

**POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 2 MAY,
HANSARD TRANSCRIPT**

PM: Tēnā koutou katoa. Good afternoon. First, the week ahead. I'm in the House on Tuesday and Wednesday. Also on Tuesday, I will attend a ceremony at the Carter Observatory here in Wellington, for the gifting of the Matariki tohu, or the official branding for Matariki. On Thursday, I'm in the Waikato with Minister O'Connor to mark a significant milestone in our *M. bovis* eradication programme, and to make a biosecurity pre-Budget announcement to further secure our productive agricultural base. On Friday, I will be in Auckland to announce the next steps in our work to tackle climate change and decarbonise the state sector, with a focus on replacing coal boilers in schools. Calls during the week have also been scheduled with the Prime Minister of the Netherlands and the Prime Minister of Spain to discuss the EU FTA agreement and the ongoing situation in Ukraine.

In the early hours of this morning we marked another big moment in our reconnection with the world, with our borders reopening to visitors from visa waiver countries, welcoming again tourists from the USA, the UK, Japan, Germany, Canada, Korea, and Singapore. Pre-COVID, those travelling from visa waiver countries, including Australia, resulted in over 3 million individuals visiting New Zealand, based on 2019 figures. We look forward to welcoming them back. At Auckland International Airport alone, 21 international flights are landing today, and today's changes mean Auckland Airport will now be open to 88 percent of pre-COVID markets.

In addition, those holding existing visitor visas from any country in the world can also travel here from today, of which we know there are over 500,000 who fit into this category, and we welcome them too, because not only is this a further sign of normality returning in our interactions with the world but the arrival of our Northern Hemisphere friends will further propel our economic recovery. We see this already happening, with an uptick in spending that has occurred since we welcomed back our Australian tourists a few weeks ago.

Here, I have a few insights to share today. Worldline, formally known as Paymark data, showed that over the four-day Easter period, spending hit \$420 million—8 percent higher than the spending at Easter before COVID in 2019. Our regions benefited the most as people travelled the country, with Easter spending in Taranaki up by a quarter on 2019, 22 percent in Wairarapa, 18 percent in Whanganui, and 10 percent across Canterbury.

With increased tourism, of course, comes the call for more workers and so we opened the Working Holiday Visa category in mid-April too, and more than 5,000 of these applications have now been approved. This is on top of over 18,000 visas reissued to people who applied pre-COVID, but never had the opportunity to take up their visa. We know things will take time to fire back up, but the recovery has begun, and well ahead of our peak tourism season, which begins from October, when our border will open to the entire world.

Backing this up are the announcements by international airlines confirming that operators like Air Canada, Hawaiian Airlines, Malaysia Airlines, Air Tahiti Nui, and Emirates are restarting routes later this year, in addition to Air New Zealand's resumption of long-haul services from key US cities San Francisco, Houston, New York, and Chicago.

Our tourism industry have felt the effects of the global pandemic acutely and are working hard to prepare for the return of higher volumes of international tourists, and we'll continue to assist this sector through our various targeted support schemes. The resumption of the working holiday scheme has already seen over 18,000 visas granted since 14 March, with around 4,000 of them already in the country. Preliminary advice from tourism officials say that 92,000 flight bookings have been made since we announced the new dates for border opening almost seven weeks ago, and that we are currently seeing around 33,000 arrivals per week.

Interest in travel here remains high, with international flight searches to New Zealand running 19 percent higher than pre-COVID. New Zealand is in demand, and leveraging that interest is a priority for us as a Government. With our COVID-19 control now a matter of record, a growing economy, and our tourists returning to fill our regional economies back up, we will continue to see signs of our recovery. And to our newly arrived tourists: I know the Great Walks booking season has just opened, and they book out fast. So I'll encourage everyone to book their trip here and secure a spot in our Great Walks as soon as they can—we look forward to welcoming you.

Now, happy to take questions. Oh, I'll come down the middle—Jessica.

Media: Prime Minister, do you rule out a wealth tax while you're Prime Minister?

PM: Of course, we've already said that our policy is not to introduce that, and that remains our position. Nothing has changed.

Media: With David Parker looking at options, can you see why it is making people nervous, and will that information that he's gathering reshape your tax policy for the 2023 election?

PM: Look, I think with any policy or programme that we have as a Government, you always check that it's doing what you intend. The simple question that David Parker and we as a Government are asking is, "Is everyone paying their fair share?" Our tax system is set out in such a way that that's the expectation; now let's just check that's what's happening, and I think taxpayers would want to know that people are fulfilling the tax requirements they already have in our existing system.

Media: Who should be paying for the damages with sea-level rises?

PM: Look, one of the issues we're facing as a Government is the complex issue of sea-level rises impacting on existing infrastructure. Now, that's not a simple question. Between us as central government, local government, and, of course, insurers, we need to look at how we can ensure we are protecting any future infrastructure but also how we deal with any issues of existing infrastructure being impacted by rising sea-level changes. No Government before has tackled that question. We are, and so at the moment we're working through that national adaptation plan, how we deal with issues like managed retreat, and, ultimately, how do we ensure that we are supporting any transition that's required, and the cost and where that falls.

The final point I'd make is it's really important, though, as a country, we not just look at adaptation but that we do our part to make sure that sea-level rises do not continue to rapidly increase when we have the ability to stop our climate from warming, and so that's where the Emissions Reduction Plan is so important. We have to do our part as a Government and as a country.

Media: Could you just run us through sort of what the point in David Parker's speech and the proposed bill actually is? Are you just going to use it to get a better understanding of taxpayers in New Zealand, or will you use it to influence policy for the 2023 election?

PM: The first point is the primary point and a really important one, and Minister Parker has already set that out. With any other policy, we of course check that it's operating as we intend, and I think New Zealanders want to know that given that we pay tax on our income, ensuring that that is exactly what is happening through our tax system and that people are paying their fair share. So that's not an unreasonable question to ask and ensure that we have the data to be able to answer that. We have gaps at the moment. Now it doesn't mean that you have to expose people's individual information. There are ways we can do this and check that our tax policies we already have as a country are being implemented as intended.

Media: But he was pretty forthright in saying that, you know, for example, the NBR Rich List is a better way of establishing who has money than the IRD. You've talked about gaps. Is anything in that you will identify within that gap? Will that influence—

PM: We are not doing any work on any additional tax policy, and so this is exactly as he says it is: ensuring that we have information around how our tax system is currently working.

Media: So you say you're not doing any work now—

PM: No.

Media: Does that mean that there will be no policies—

PM: We have no other plans around any further work. What Minister Parker is introducing here is simply answering the question around whether our tax system is operating as intended—whether it's operating fairly—and I think New Zealanders will be interested in that information, too.

Media: So no new tax policies at the 2023 election?

PM: Our policy has not changed, we're not doing any additional work, and I stand by all the statements I've made to date.

Media: And just for absolute clarity: the level of this rule out, is this a rule out for this current term, or whilst you're Prime Minister?

PM: I made a number of statements in this space and I stand by all of them, and nothing has changed.

Media: So what is the statement you've just—you have made a number of statements, so what is the statement you're making now? Is it ruling out it perhaps for this term, or while you're Prime Minister?

PM: The statement I am making—that is, nothing on our tax policy has changed.

Media: Right. But the confusion is what your tax policy was to begin with, so what is the tax policy?

PM: It's because we've implemented it already, Thomas. You'll—

Media: Yes, but you are probably going to be Prime Minister for another year until the election at least, and possibly beyond that, so what is the tax policy then?

PM: Oh well, thank you for that vote of confidence, and of course we've already set out where our policy for this term is and we have implemented it. Nothing has changed. We are not working on anything further. Obviously, as it strikes me, the only tax policy at the moment that's on the table that's being debated that's new policy is the National Party's plan to scrap the top tax rate.

Media: When you say you're not working on anything further, do you mean in this term, or for the 2023 election?

PM: We have no current tax policy being developed at this point in time—right now.

Media: Yes, but it just seems bizarre that you won't say that you will have tax—

PM: Nor do we have any plans to.

Media: —policy for the 2023 election.

PM: Nor do we have any plans to.

Media: So you're not planning to have any tax policy for the 2023 election that is different from what it is now?

PM: I've said exactly all that we have under way currently. We have no change in policy. We've already implemented our plans. There is nothing new under way.

Media: Just on tourism: Greece and Italy in the last 24 hours have removed the requirement that people be vaccinated—tourists be vaccinated—and that's ahead of the

summer tourist season, and a lot of countries in Europe are going down that route. Is that something that New Zealand would do for our summer season?

PM: Yeah—so currently on vaccination, one of the issues we've had raised with us is more around the issue of residents, because, of course, you'll know that we've got requirements that apply to citizens that are different from residents, so we have been looking at whether or not we are applying that policy fairly and equitably. We don't—we're not considering any change in vaccination requirements beyond that at this stage. We are keeping under review all of those pre-entry requirements, though. No changes are currently proposed, but I think that will be one of those things we'll keep a rolling watch on because, of course, we continue to still have pre-departure testing and so on before you enter into New Zealand.

Media: And how does it make sense that tourists from, say, India or China aren't allowed in and tourists from anywhere else are?

PM: Ah. So, of course, as you will have just heard me identify, there are a number of people that are from countries that require visas that already have them.

Media: Yeah, but for—

PM: Hundreds of thousands.

Media: But for those that don't?

PM: And so for those that don't, we currently have them in step five of our reopening. The thing is I've signalled a few times before we are looking at whether or not that's something that we could look to bring forward. I expect to be able to give a signal on that at some time in the very near future. Those were always the last possible time frames that we are looking to, and most of that is around visa processing more than anything to do with COVID-specific issues.

Media: Just on pre-departure testing, Greg Foran said that he'd like that scrapped. Is that something that you'd consider and, if not, why not—and do you have a time line for that?

PM: So that's—a number of members of different parts of the industry are looking to remove as much friction as they can at the border, so I absolutely understand that airlines, airports, and tourism operators do want to make entry to New Zealand as easy as possible. We have to balance that against, though, continuing to make it as safe as possible. So the consideration for us is by having pre-departure testing, you reduce down the number of possible people who may end up in your hospital system because they've come to the country with COVID already, and so at this stage we are constantly keeping that under review, but we're not here to make any changes right now.

Yeah—Henry.

Media: Prime Minister, the Government is currently consulting on a plan to proactively release all advice sent to Ministers. Why are you doing this and why are you asking agencies to do it within their baselines? Won't this cost quite a lot of money to administer?

PM: The first thing that I'd make a—give a little context around, we have been very forthright on trying to create stronger systems around the release of information as a Government. So a proactive diary release didn't happen in the way it does now before we came into office—the proactive release of papers and systematising that—and, of course, now you have more frequent appearances and lines of questioning, even for Ministers and agencies, so all of that has happened while we've been in Government. We haven't made further changes, or Cabinet has not taken any decisions on anything further than that at this stage. If we do, we'll make statements on that at the time. One thing I would say, though, is that it does place—you're right to point out it does have a significant burden on the resource that we have within agencies, because, you know, we do get a lot of requests and we have those same time frames to work through. So making sure that we have systems in place that make that as easy as possible is something that we're mindful of.

Media: Prime Minister, a bit of clarity on the tax question from earlier: during the 2020 election, there was, as you will recall, a lot of statements around the wealth tax that the Greens were putting forward, and you were asked would you enact a wealth tax while Prime Minister and you said, “I will not allow it to happen while Prime Minister.” At that point, were you talking about the Green Party’s wealth tax policy, or were you talking about any form of tax on wealth?

PM: Again, I haven’t—I’m not shying away from any of the positions I’ve taken; I stand by all of them. And, yes, I did rule that out, and I stand by those statements.

Media: Was that the Green Party’s wealth tax, or any wealth tax?

PM: I have no intention of introducing a wealth tax here in this term, and we’re doing no further work on it. Again, I have to be frank here: there has been mischief made here where it does not exist. I accept it may be a slow news day, but we have no policy to report on and there’s no election policy I’m putting forward today for debate. And my statements and positions have not changed—end of story.

John.

Media: Lots of international delegates have been visiting Kyiv. What, if any, plans do you have for yourself or members of Cabinet or Government to go visit Ukraine?

PM: So from my observations, John, many of them are from within Europe, leaders where, for instance, the Prime Minister of Denmark, the UN Secretary-General—very direct, localised impact of that conflict on their region and on their back door. And of course, for obvious reason, the UN Secretary-General has a specific interest, obviously, as well. You know, for us, it’s about making sure that we are connected to what is a very dynamic conflict. It’s about making sure we have the right information to make decisions on New Zealand’s contribution, but it’s also about weighing that against making sure that we are not in any way removing the focus that, rightly, needs to be on the management of the conflict itself and the protection of civilians there.

Media: But are you concerned about upsetting Russia by—

PM: No—not at all. No, for me, actually, it’s about making sure that we’re not drawing Ukraine’s resource away from where they need to be focused. When I spoke to the Prime Minister of Ukraine, he said that he would love to host us in Ukraine, but for us it’s all about the right time to do that. They’re in the middle of a war. I can absolutely understand the imperative of, within Europe, having those neighbours and close allies in close proximity to that conflict within the region, but I’m also cautious about assuming that New Zealand visiting would be a priority for Ukraine right now. I don’t consider it would be.

I imagine that that was based on some statements made by a past politician in this area. I disagree with his position.

Michael, and then Jo.

Media: What is your view of the High Court ruling on MIQ lotteries delivered last week, and do you accept that it infringed on the rights of New Zealanders, as the court ruled, and any further decision on challenging that?

PM: Yeah, so I think what I will say—I’ll just say, keeping in mind that the process is still under way, we still have a declaration that’s yet to be issued. But all the way through, I think it’s fair to say we’ve known and acknowledged that MIQ, and even the systems that we put in place to manage MIQ, were the best of a range of bad options. The moment you’re limiting the ability to come into the country, you are going to have a situation where people are put in terrible scenarios, and we’ve seen countless stories of that and all of them have been heartbreaking and incredibly difficult. And so what I will do is absolutely, again, acknowledge the impact that each of those circumstances has brought for people, but I still want to just make sure that we don’t delve into this space where the court’s still looking to make a declaration. So I imagine we’ll have a bit more to say after we’ve had that declaration issued.

Media: Did you accept that—I mean, could it have been done better, as the court ruled?

PM: Oh look, I accept the court's findings—I mean, ultimately, what they've said is that our reason, our rationale, for having those protections at the border—they've accepted that. But what they've looked at is how that operation, the exemption regime that was operating, and the way that we implemented some extra tools—whether or not they were right. One thing I would acknowledge is that our attempts to make it fairer were found, obviously, by the court to not have improved the system, and I accept that.

Media: Will you apologise to people who had to go through that?

PM: And this is where I just want to make sure that we have the declaration. I do think there will be more to say, but I want to make sure that the court has finished its process.

Media: We're halfway—

PM: Is yours on this, Thomas?

Media: No, no—it's not.

PM: OK. Jo, and then I'll come back round to you—yep.

Media: You had your US Business Summit speech this morning, and you obviously spoke about the Indo-Pacific region and the desire for the US to still be part of the CPTPP. You've also highlighted the fact that you are travelling to the US later this month. How realistic is it that you will have a face to face with President Joe Biden to discuss these issues and the importance of the Indo-Pacific region?

PM: It's not unusual for us to just wait until slightly closer to travel time to release the detail of our programme, and so we'll do that again this time. So there'll be more detail on all of our various engagements a little closer to the time. One thing you will have already heard me say, though, is that is, yes, political engagement has been part of our programmes to date, but it's not necessarily always been the number one priority as part of our reconnecting strategy because that political engagement has continued throughout COVID. What hasn't continued is the face-to-face engagement for our trade delegates in particular, and so that's where we're putting a lot of our emphasis at the moment. But we'll look to release more detail closer to the time.

Media: You also had it seemed a very good rapport with the both Prime Minister Lee and, in Tokyo as well, with Kishida. Have you had any contact with them since you have returned, and are they both on that level now that you can sort of pick up the phone and just send them a quick message?

PM: So I would say for Prime Minister Lee that was already the case and, again, multiple engagements—multiple bilateral engagements—and we have in the past been very quick to pick up the phone to either share information or engage on a practical issue. So that was already the case, I would have said, pre-trip. Certainly, having those face-to-face dialogues helps build that position where you can do that, and I'd like to say we'd be in the position to do that with Prime Minister Kishida, and that takes different forms. If there's the need for translation, you might put a bit more planning around it.

Yeah, Ben, and then I'll come to you.

Media: We're halfway to the date of the next election. Have you got a Cabinet reshuffle pencilled in—are you likely to do a Cabinet reshuffle before the next election?

PM: Yes to the latter; nothing firm to the former. So it's not unusual to, in between the cycle—mid-cycle—to look at your line-up and ensure that, for instance, you're using the talent to the best of your ability. I haven't set a particular date around that.

Media: Is it likely to be, do you know, this year, or closer to the election next year?

PM: Haven't set any, you know, firm dates yet at this stage, but all I'm indicating is that I don't anticipate having exactly the same line-up of the team for an entire three years.

Yeah, I will come to you.

Media: Just one more time for the people at the back: can you categorically rule out that while you're Prime Minister, there will be no wealth tax?

PM: I have answered your question.

Media: I think a few weeks ago, you met with Local Government New Zealand, who expressed concern about that rule that says candidates have to put a street address on their promotional material—particularly, some really don't want to have to put their home address out on their campaigning material. I think you shared their concerns, but are you going to change the law?

PM: Yeah, I do share their concerns. The difference that we have at the moment with the local government regulations and the general election and for elections into Parliament is that often there, of course, you have party political structures, and it means that you're often able to use party HQs and so on, which means that you do have, yes, that transparency but also that layer of protection. Local government has raised with us concerns that oftentimes they are required to use their personal home address for the purposes of campaigning, and I think New Zealanders would think it's not unreasonable to raise that we have evidenced that that has caused some issues for people—safety concerns—and they've asked us to remedy that whilst keeping transparency. So that's what we're going to look to do.

Media: So that means a law change—yeah?

PM: Yeah, so it means that we're looking at whether or not we have the ability to do that before the local government elections, and I think there are ways we can do that while still making sure we have that transparency that people want. So when they see a political ad, they know who it's from, but without having to compromise someone's personal safety.

Media: So you'd change it for local and for national-level—

PM: No. I think the focus at the moment will just be on the particular circumstances of local. There hasn't been the same concerns raised about general, and I think we've got more time, if we need to, to give that full consideration.

Media: The Opportunities Party has raised concerns about that, though, at the national—

PM: Yeah, and look, I think there's more time. So for local government elections, they are looming. We have a limited window in order to be able to deal with the issue, given we would have to give very quick consideration to it. Our preference would be to keep it fairly narrow and deal with their issues presently, rather than expanding out to the general electorate, where it is not quite the same concern.

Media: Just coming back to Thomas' question earlier: with the Cabinet reshuffle, have you had any indication from any of your MPs, whether it be Ministers who are looking to not run again or perhaps are not happy in the portfolios they are in, or any electorate MPs who aren't planning to run—

PM: Even if I did, that wouldn't be something I would discuss publicly.

Media: Prime Minister, in Southland—

PM: Sorry, I think I will come to you. Sorry, was that—oh, it's someone behind a camera. Oh, Isabel, how are you? Sorry. John, if you don't mind, I'll go to Isabel, and then I'll come back to you.

Media: Just quickly: on Mick's earlier question about the potential relaxing of COVID rules for visitors coming in, is there any chance of that happening prior to the ski season? Because, obviously, operators down south are really hoping to get as much as they can out of the ski season because, you know, the summer is a long way away.

PM: Look, from what I've—the feedback I'm receiving, and with already 33,000 people coming in a week, I think it's fair to say that pre-departure testing isn't necessarily presenting

any barrier to people, for instance, coming into Queenstown and enjoying the ski season. We're already hearing anecdotally a lot of people reporting that they're seeing good, strong bookings coming through, and I think Australians are pretty used to going and getting a rapid antigen test, and are willing to do so in order to come and enjoy our ski fields.

Media: And what is your message to Aussies looking who still might be on the fence about booking a ski season?

PM: Look, I read an email just yesterday where someone from Australia said that they had heard New Zealand was reopening and that we'd moved to the top of their bucket list, and our message is that we're a safe place to be. We're easy to come and visit, so why wait? We're open, we're ready, and there's a fantastic ski season looming, so book now—that sounded exactly like an advertisement.

John.

Media: Down in Southland, a protester with Extinction Rebellion was arrested today at a coalmine. What future does coal have in New Zealand—I mean, Labour said it would phase out coal boilers, but there doesn't appear to be a lot more policy specifically targeting coal. What is the future of coal in this country?

PM: So, look, when it comes to the management of protests—and I'd say this regardless of the nature of that protest—it's ultimately up to police to choose how they manage those situations. When it comes to the issue of coal and its place globally, I would say our position in New Zealand, I would hope, is the same as every other nation that we're calling on to make a transition because, ultimately, if we want to keep warming down to 1.5 degrees, we all need to be planning that transition. We're doing that through our own domestic use. You'll know the goals that we have around, for instance, within the State sector, coal-boiler use, the work we're doing with GIDI to support the private sector to phase out the use of fossil fuels and energy production in generation and manufacturing, or, for instance, the work we're doing to try and ensure that in hydrological dry years we're not relying on coal and other alternates so that we can boost our use of renewable energy for our electricity grid. So we are doing our part and we call on all to do the same, and it will mean that we continue to transition away from fossil fuels.

Media: Do you think we'll still have coalmines—will we still have coalmines operating in this country in 10 or 15 years' time?

PM: And this is where, actually, we have to start making plans for a different future. We ourselves are planning to move away from fossil fuel use and we continue to encourage others to do so, which is why we need to work with those regions where there has been traditionally fossil fuel extraction. You'll have seen us do that in New Plymouth, with the Just Transition work. We've got work going on down in Southland, given the uncertainty we've had over Tiwai and the aluminium smelter. This is where we have a responsibility to make sure we're preparing for that future.

All right, I think we'll take the last one here.

Media: It's been three weeks now since the Supreme Court gave the green light to extradite a murder suspect to China: Kyung Yup Kim. Are you planning to move ahead with that extradition?

PM: As I've said before, this has gone through a thorough process. It's gone through our judicial system, who have upheld those decisions that have been taken. So I know that undertakings were made around the likely timing of that, given that the defendant in this case was seeking to pursue another avenue, but, ultimately, nothing from the Government's perspective has changed on this serious criminal matter.

Media: But the Government has won this case. We haven't had any kind of comment. Is the Government pleased that they won this case, or did you—

PM: It's not unusual for us to be cautious around issues that have been before the courts, and we'll continue to be cautious in the commentary that we make around this case.

OK. Thanks, everyone.

conclusion of press conference