

POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 16 MAY 2022**HANSARD TRANSCRIPT**

Hon Grant Robertson: Kia ora koutou katoa. As you know, I'm standing in for the Prime Minister who has COVID and is currently isolating at home. Like many New Zealanders who have had the virus, she's experiencing moderate symptoms and will be taking each day as it comes over the next few days, and, hopefully, will be able to join us remotely later in the week. Through my own communication with her, I can assure you that she's doing OK and has managed to provide some feedback to me throughout the day.

Now, to the week ahead—Budget week. The House will sit as normal on Tuesday and Wednesday. Tomorrow, Minister Little will be in Christchurch to make a pre-Budget announcement around mental health, and I think I'm also doing the pre-Budget photo-op tomorrow as well. Thursday is, of course, Budget day, where we will proceed with the usual Budget lock-ups, my speech in the House, and responses from other party leaders opening up the Budget debate. As indicated by the Deputy Leader of the House last week, an urgency motion will then be moved. On Friday, I will be delivering the first of several post-Budget speeches at a business lunch here in Wellington. Next week—which is a recess—I will also be giving a number of post-Budget speeches, and taking part in a number of post-Budget engagements in different centres around New Zealand. Budget week will see a focus on the economy. Our health-led response to COVID has left us in a strong position to deal with the challenges we face, and build us up to take the opportunities of the future. Our focus is on economic security for all New Zealanders, both today and for generations to come.

Today was a landmark day in the battle against climate change, with the release of the first emissions reduction plan, and the first allocations from the Climate Emergency Response Fund. It was also an important moment for our economic security. Addressing climate change in a long-term, focused manner means a more secure future for households and the economy as a whole. Increasingly, businesses and households are facing the costs of inaction on climate. We're ensuring that the early heavy lifting has been done in partnership with businesses as we deliver reductions needed to meet our targets. These climate investments will take pressure off Kiwis by providing choices and options for tackling climate change, while moving to a high-wage, low-emissions economy that provides greater economic security by creating jobs, upgrading the country to run on more clean energy, supporting nature, and improving infrastructure. Addressing climate change now also means we can bring down the cost of living and reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, and also shield households from the volatility of international price hikes. The Government's actions over the past 4½ years have bent the curve of our emissions trajectory, and this plan will now accelerate our emissions reduction.

Putting on my Minister for Sport and Recreation hat for a moment, I'd also like to talk about the report of the independent inquiry into Cycling New Zealand and athlete wellbeing that is being released today. I want at the outset to acknowledge Olivia Podmore and her family. Olivia's tragic death is what precipitated this latest report, albeit that the specific circumstances of her death are the subject of a coronial inquiry. The report was shared with Olivia Podmore's family ahead of today's release. I want to reiterate my heartfelt condolences and apologies to them, and acknowledge the ongoing hurt that they are having to publicly deal with once again. The report's findings lay bare the need for meaningful change, and I am determined that we will see that, in particular, the need to ensure that sports administrators and High Performance Sport New Zealand are putting the mental health and wellbeing of athletes at the centre of their approach. Mental health and wellbeing are essential to people performing at their best. I strongly believe that you can achieve both wellbeing and high performance—it is not an either/or situation. There is no trade-off. We can, and we must, have both.

There has been positive progress on addressing some of the issues in the high-performance system. But there are some fundamental things that have been raised in this report that need

to be acted on. This includes the role of the centralisation approach on wellbeing—both mental and financial—and the importance of transparency around areas like selection, recruitment, and competitions to reinforce trust that the system is working for athletes. We have had a number of reports in recent years into various sports, where athletes from grassroots to elite level have been let down by the system in one way or another. We must do better, and we must change.

Protecting and enhancing the integrity of our sports systems is a priority for me as Minister. I'll have more to say in the coming weeks on how we will ensure that there independent protection and a level of integrity across the system to ensure that all those involved are safe, competing on a level playing field, and feel included. Happy to take questions.

Media: Minister, the inquiry revealed there is a gender bias within high performance sport and highlighted major shortfalls with regard to the health and wellbeing of female athletes. What measures would you like to see implemented to ensure this imbalance is addressed?

Hon Grant Robertson: I think it is an issue that we need to take seriously, that most of the inquiries that we've had in recent times here in New Zealand, and indeed, the issues that have been raised globally, involve female athletes. We have to make sure that at every stage of our system, the sport that woman are involved—that particularly includes in areas of high performance coaching, high performance management. I'll note that Kereyn Smith, the departing head of the New Zealand Olympic Committee, is to be brought in as a transformation manager within Cycling New Zealand. I'm sure she will be bringing that lens—something as simple and as practical as the fact that there is now a female doctor at the Cambridge training base for Cycling New Zealand is important. But they're just small fixes alongside a much bigger fix for the system that ensures that we recognise the different needs of athletes. I do think, when you look around the world and you look at the likes of Simone Biles or Naomi Osaka, Ash Barty—you know, we're constantly seeing women in high performance being placed under extreme pressure. We do need to ensure that the support systems are there at every level for them.

Media: The report highlights that many high performance athletes currently earn less than the minimum wage. Is this acceptable to you, and, if not, what do you want done about it?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, we've already started to do something about it. So we have provided additional support to high performance athletes. I think the overall amount of money's increased to—the direct financial support's increased from \$6 million to \$10.5 million a year, and we are continuing to look at the best ways of making sure that each sport not only provides that direct financial support but also supports overall financial wellbeing. So absolutely accept that we need to do that. This also relates a little bit to the centralisation approach as well, and different sports have different approaches as to whether they bring athletes together for short periods of time or have them live in, and obviously that has its own financial issues related to it as well. So we need to assess whether that is the appropriate model.

Media: We've had a few reviews like this one. So when is someone finally being held accountable here, and what are you going to do to fix these broken system and failing funding models for athletes?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, the funding model for High Performance Sport New Zealand has been completely overhauled over the last couple of years, and I'm confident that it is now focused on making sure that we support athletes and we support sports to build the structures around those athletes to ensure their wellbeing. So we have, at a structural level, certainly dealt with that.

We have to do better, though, in terms of the direct support for athletes, for their wellbeing. We've increased that investment as well, and out of this report, we'll take a look and see what more that we can do. High Performance Sport New Zealand now has an athlete wellbeing manager, and we're going to be putting those into each of the national sporting organisations. So change is coming, but I am never going to defend some of the things that I've read in that

report. When I look at some of the other sports where we have seen issues, we've seen some progress. But we've also—I think the time has come to look at where we have some success. I look at something like the Black Ferns Sevens programme, where you see a team who have had a tremendous say in their own future, and so making sure that we listen to the athlete voice early is important, and we are in the process of establishing independent athlete voice as well. So there is a lot happening, but I'm not defending what's happened in the past.

Media: We had a few more ram raids overnight as well. So when are we going to get targeted relief to combat these?

Hon Grant Robertson: As I indicated, Cabinet's in the process of finalising that approach now. As we've said, we want to take an approach similar to what we did with the fog canons, to give direct support to make sure that we can support businesses to put in place things that can protect them, whilst at the same time, reaching to the causes of the crimes that have been committed. We'll have more to say about that in the next few days—probably next week, actually, once the Budget's done.

Media: On ram raids last week, Poto Williams said that a paper was going to Cabinet for final sign-off today. Did that happen?

Hon Grant Robertson: Cabinet had discussions about that today. As I indicated last week, there are a number of things to finalise in order to make sure that we can announce a programme that will be able to be enacted quickly, that will be able to deliver to the small-business owners the support and protection that they need. With the Budget on this week, we'll probably make that announcement next week, but work has already been under way, and police and others have already been working with small businesses. What we've been doing is finalising the source of the funding and making sure we can roll the programme out quickly and efficiently.

Media: Do you not think that that's too long for a lot of people to wait? There's a lot of people that are scared that it might happen to them. Can you not give them any indication now as to what's to come?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, the police are already working with small businesses, Jason—that's exactly what they're doing. This is simply about making sure that we finalise the source of the funding. I can say today that that is most likely to be from the Proceeds of Crime Fund. That is exactly what that fund was set up for, and we need to make sure that that we can access that funding as quickly as possible. The work is happening. We'll make the announcement about the details of how that extra funding will be rolled out next week.

Media: But can you give business owners any sort of assurance as to what they could be looking at so they can get ready or have that sort of assurance within the week, because this is happening on a nightly basis now?

Hon Grant Robertson: I'm very aware of that, and police continue to work with those businesses who are affected, continue to provide advice. What we've indicated is that what we'll be providing is similar to what we provided with the fog cannons, so that we will be providing direct support to businesses to be able to protect themselves from ram raids. That could involve a number of different approaches. As I indicated last week, we do have a number of local authorities around New Zealand who, for example, don't allow bollards in the kind of way that might be used here, so we have to work our way through that. Support is currently being provided. New Zealand Police will be there for people if this happens, and we will announce next week the detail of the funding for how we'll provide that.

Media: Thank you. Are you satisfied with New Zealand Rugby's response to the women's report, then, given that there was homophobia, racism, and sexism highlighted in that report but the same management were reinstated—are you happy with that response?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, there's been significant change in the team that's now around the Black Ferns 15-a-side. So we've got people who've come through from the Sevens such as Allan Bunting, experienced coaches in the form of Wayne Smith being on

board, Whitney Hansen being involved—so you've got quite a different structure there and a lot of lessons that have been learnt. You'd need to talk to New Zealand Rugby about the detail. All I can say in the wake of today's report is that I believe our whole sports system needs to do better around athlete wellbeing, listening to athletes, in particular listening to female athletes and building appropriate structures to support them to succeed while their wellbeing is also looked after.

Media: But as a Minister, are you happy with their response?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, I can see that they've changed. Whether or not I'm happy with it will be a result of how it plays out, but there has been significant change there.

Media: On the emissions reduction plan, National says it supports the targets but not the plan itself in totality and called aspects of it corporate welfare. What do you make of those comments?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, I'm sorry to say that once again it's the National Party trying to have their cake and eat it too. It's all very well to say you support actions on emissions, but if it's not these, what is it? With respect to the support that we're providing to business, if they're talking about the GIDI Fund there, the GIDI Fund has been demonstrated to work. It is a fund where businesses have to contribute. I think in the first two rounds, the business contribution was between 25 and 50 percent, and we're looking for it to be around 50 percent going forward from here. But what it has done is bring in private capital and advance work that we need to reduce the emissions from the way we heat our industries. So we believe it's a partnership. We could sit on our hands and hope for ever that the emissions trading scheme on its own could do that work. That's not happening. We have to do better. I'd ask the National Party to front up with what their plan is to actually meet these carbon budgets.

Media: There's also been criticism from the likes of Greenpeace around agriculture, the largest emitter, being largely omitted from this plan. So what you make of that, and what is the plan, then?

Hon Grant Robertson: I think, on agriculture, obviously, through the He Waka Eke Noa programme, we're working together with the industry to make sure we do get a proper emissions reductions plan from them. What we did decide to do with particularly the Climate Emergency Response Fund is include agriculture emissions, because we do want to get on with it. There is tremendous possibility and opportunity with the technologies that are being developed, and so we want to get alongside that. Every sector is expected to pull its weight here, and while agriculture is not part of the ETS, our expectations on that sector remain high.

Media: Why choose to encourage people to buy new private vehicles, even if they're EVs, when you have an overall goal of reducing [*Inaudible*] so much on the day, when there is clearly a lot of appetite for some kind of subsidy for e-bikes?

Hon Grant Robertson: Yeah, look, I mean there's a range of things that we can work through, and how we encourage more people to use e-bikes remains on the table. But we also have to make sure that we deal with the way that most New Zealanders get themselves around at the moment, which is through private vehicles. So there's clearly an important role for moving people into low-emissions vehicles. There's equally a really important role in making sure that we invest in public transport. And you'll see in the announcements today support for the decarbonisation of the public transport fleet, support for making it affordable via paying drivers properly so that it doesn't increase the cost. So we've got to get a balance here, support people into mode shift, but also recognise that private vehicles will continue to be a part of the mix.

Media: But there's absolutely no retail policy for public transport. There's an FPA for bus drivers and there is getting buses to become green, which is I'm sure very important. There's no actual details of any kind of subsidies for public transport users, any kind of subsidies if we want to get into bikes; it's only families who are still going to drive private vehicles. Were

you spooked by the politics of seeming to encourage, I guess, urban lifestyles over people owning private vehicles?

Hon Grant Robertson: No, not at all. It's an important balance to strike between how we shift people into more sustainable forms of transport. That definitely involves encouraging walking and cycling, and you've seen initiatives today that will do that in the mode shift part of the transport emissions plan. It's also about making sure that we get cleaner private vehicles, and it's also about making sure that more people can get on more affordable public transport.

Media: So would you put up this policy in a similar way if you were polling at 10 points higher?

Hon Grant Robertson: This is the emissions reduction plan that we've been working on for months and months. It's backed up by a massive investment—the biggest investment we've ever seen in climate action in New Zealand. Of course people can quiver about individual details of what's prioritised this Budget versus what might be prioritised next Budget, but what we have done today is based on the science of the carbon budgets and a plan that will meet those budgets.

Media: Can I ask, just in a similar line, I mean, in Australia politicians have [*Inaudible*] on climate change for decades—they haven't shown any sort of political courage. What do you consider to be politically courageous in this plan?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, what is in this plan is a shift for every sector in the economy. It means that every sector needs to contribute to reducing emissions. It means in our transport fleet we are decarbonising at every level. It means that our big industries need to make sure that they're not emitting any more. It means that in agriculture we're going to have new technologies available so that farmers are doing their bit. This is an ambitious but achievable plan. I do believe that we are showing courage. Is there more to do on top of what we've announced today? Yes. Are we already doing things building into this? Yes. But today is an important day for showing that we not only have a plan but we've put the best part of \$3 billion alongside it to back that plan.

Media: Are you pleased that Federated Farmers are so in support?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, Federated Farmers and others in the rural sector have been working together with us on He Waka Eke Noa. I want to make sure that the rural sector continue to support us but I also want to make sure that we've got action from them as well. So there's still a bit of work to do on He Waka Eke Noa, but we are getting alongside there today. And one of the announcements I'm really pleased about today is the centre for climate action, because that is going to be a genuine public-private partnership, and it will drive innovations more quickly, which means we can see emissions reduced more quickly.

Media: Have you received any advice on the extension of the half-price public transport fares since that policy was rolled out?

Hon Grant Robertson: We've been getting a continuous stream of information about how that's been utilised. We're also obviously looking at the core of that issue, which is the price of oil, and what that's done in terms of transport options for New Zealanders. And so we get a continuing stream of advice.

Media: And is that advice recommending it? And does that advice—you know, you say the advice is about the cost of living and impact of that. Is that advice looking at the climate change aspect of that as well?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, the two go completely together, don't they, because obviously New Zealanders are currently facing significant increases in their cost of living, their transport cost, caused by that global oil price. At the same time, as we articulated today, the more we can see people on public transport, the better that is for the environment. So I definitely see it as a win-win.

Media: Just as a sort of binary closed question: are officials telling you to extend that policy?

Hon Grant Robertson: I don't believe I can answer that question today directly, but we're continuing to assess the impact of that policy.

Media: Minister, how appropriate is it for New Zealand On Air to direct \$200,000 of public funding to make a documentary about a sitting Green MP? And isn't it only fair that if a documentary is made about a sitting MP from one party, that a documentary would be made about sitting MPs from all other parliamentary parties?

Hon Grant Robertson: I think you'll be aware that decisions taking by NZ On Air are taken independently. And if I were seen to be interfering one way or the other in those decisions, you would be criticising me for that. I would simply note that I'm aware of the decision they've made.

Media: Would you like a documentary crew to follow you around for two years on day-to-day in Parliament?

Hon Grant Robertson: I think my life would be so boring that it would make for a very poor documentary.

Media: Officials are saying that Māori will be empowered by this emissions plan. Can you tell us exactly how Māori can see themselves being empowered?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, the plan at a number of levels gives Māori a voice in the way in which emissions reductions will occur. If we just take one example—in that agriculture area—we do have dedicated funding to make sure that what happens on our whenua, particularly involving those who are involved in Māori agriculture, can contribute to the reductions in emissions but does it in such a way that upholds the tikanga of that work on that whenua. You can see the same thing across the board in the climate programme. We want to do this in partnership not just with Māori but particularly with Māori as well.

Media: Any thoughts on the landslide election victory of Ferdinand Bongbong Marcos Jr as the next President of the Philippines?

Hon Grant Robertson: We obviously have a good relationship with the Philippines as a country. We work with whoever is elected in these countries. We don't comment on or interfere in the democratic process. New Zealand and the Philippines, as countries in the Pacific Rim area, work with each other on a regular basis and will do that, and obviously congratulate them on their election win, but also acknowledge that we don't comment on what happens in other people's elections.

Media: Just going back to ram raids. We've spoken to a family whose business has been hit four times in the last 12 months. What do you have to say them, who tell us they don't have any help whatsoever?

Hon Grant Robertson: Look, it's devastating for business owners when this happens. And we've acknowledged that we need to take action, not only to support them with protection of their business but also to stop this from happening in the first place. Both of those things are happening. We had a significant announcement—a half-billion-dollar announcement—on the support that we're going to be giving in law and order, and that includes support for the victims of crime as well. In terms of their specific circumstances, obviously, I don't know those, but I would encourage them to get in touch with their local police to be able to start the work on what they can do together to protect themselves better.

Media: Just on the emissions reduction plan, and the mention of it empowering Māori. How are you approaching, therefore, the decisions about including plantation pine in the scheme, which iwi groups have protested against?

Hon Grant Robertson: Yeah, it's one of the issues in the forestry sector that we have to work through. There are a variety of different views when it comes to how we best achieve the goals for the forestry sector within the wider emissions reduction plan goals. You would

have seen today announcements about the planting of native forests. And so we want to make sure that we continue to support that. Broader plantation forestry industry and exotic forests, they are still up for debate. We have to listen, we have to make sure that we consider everybody's views, but clearly within the forestry sector, as you'll know, there's always a wide range of views there.

Media: So when is that decision due?

Hon Grant Robertson: I'd have to talk to Minister Nash on that, sorry.

Media: Why did you walk back on Labour's promise of a 100 percent renewable electricity system by 2030? The RP doesn't have a date on that and it calls it just aspirational.

Hon Grant Robertson: Yeah, look, I wouldn't say we walked it back. You'll be well aware that the work that we're doing with Onslow is all about making sure that we can put ourselves in that position to be able to deal with the storage issues that we currently have to deal with on their fossil fuels. We're still working on that. It's still part of our vision to be able to reach that point, but, obviously, as we come to the point of having to put dates on things, you'll hear more about that, once we get the first feedback on the Onslow proposal, or indeed any other proposal that might deal with that.

Media: Minister, with the fuel subsidy and the emissions trading scheme, Government is getting more involved in setting, I guess, the correct prices for things, and so I was just interested in getting your broad thoughts on what the role of Government is in, sort of, setting prices in a world where prices may be increasingly unstable?

Hon Grant Robertson: Yeah, look, at the risk of entering into a deep philosophical debate about how the emissions trading scheme sets the price—because, arguably, that is a market mechanism—but taking a step back, the decision that we made around the fuel excise duty was, obviously, a temporary one and a very specific one, in order to be able to support people. We have not set the price of fuel, and that will be obvious to everybody who's going to the petrol pump, because despite having cut 25 cents a litre off that because of what we're doing with fuel excise duty, the price is variable; that's the nature of it. So I wouldn't say that we are moving more into the area of setting prices. What we've tried to do is support New Zealanders with the cost of living.

Media: Minister, the stockbroker commentator and Milford Asset Management co-founder Brian Gaynor has passed away. Any thoughts on his contribution to society and the business community?

Hon Grant Robertson: Yeah, I'm deeply saddened by Brian's passing. He was a person who I met on a number of occasions and listened to carefully, and I was always impressed with Brian's ability to weigh up the different sides of an argument. He had a unique role, I think, in being a commentator and a writer but also a very active participant through Milford, and he's going to be sorely missed. I read something earlier today about how he had two principles for writing his material, one of which was that he always got his column in on time, lest anyone else take it over, and, secondly, that he never used the words "I" or "me" in his columns.

Media: Has the ERP let the agriculture sector mostly off the hook? Environmental groups have told RNZ it's a massive missed opportunity.

Hon Grant Robertson: No, I don't believe so. I mean, what we've done through the ERP is set a pathway for emissions reductions in the agriculture sector. That's the whole point of the Waka Eke Noa process—is to make sure that we actually do get emissions reductions and we do make sure that the agriculture sector is doing its fair share. As I said in the lock-up earlier today, we could have taken the position that, because they're not part of the ETS, they're not getting any of this revenue back, I think that would have been cutting our nose off to spite our face. We have to get alongside the sector and make sure we do get meaningful emissions reductions. So, no, they are very much part of this. Every sector has to pull their weight.

Media: Just on the cycling—the review, High Performance Sport, you laid out the work that you’re going to do now, but, present tense, are you confident the High Performance Sports system is working as it should?

Hon Grant Robertson: As I said, High Performance Sport has started to make a number of significant changes: increasing the amount of financial support we give to athletes; increasing the support given for the wraparound services around them; some of the changes I mentioned specifically in cycling with the arrival of Kereyn Smith to work as that transition manager; the arrival of a female doctor at Cambridge. So changes are being made as we go, but the point I will reiterate is the system as a whole needs to change. We need to make sure that athlete wellbeing and high performance are not traded off. They do not need to be traded off and we can do better by the athletes in our system.

Media: Mr Robertson, have you seen how high butter and cheese have gotten in some supermarkets over the weekend and should consumers be expecting that to keep rising?

Hon Grant Robertson: Oh, well, unfortunately, you know, the prices of a number of staples in our supermarkets have been rising over recent times. It’s why we’ve made sure that we’ve continued to support low and middle income New Zealanders. One of the issues with products like butter and cheese is that New Zealanders tend to pay the equivalent of an export price because those producers in New Zealand are selling that into a global market, and, as we’ve been discussing a lot over recent times, this is a global phenomenon of inflation and so therefore those food prices are rising all around the world. What we do know is that economists tell us that they expect inflation to peak in the middle of the year, come down from there, but unfortunately we are in a period of time now where there are rising prices and that definitely is hurting people.

Media: Do you think it’s acceptable, then, that the exact same block of cheese that Woolworths sells here sells for exactly half the price in their stores in Australia?

Hon Grant Robertson: It is one of the anomalies of our system. As I said, it’s all to do with the kinds of export prices that people can earn. Over the years some people have suggested intervention in that. That’s been strongly resisted in terms of setting prices, to come to the earlier question, so I’d have to go and have a look if that’s the case in a widespread way, but it is a function of the system. New Zealand earns a lot of money from the exports we sell to the world. It’s one of the reasons we can do the things we do.

Media: So this is an internationally traded commodity where it’s half the price in Australia than it is here.

Hon Grant Robertson: But it brings us back, doesn’t it, Bernard, to the competition in our supermarket sector and the importance of doing much better there, and you’ll be well aware that we are on to that issue. We’ve had the Commerce Commission inquiry. We want to follow through on those recommendations and, ultimately, it’s there that we can start to solve that problem.

Media: Can you give us an insight into the feedback the Prime Minister gave you today on your performance or—

Hon Grant Robertson: Affirming and positive, Ben.

Media: Can I also ask if New Zealand Labour has any MPs or officials in Australia during the election?

Hon Grant Robertson: I know the General Secretary of the Labour Party was in Australia last week and has spent some time there. I’m not aware of any MPs who are there at this point.

Media: The Foreign Minister today tweeted that New Zealand was deeply saddened of Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh. Why did it take six days to issue a statement about this, and does the Government, you know, condemn the killing as the UN Security Council has done so?

Hon Grant Robertson: Look, I couldn't answer for the first part of the question. You'd need to put that to Minister Mahuta. But I join with her in expressing our sadness about that. It's a dreadful situation. She was a very respected journalist going about her work, and we must protect journalists around the world to be able to report on any situation, whatever the conflict or wherever they are.

Media: Has there been conversations with the Israeli embassy or Government—

Hon Grant Robertson: I'm sorry, I couldn't comment on that, Michael. You'd need to put that to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Media: With your hat as Wellington Central MP on, perhaps, what do you make of the decision by Mayor Andy Foster not to light up the Michael Fowler Centre in the colours of the Palestinian flag on advice from MFAT? Is it really the right idea for MFAT to be instructing mayors on how to light their buildings?

Hon Grant Robertson: Oh, well, mayors can entirely make decisions for themselves about what they do with their buildings, so I can't comment on particularly why Mayor Foster made that decision. In terms of the advice that he might or might not have got from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, I'd certainly want to have a look at that. But, absolutely, it's up to him—or him and the council—what they do with their own buildings.

Media: Do you honestly not have an opinion yourself?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, no, it's not my place to have an opinion about a building that's not in the control of the Government.

Media: You don't have an opinion on whether it's appropriate to light a building with the Palestinian flag?

Hon Grant Robertson: It's entirely up to the Mayor of Wellington whether or not he lights that building up.

Media: The work programme for pricing agricultural emissions is called He Waka Eke Noa; the idea is obviously that—you know, the translation's literally, like, we're all in the same boat. How do you think that literally applies to the way that agriculture interacts with our climate system? Agricultural emissions aren't priced; they're subject to a lower emissions reduction target. Other people are now paying to help them reduce their emissions in a way that is, you know, a direct subsidy of our agriculture. And can you articulate in what sense agriculture is in the same boat as everyone else?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, we are, for the first time, sitting down with all of the leaders within the primary sector to reduce emissions, to come up with a clear plan to price emissions, and to make sure that that is reflected in how we work from here on forward. That means we are all in this together in a way that we haven't been in the past. New Zealand needs to do better on its emissions reductions across carbon and methane. We have set out a plan to do that. We could get into a debate about short-lived and long-lived gasses and all of that, if you want, but we do have a plan with specific targets, and we are all in this together to get there.

Media: And obviously the coalition around—with the rise of Groundswell, the coalition of groups around He Waka Eke Noa, there's a certain fragility, I suppose, of the consensus, or if there is any consensus in the agricultural sector about what needs to happen with emissions. Is your decision to allocate so much money to agriculture a sign to the agricultural sector that you would be very displeased with that consensus to fracture and were those sector groups like Fed Farmers to split off and join the Groundswell side of things?

Hon Grant Robertson: The thing that I'm reassured by is that the core primary sector organisations are at the table, and they represent the vast majority of those in our rural communities, and, you know, all of us have seen really good examples of attempts to do emissions reduction, attempts to look after our waterways better. I see groups like Groundswell as the fringe, not the core, and the core groups are continuing to work with us.

I'll take John and then I'll finish.

Media: Just on flu, Minister, it turns out that only 18.1 percent of people are eligible for a free flu vaccine. How satisfied are you with our preparations for the potential upcoming flu season?

Hon Grant Robertson: I'm certainly satisfied with our preparations. You will have heard Dr Bloomfield last week talk about that, and we are putting an extra push this year on making sure that people get out there and get their vaccine. I'd have to look at the numbers that you mention, John, but a number of businesses and organisations offer free flu vaccinations and obviously we've also got the support that we do. So we continue to encourage everybody to get in there and get their flu vaccine alongside making sure they're protected against COVID as well. Thanks, everyone.

conclusion of press conference