks all of the time when we've essentially been COVID-free. Scanning, yes, because scanning's backwards looking, right, so we want to make sure that we get back into where people have been so we can contact trace. But we took a different view with masks. Masks right now, though: really important. COVID is in our community—yes, it's contained, but we see it definitely playing a role in this current environment.

Media: Just one on behalf of me and then one on behalf of a colleague: there's been a couple of polls out yesterday that show the Labour Party doing quite well; not so the same story for the National Party. Are you heartened to see these results, and have you got any advice for your rival, who's down in the dumps at this stage?

PM: I'm going to be very honest with you, Jason: I haven't actually seen—someone mentioned the numbers to me yesterday. I can't actually recall them off the top of my head, so that probably gives you a bit of a sense of where they're sitting in my order of importance right now.

Media: So you just don't care?

PM: Oh, look, it matters to me whether or not New Zealand has trust and confidence in what we're doing, the job we're doing as a Government, but right now I have a pretty singular focus, and it's the job we're doing here.

Media: And the other question—it's not actually on behalf of a colleague; it's on behalf of Jessica Mutch McKay, who was too scared to ask it—just on the buses, you've come up with "Shot Bro"?

PM: So—you should just own those questions, Jason. So yesterday I popped up last night a quick react poll on Facebook, so I wouldn't say that it was in any way scientific. I'm having a little trouble remembering the number of people that engaged in it.

Media: Twenty-eight thousand.

PM: Twenty-eight thousand, and "Shot Bro" came out on top of that. So that's why one of the buses has "Shot Bro" on it. I'm sure there'll be plenty of other names on the other buses.

Media: Is "Shot Bro" actually better than "Jabba the Bus", the great Australian name?

PM: I think, look, in defence of "Shot Bro", which I believe came from [*Inaudible*] from Māori TV, because that was the first person who put it to me as an option, so I think that's where it came from. I think that it's pretty unique to New Zealand. It's got a bit of double meaning, so, I don't know, I thought it wasn't bad.

Media: Speaking of nuclear-free moments, do you view climate change as more or less urgent and dangerous to New Zealand than COVID-19, and are you satisfied that it'll take 18 months after declaring a climate emergency for the Government to release its emissions reduction plan?

PM: Well, that would be problematic if that was the only channel in which emission reductions were being delivered, but it's not. So that's probably the first, most important point for me to make. In terms of the relative threat, there's no question what threat a pandemic poses to the immediate public health of an entire society—indeed, the world. So there's good reason why it is top of mind for everyone right now; it is taking lives right now. That is not to diminish the fact that climate change, equally, is an incredibly important challenge for us for generations to come that we need to act now on. So I'm not going to diminish the importance of climate change right now.

Media: Are you still hopeful that you'll be able to release an updated NBC ahead of COP26?

PM: Yes, that's our intention, and what we are working towards.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, the Middlemore case that you referred to earlier, do you have any more information on that, including how many other people are deemed close contacts and isolating, what department the person was in, etc.?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: The only part of that I can respond to is the last part of the question, which was the department—that person was seen in the emergency department. They were screened and had no risk factors or symptoms, but they were tested just as part of the wider surveillance testing they are doing, and was found to have a positive test. I don't have any further information than that at this point. If there are any locations of interest, they will be published as soon as possible.

Media: Does that indicate that there may be some community transmission in South Auckland that we're unaware of?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, one of the things I would say is every one of those cases over the last week that has been first identified at Middlemore, with people seeking healthcare, we've been able to link back to our existing cases, households, or workplaces, but of course each case is taken on its merits, and the interview's under way at the moment.

Media: Just two questions on vaccination. Going back to children not being able to be vaccinated, is it your view that as long as children can't be vaccinated, there will need to be some sort of COVID-19 restrictions in place in order to keep them safe?

PM: So, looking around the world—and that's where we're seeing—at the moment, we're building some international evidence of what is needed alongside vaccines to ensure that those who can't be vaccinated, i.e. children, have some level of protections. You'll see that what's happening overseas is they're not doing things that are necessarily specific to children. It's about what we do to reduce down the amount of transmission that's happening. So there's very few countries who are doing nothing except vaccinating—very, very few. In fact, even Denmark has work at the border. So, in fact—yeah, as I say, very few. They're coupling vaccine together with other measures, because, even with very high rates of vaccination, you still have risk for people like children.

Media: And just also, should vaccination be mandatory for health workers, or is this something that you're looking at?

PM: Yes, it is something we're looking at. Perhaps what I might do is get Minister Hipkins, next time he's on the podium, to give you an update on that. Actually, perhaps Dr Bloomfield would like to speak to it?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Just that we've certainly given advice around this, and my own advice—my advice as director-general—is that it's we should have a high expectation of our health workforce to be vaccinated, as part of both protecting patients that they are seeing,

but also as part of ensuring that our health workforce is able to function and deliver care that is needed.

PM: I think the public would have that expectation, and I don't think it's an unreasonable one. Just one of the pieces of work that would need to be done, though, is just the way that you define health workforce.

Media: I just wonder how many of those 13 are from Snells Beach, and also when is the driver going to be interviewed, and will put up on your website—even if it's clear—to sort of allay fears for people on where he's been?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Sure, we will give an update later on, including if there are any locations of interest. The driver's being interviewed at the moment. In terms of Snells Beach, we had the positive waste-water test, that was from the 6th, it was just we got the result. A further sample was taken yesterday, and in the meantime the public health unit is doing several things. First, look at which people who were cases from that Warkworth - Snells Beach area previously have now been discharged back to the community, and there are several who were in quarantine who are now back there recovered. Secondly, they're doing some focused testing up there around Snells Beach, and in particular focusing on people who live in Snells Beach who work for Southern Paprika, which was one of the industries or one of the employers that was tested and where some of those earlier cases had worked at, and so we'll have an update on that. But at the moment, no, none of the new cases are from up there.

PM: Yeah. As Dr Bloomfield said, there is a possibility of someone that we know who has been released that it may link to, but we just need to do a bit of work in the meantime. Precaution is always best, so if you're in the area and you're symptomatic, please make sure you go and get a test.

Media: There's a group of young women involved in sports and education in Afghanistan seeking visas to come to New Zealand before being killed or sold off. Why are we not taking any more resettlement visa applications and what opportunities will there be for people trying to get paperwork?

PM: Yeah. So there are a large number of people who, for a range of reasons, will want to leave Afghanistan, and there are a large number of countries who are working through ways in which we may be able to provide further humanitarian assistance, or, indeed, further pathways in the future for resettlement. One thing that you will see in some of that work we've already been a part of that effort, but what we need to do is then update you on the next steps—having already evacuated over 390 people, the next steps in supporting those who already have legal right to be in New Zealand and the other assistance we might be able to provide.

Thanks everyone.

Media: When will you make a decision on that?

PM: As soon as we can.

Hon Grant Robertson: Kia ora. Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou katoa. I thank the Prime Minister for her extensive introductory comments before I came up here. I'm here to take questions on today's GDP results, and obviously any other matters in my areas.

Can I just start by saying that this is a very positive result and does show the resilience and the strength of the New Zealand economy heading into this current outbreak. A 2.8 percent rise in the June quarter was well in advance of what any economic forecasters were predicting, and I do think it shows not only the resilience of the New Zealand economy but also the value of the approach that we've taken with a science- and health-led approach, that has delivered a stronger economic outturn for New Zealand.

Just in addition to the numbers that were released today, I can also say that on a GDP per capita basis, we saw a 2.6 percent quarterly change and a 3.7 percent annual change—all

of these numbers are some of the best numbers we've seen for almost 20 years, including the strongest quarterly growth that we've seen since 1999, with the exception of the one-off rebound in the September quarter.

We do obviously know that we now will see a September quarter that will show the impact of the current outbreak and the period that we've had at alert level 4. But I think what these numbers today show is that our rebound that we will have once we come through the outbreak will be based on a very strong position going in, and I think the resilience of the economy gives me a great deal of confidence that we will return to these levels of growth again.

Media: You've got a few billion dollars extra for going into the COVID fund—specifically what is that going to be spent on?

Hon Grant Robertson: Yeah, so what Cabinet's decided there is that the focus of that is, firstly, the economic support programmes that you know about—the wage subsidy scheme and the resurgence support—if they are required to be extended further beyond where we are now and what we've already indicated, that money would be available for that. It's also available for direct COVID-related responses: if we have to support particular groups; particular populations groups; or, specifically, particular parts of the health system. There's also additional funding included there for things like the vaccination programme. I can't go into exact dollar numbers there because they're commercially sensitive. And it's also there to support the development of some of the border- and MIQ-related work that needs to take place. But it's focused on those areas.

Media: Have Cabinet considered extending wage subsidy to include level 2 in Auckland?

Hon Grant Robertson: It's not something that we're considering at this time. I think I've said before on the podium here that the wage subsidy scheme is for alert levels 3 and 4 when many businesses simply cannot operate. For alert level 2, that's the reason we've got the resurgence support payment there. But, equally, I've also said from March 2020, we've continually evolved the support that we give. The wage subsidy schemes evolved, we brought in the resurgence support payment, so we continue to listen to sectors to see what we can do to make sure that we are supporting people. But right now, today, we don't have an intention of changing that.

Media: Have you had to replenish the COVID fund because you wasted some of it?

Hon Grant Robertson: No, not at all. And so, if we take ourselves back to March 2020 when we created the fund, we then had the Budget in May 2020. We were still in a very uncertain environment there, and we put in place a number of supports that are still paying dividends. So one of the ones I've heard criticised by some people is in the arts and creative sector. That funding that we put in there is still being rolled out and so is now having the ability to support artists and their programmes through this new outbreak. So I think the expenditure we've put forward has been focused in the areas it needed to be, and bear in mind the vast bulk is in areas like the wage subsidy scheme, the support for the health system, the changes to the tax system that we've made.

Media: How much of a dent do you expect the Delta outbreak to deal to growth?

Hon Grant Robertson: It's hard to say. I mean, when I look at the bank economists, their predictions are ranging in a sort of a September quarter dip of sort of 6, 7, 8 percent, but then almost all of them are talking about a rise again in the December quarter of a greater number than that—7, 8, 9 percent. And I think that's the point here, is that what these numbers show us is that the New Zealand economy was very strong—very strong relative to the rest of the world and very strong in and of itself, and broad-based across a range of sectors. So not only areas like hospitality and accommodation, but also construction, manufacturing—these areas have been doing well. There have been some supply challenges for them, which we acknowledge, but that's what gives me confidence that yes, we'll have a significant hit in the September quarter—you can't have Auckland at alert level 4 for a large part of that quarter without that—but we will see a rebound as well.

Media: Does the \$4.7 billion of the initial \$62 billion remain unallocated?

Hon Grant Robertson: So some of it does. So we've allocated, or we've spent, about \$2.5 billion so far on the various support schemes—the wage subsidy scheme and the resurgence support payment—and we have more there for the next rounds of those as they come forward. As I said, there's been a little bit of spending since the Budget in the vaccine area, but I'm not going to give the number for that for commercial sensitivity reasons, and then some further supports provided across a range of smaller programmes. So there's still some money remaining there, but this is the opportunity we've got to be able to replenish that fund, acknowledging that some of those other costs that I've mentioned in my answer to Jess are going to be there for some time.

Media: How much is some? You mentioned some's left, how much is that?

Hon Grant Robertson: I believe, at the moment, unallocated there's probably just around \$2 billion, or just under \$2 billion of that money that was left over after the Budget. But, as I say, this now gives us a greater level of replenishment. I'd also like to make the point that this can occur because the New Zealand economy has been strong enough that our fiscal headroom is there to do this. You know, we obviously haven't got the final annual accounts yet, but if we just took the accounts to the end of May, we're running ahead in terms of revenue generated, we're under where we thought we would be from a debt perspective, so the strength of the New Zealand economy means we can replenish this fund with the fiscal headroom that we've got.

Media: There is some confusion about the wage subsidy and exactly how it's assessed or how business proves that part of their revenue drop is because of Auckland being at alert level 4 or 3 rather than just with the level 2 restrictions applying locally. Can you explain how that's assessed?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, it's actually, as I think you'll know, it's a high-trust model. People apply on the basis of attesting to that—that it is the alert level change that has caused that. Where, for this current payment, people have experienced a drop that is caused in part by alert level 3 and 4 and in part by other matters, we're encouraging people to look closely at their accounts but to apply on the basis that they have had that revenue drop. Then there is post-application assessment; that's been the process all the way through. If we did it any other way—if we went through a detailed examination of people's reasons now—that would slow the process down to a point that it would no longer be a useful fund. So I continue to back the high-trust fund, but we've put more resources into those post-payment checks now.

Media: But what would businesses—like, what are businesses meant to, how are they meant to tell whether it's because of the alert level change?

Hon Grant Robertson: Yeah, well, they will know their own business, and the example that's been given on the podium here before is a rental car company in the South Island knows where its bookings come from. They know that 70, 80 percent of their bookings were from Auckland, they're able to sit there and say "Well, we know what it is that's caused our revenue drop."

Media: And also do you know how many public servants have been unable to or told to stay away from work because of level 2?

Hon Grant Robertson: I wouldn't be able to give you that information. Each Public Service agency, the chief executive is the person who determines matters to do with staffing and the way that employees work. What I can say is that I know that the Public Service Commission has been communicating with chief executives that they encourage people to be in their normal place of work in line with public health guidelines. So there will be some workplaces where, in order to do the spacing and the physical distancing, it may be necessary for some people not to be there, but the Public Service Commission's encouragement is for people to come back to their normal place of work. Bear in mind, some public servants have mixed working from home, working in the office days, as well.

Media: Sorry, just following up on that, is that a bit hard, though, when Parliament sets the tone and we're still very locked down and very restricted here?

Hon Grant Robertson: Yeah, so Parliament's run by the Speaker.

Media: I understand that, but I mean—so, obviously, you have a different view to the Speaker about how Parliament should be run?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, I don't—bear in mind it's not me that manages the Public Service in this regard, either; it's the Public Service Commission and chief executives. I'm aware of the advice that the Public Service Commission gives. I know, for people out there—if there's anyone still left watching us—that might sound a bit confusing, but Parliament is the Speaker's domain, and the Speaker makes decisions. So you would need to put questions to him on the level of restrictions he expects within the precincts of Parliament.

Media: What is your opinion? Why can't you just give us your opinion, Deputy Prime Minister?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, you know, as I say, it's not up to me to make that decision. I'm here. We can—I'm sure Parliament can operate under level 2 rules. We all know what they are. We know what physical distancing rules are. But I don't set those, Jenna, so I'm—

Media: Yeah, but you're the MP for Wellington Central. Half the city is closed down because the Public Service won't go back to work.

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, that's not true. Half the city is not closed down. And, in fact, the Public Service represents about a third of the people who work in the city and come into the city, and so they are coming back in significant numbers. The question was about Parliament. I've given you my view about public servants, which is that I believe I want them to come back to work as long as it's safe and they're acting in line with public health guidelines. The Speaker has determined what he thinks those guidelines are for Parliament. I encourage you to ask questions of him.

Media: In the Stats New Zealand release, it makes clear that the trans-Tasman bubble has contributed significantly to the second quarter figures. You will obviously consider the future of the bubble at Cabinet soon. Do you think the bubble can operate on a state-by-state model?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, those are decisions for Cabinet, and, in the past, we have looked at things on a state-by-state model, but clearly we have to bear in mind Delta and the impact of Delta in Australia, and so those are the kinds of things that Cabinet bears in mind when it makes those decisions. But, you know, we will look at that. But, for now, I think most people would understand that given the scale of the outbreak in Australia, it's quite difficult to look at things on a state-by-state basis.

Media: Can I also ask, on a different topic, on the polls, previously, in all your politics watching days, have you seen a major party in such a state as National right now?

Hon Grant Robertson: I'm with the Prime Minister on this. I'm focused very much on the job that I've got to do, and, obviously, as the Prime Minister has said, we're always mindful of wanting New Zealanders' trust and confidence in order to be able to go about what we do. The problems and the dramas of the National Party are for them to deal with.

Media: You're a political creature. You must have seen the polls, and you must be able to give us some commentary on them?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, I know that all political parties go through different stages in their lives, and I'm focused on the Labour Party, in terms of the political side of things, and on the Government, in terms of making sure we do what's best for New Zealand. I'm not going to get drawn into it. There are plenty of people who want to speculate and comment on the National Party.

Media: Does watching it happen give you a little bit of PTSD?

Hon Grant Robertson: Ha, ha! Like I said, all political parties go through these things.

Media: What was that hand motion you did over here when the Prime Minister was asked about the polls?

Hon Grant Robertson: I beg your pardon? I would have been affirming her, Claire.

Media: Was it a thumbs up or—

Hon Grant Robertson: Could you re-enact it, Claire, perhaps, for people? Because I don't recall it. Thank you.

Media: Just back on the Public Service stuff, do you think that it's about time now for a bit more BAU around this place?

Hon Grant Robertson: Around Parliament? As I say, I think the rules around alert level 2 are clear for the way in which businesses can operate. And so the Speaker will, no doubt, take a look at those when Parliament returns to sit next week, but, as I said before, I'm welcoming public servants back into the city. They are coming back into the city, and there is lots of businesses here who are ready and willing for their custom.

Media: I meant more broadly than that. I don't mean just coming and sitting in your seat in the Chamber. In terms of Ministers, their workload, ministries, we're not seeing work programmes, press releases, we're not seeing activity because it's under this sort of shadow of COVID. So now that a lot of the country has been in level 2 for a while, wouldn't the expectation be that you would be starting to see some of those work programmes?

Hon Grant Robertson: I would differ from you there. The existing work of Ministers and of the Public Service is carrying on. I'm participating in meetings about a range of different parts of our programme. Public servants are working. Some of them aren't working in their normal offices, but they're still working. In terms of media releases and so on, you know, the focus of all of you is largely on COVID.

Media: That's because there's nothing else.

Hon Grant Robertson: But where there is an issue that's of some interest, it comes up. Mark was asking about the emissions reductions plans earlier. There's a lot of work going on, but, you know, the focus, rightly, for the country tends to be on COVID. But people are working.

And I do think, actually, it's an important point, you know. I've heard the phrase said about public servants going back to work; they've been working all the way through. The issue is where they're working, and more of them are now coming into the city.

Media: Yeah, thanks. Just quickly, to reprise the question around defence spending: the defence Minister has consistently, for months, said that the Defence Capability Plan was under review, that he's in discussions with you about it. Can you confirm that, yes, you are in talks with the defence Minister about the Defence Capability Plan and his signals that that spending will likely be pushed out into the future?

Hon Grant Robertson: So defence is always a significant part of the Government's Budget, and so I think you'd probably expect that the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Defence would have pretty regular discussions about it. I did with—

Media: But about this, in this context.

Hon Grant Robertson: Yeah, nah. But I did with the previous Minister and I have with this Minister as well. And, equally, as with every agency and every department, I will always be looking closely at expenditure plans—that's what I've been doing with the Minister. We have spent significantly—particularly on hardware—in the last term. There are other issues within the defence sector as well, including the defence estate and what that looks like, the pay and conditions of our Defence Force—there's a range of issues along with that. So nothing has changed in terms of the overall big-picture plans, but, as I would do with any Minister, I'm in conversations about the quality and the amount of spending we do.

Media: But what he's saying is that that hardware—you know, former defence Minister Ron Mark had a very detailed plan of ships and boats and planes and drones that would be coming in a decade's time. Henare is suggesting that that would be pushed out further. Can you confirm that? That's your intention?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, no. No, I'm not in a position to confirm that at all. What we saw with Minister Mark was a re-do of the white paper and then the plans that emerged out of that we were able to fund a number of purchases through that. That plan is still there, but as with every Minister at any given moment, you take a look at the programme. So even though Minister Mark designed that plan, the funding of it gets agreed as we go forward in stages. So that's the process we're in now.

Media: Minister Robertson, was Simon Bridges a better leader than Judith Collins?

Hon Grant Robertson: That is—I'm not in a position to comment on that. I do note that members of the National Party at different times have had different views about who's the best leader, but I'm going to leave that to them to decide.

Media: Can I just go back to COVID economic support, sorry. You mentioned that possible further support for different groups early on in the press conference. Have you got any, kind of, more detail around specific considerations for targeted support for industries that are really suffering?

Hon Grant Robertson: Yeah, so look, we've tended to prefer more universal forms of support, and I've said this before up here: that when you try to break things down sector by sector, it doesn't quite divide up properly. And the example I've given is there's a petrol station in Queenstown is a tourism business but a petrol station in Matamata might not be. And so it's quite hard to do those targeted forms of support. So what we've used is proxies like revenue loss because of an alert level, because different types of business are more affected by being at a higher alert level. So that remains the main way that we think we should deliver our support. However, as you saw during the last outbreak for the tourism sector, we did provide a substantial targeted support fund—over \$400 million. And so we've been prepared to look at that and we continue to be prepared to look at that and are having discussions with sectors.

Media: Grant Robertson, one of the issues raised by some people in the public service about coming back to work in their offices has been the quality of ventilation in [*Inaudible*] office buildings is not, you know, COVID- or Delta-proof. As finance Minister, have you received any budget bids, or would you consider any budget bids—and, I mean, I know the public sector doesn't own many of its office buildings, but to improve the ventilation—

Hon Grant Robertson: In answer to your question, I haven't received any that I'm aware of and I haven't heard that as a major concern. As you're noting, most of the public service buildings are leased, and so those conversations would be between the agency and their landlord. Lest we get too deeply into this, I'll just take a couple more.

Media: On the imprest supply bill the other day, so, I think, Interest reported that about \$15 billion of that has potentially been allocated as other spending that is already accounted for leaving headroom of, I think, the total bill is \$42 billion, so somewhere south of about around \$20ish billion left—\$25 billion. So how much—

Hon Grant Robertson: It's the other way round.

Media: Oh, right. So—

Hon Grant Robertson: So there's \$15 billion that's the effective contingency that's available that's not already tagged to something like a tag contingency or whatever. That \$15 billion is there. There's no specific number or percentage related to that; it's simply an envelope of funding that is available, should there be a need to spend it.

Media: Right. So the \$42 billion isn't the headroom. What is the headroom for you, should you need it, is around \$15 billion?

Hon Grant Robertson: That's the broad contingency that isn't yet allocated to something specific.

Media: Why was a decision made not to publicise it like that? So I think the markets were slightly spooked that you were sort of tossing up pumping \$42 billion.

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, I'm not sure how much more publicity I could do beyond saying it in my speech and it being in the bill. And it was in both places, broken down.

Media: Right. People seemed to think it was a \$42 billion—

Hon Grant Robertson: I do recognise that we've got ourselves into quite an in-depth discussion about the Public Finance Act and the imprest supply bill this time round. These are very normal features of our public finance system. There've been at least two imprest supply bills in every single year since 1989. Obviously, the quantum of money in recent years has been higher because of COVID, but there's nothing at all untoward here.

Media: On the emissions reduction plan, the plan is now going to go into consultation in early October and a final version due in May. How is that going to work in terms of the timing of Budget bids, in particular, which you'd normally do, you know, well before the end of the year?

Hon Grant Robertson: Yeah, we don't work in complete silos here. So it's not like these projects have been done by somebody outside of Government; it's the same people who will be bidding into the Budget. So we're going to be considering those as we go. It will be a simultaneous exercise.

Media: Just on the wage subsidy scheme, have you got numbers on how many people have applied so far and how much has been given out, just ahead of tomorrow's reapplying?

Hon Grant Robertson: I haven't got them with me today, but I'll happily send them through to you, Jason. I know that between it and the resurgence support payment, we're up around the \$2.5 billion mark now, but I can get you the breakdown between the two different versions of the scheme.

Media: The schemes going well so far; it's working?

Hon Grant Robertson: It is. Obviously, as we've stated before, it is very important that when people apply, that the information they provide in applying for the wage subsidy scheme is the same information held about their company by Inland Revenue. That has delayed some of the applications, because we've had to go back to firms to be able to do that.

That is excellent. Thank you all.

conclusion of press conference