

POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 13 JUNE 2022
HANSARD TRANSCRIPT

PM: Good afternoon, everyone. We have a busy week ahead. Tomorrow I'll be welcoming new Samoan Prime Minister Fiame Naomi Mata'afa to Wellington, where we will hold official talks. There is much to discuss. Top of the agenda will be climate change, regional security, and the recovery from COVID-19. On Wednesday I will be in Christchurch opening Te Aratai College, which replaces the former Linwood College and is the largest project in the Christchurch schools rebuild programme. I will also be visiting Lincoln University and then, that night, will attend the world premiere of James Napier Robertson and Paula Whetu Jones' new film, *Whina*, the story of Dame Whina Cooper.

On Thursday, I'm in Auckland where I'll visit the St John Ambulance Communication centre, do a walk-through of the City Rail Link tunnels and speak to the Howard League celebration of assisting 12,000 people to get their driver's licence. On Saturday I'll be in Queenstown to mark the start of the ski season.

Today, I am announcing changes to our Cabinet line-up triggered by two departures. Minister Kris Faafoi has decided to leave Parliament to spend some time with his family, as his youngest son starts school. This was a decision Kris expressed to me at the election. In fact, he had intended to leave 18 months ago but I asked him to give us another year. I'm grateful for the significant work he's undertaken so far this term in resetting our immigration and public broadcasting settings. His contribution as a Minister has been hugely valuable. He goes with the love and thanks of his colleagues for his contribution over many years, and he will be greatly missed, but I know we can never miss him as much as his family already has, and I thank him for the gift of his time.

I'm also announcing that Trevor Mallard will step down as Speaker in mid-August as he prepares to take a diplomatic post in Europe. Trevor has been an MP for 35 years and has held 13 different ministerial portfolios across his career including education, labour, and the Rugby World Cup. He has been Speaker for five years and is currently the grandfather of the House. After the 2020 election, Trevor told me he wanted to transition out of the role of Speaker over the course of this term to allow someone else the opportunity and to take on new challenges himself. He's worked closely with Adrian Rurawhe as Deputy Speaker for that purpose, and we will be nominating Adrian to replace him in this role. We'll have more to say on the diplomatic posting in the coming months once the normal processes are finalised, but it will be befitting of Trevor's skills and interests and will make him the third of our five most recent Speakers to represent New Zealand abroad. Dan Rosewarne and Soraya Peke-Mason will replace Kris and Trevor from the Labour list.

While these are two significant departures, it also provides an opportunity to give newer Ministers greater responsibility and to bring new members on to the team. In this regard, I'm promoting Kiri Allan into the justice portfolio and she also picks up a new associate finance role. Kiri is a very capable Minister, who has performed well in the portfolios given to her so far. She has a big future in front of her, in my view, and this portfolio allocation is a sign of my confidence in her.

Also taking on greater responsibilities will be Michael Wood, who takes on immigration, which fits with his workplace relations portfolio and the Government's focus on skills as part of our immigration reset and COVID economic recovery. Michael is also a very talented Minister. And Willie Jackson now picks up the overall broadcasting portfolio, which he comes to with extensive sector knowledge and experience. I've also made the decision to move Priyanca Radhakrishnan into Cabinet, retaining all her current portfolios and picking up associate workplace relations with a focus on migrant exploitation. Since becoming a Minister outside of Cabinet in 2020, she's overseen the establishment of a new Ministry of Ethnic Communities and worked on complex issues like foreign interference and social cohesion.

Labour whip Kieran McAnulty becomes a Minister outside of Cabinet with a specific focus on regional issues. He will have an associate transport delegation on regional transport and will be the associate local government Minister as well. He also picks up emergency management. He'll also take on the racing portfolio and use his past whip skills as Deputy Leader of the House, freeing up Minister Wood. Duncan Webb replaces Kieran as Labour chief whip, with Barbara Edmonds and Willow-Jean Prime joined as junior whips by Tangi Utikere. There's also our intention to nominate Barbara Edmonds to chair the important select committee that is Finance and Expenditure.

I've also made the decision to change Poto Williams out of her Police portfolio. Poto and I share a view that at this time, it's critical that our focus and time is on supporting the Police, implementing our record investment in the front line, passing our further gun law reforms, and developing additional measures to deal with the current escalation in gang tensions and violence. That focus, currently, has been lost. Poto is a capable Minister and retains my confidence—that's why she is still in Cabinet—but change is required. Poto picks up conservation and disability issues, where there is a significant work programme following the establishment of the new ministry. Poto has a background in the community sector, and was also a member of the parliamentary group championing accessibility legislation.

Chris Hipkins takes over as Minister of Police. He has a degree in criminology and a long interest in working in youth justice issues, which dovetails into his education work. Along with the Minister for Social Development and Employment, he will co-lead a youth justice ministerial team to focus on the drivers of the spike we've seen in some parts of youth offending recently. Minister Hipkins is excited about this new challenge, and I have a high level of confidence he will provide the reset necessary in this portfolio—one where we do have more work to do.

To free him up for this area of Government focus, a significant part of his education portfolio will move to Jan Tinetti, who has played an excellent role as associate education, where she brings decades of experience as a teacher and a school principle. And Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall will pick up the responsibility for our ongoing COVID-19 response. She also picks up research, science, and innovation. Meka Whaitiri picks up food safety from Minister Verrall, and that will fit with her primary sector work. One further change is housing, where I'm bringing in public housing, building, and construction under Megan Woods. This Government has overseen the largest public house build in decades, as well as record numbers of housing consents. But there is more to do, and focusing Megan on this important, ongoing work is one of our focuses.

To conclude—a nod to the future—these changes are an acknowledgment of our two departing colleagues, who I'll have more to say on in time. But they're also a nod to the future. I take the job of balancing new talent with experience really seriously. We are, however, only 18 months into our term. That's why it's my intention at the beginning of 2023 to look to a more comprehensive review of our line-up, with a constant eye to the future. Until then, my thanks to Kris and Trevor, and a warm welcome to Priyanca and Kieran.

Media: Prime Minister, Trevor Mallard has been under immense pressure—how much of that played a part in this decision?

PM: As you can see from the words that I've shared today, back at the time of the election, Speaker Trevor Mallard indicated to me that it was his intention over the course of this term to move someone else into the role. And he's not alone in that—Speakers often, in their second term, have tended to undertake that succession planning and give someone else that opportunity. That was in his thinking in 2020 at the time of the election, and today we've set out his plans to depart in August.

Media: Has it been brought forward, though, by the pressure that he has been under?

PM: No—no. Look, every Speaker in their time in this incredibly difficult and highly political role has at time faced points of pressure or disgruntlement from the Opposition—that is part and parcel of the role. Trevor's had a very hard job exacerbated by some issues that

no other Speaker has faced. That is not the cause of his departure. He determined at the time of the election that this would be the term in which he would depart. For those who have observed him closely, you will have seen him very deliberately moving Adrian Rurawhe into the role.

Media: Prime Minister, is this a minor reshuffle?

PM: Well, it's triggered by two departures, and as you can see, even with just two departures the knock-on effect of reallocating portfolios can give the appearance of quite a bit of movement. But, no, I don't consider this to be an overwhelming reshuffle in the sense that, by and large, you still have many Ministers retaining their portfolios, and that's for the fact that I do think it's important to give consistency and time. Some Ministers have only been in their roles for 18 months; you do want to give a bit of stability and the ability for those Ministers to deliver in their roles, but I have indicated at the beginning of 2023 I will be looking again.

Media: Obviously, with Willie Jackson taking over broadcasting, can we expect a change of direction for TVNZ, RNZ [*Inaudible*] they'll merger?

PM: And here I want to put in my word of thanks to Minister Faafoi. He's done a huge amount of work in the public broadcasting space at a time when we have wanted to see greater investment in public broadcasting. That agenda continues; that agenda has already been set; so what we're looking to is a Minister who's got expertise in the area to continue on with that reform programme.

Media: So what are we expecting—are we expecting any changes or a continuation?

PM: A continuation—and the reason for that is because, of course, Minister Jackson has been a member of the Cabinet that has agreed the proposals that we have put forward, so it will be a continuation.

Media: Do you think Kris Faafoi's heart has been in the job since he flagged last term that he wanted to leave?

PM: Yes, I do. There's been a significant work programme that he has led the charge on. Two areas in particular come to mind: broadcasting reform work—which he has held a particular passion for, given his background in the sector—and his view that more needed to be done to reinforce the importance and bolster public broadcasting in New Zealand. And the second area of work has been the immigration reset. Now, it was a significant piece of work made even more so by the period of our border closures and, also, the need to bring in skills and retain skills in New Zealand. He has done that, so now I think he's able to depart with a sense of closure that those two significant pieces of work, for the most part, have been delivered.

Media: I mean, Kris Faafoi certainly had massive portfolios; he had a lot on his plate—many would argue whether he, you know, was simply burnt out. Do you run the risk of burning out Chris Hipkins by putting another big portfolio on his plate?

PM: No. Not at all. Two things, here, with Minister Hipkins. You'll see here that fundamentally the COVID-19 work has changed. We are now very much in a steady management of that pandemic, but it is not over. Minister Verrall has been the Associate Minister on COVID-19, and has done an exceptional job. She now picks up the totality of that portfolio, which will be a very smooth transition given the work she's already been doing, including on the variant plan. Also, Minister Hipkins has given a significant part of his education delegation to Minister Tinetti: Associate Education, schools operation. So a lot of that day to day decision-making now is sitting with a very experienced educationalist. That frees up Minister Hipkins to take on a new challenge, one that he's had a desire to step into, and where, interestingly, he has some background in.

Media: Prime Minister, why did Poto Williams lose her way on Police?

PM: So as you would've heard me express today, I maintain my confidence in Minister Williams, and she maintains her place in Cabinet. What we have both agreed, though, is that the focus on the portfolio and where it needs to be has been lost in recent times. And yet, Minister Williams has presided over a significant increase in the Police budget of 35 percent, an increase in Police numbers by 15 percent. But our concern has been the need to focus on, particularly, ongoing legislative reform, where it's needed, to support the Police—is not necessarily where the focus is with the current narrative around the portfolio. We need to get back to those basics.

Media: So what you're saying is that Chris Hipkins, who has a better grasp of that legislative change if needed, will be the right person to bring back that focus?

PM: It's fair to say that at the time that the portfolio was allocated to Minister Williams, it was a very different environment for the Police. There was some controversy around some of the proposals around AOS; some concerns around their culture change programme. Minister Williams, at that time in my mind, was the right fit. The focus has changed, and with it, we've changed the ministerial line-up.

Media: It was a surprise to many when Poto Williams was given Police Minister. You put a lot of faith and confidence in her at the time, and people questioned it. Did you get it wrong?

PM: Oh, did they? That's not something I particularly picked up. I stand by the decision that was taken; at the time, the context was very different. And keep in mind, Minister Williams' background is in family and sexual violence. In her career, she had worked closely with the Police in the work that she had done and, so, had good understanding of the operational pressures they face but, also, the need to make sure that, as always, that community support for the Police—at a time as they were taking on some difficult issues—was built, retained, and as I say, grown. That was a tricky time for the Police. There had been the AOS issues, and that hadn't necessarily been managed in a way that was building some community confidence. So that was the context then; the context now is vastly different. That culture-change programme continues to be important, but I have absolute faith in the ability of Minister Hipkins to continue it.

Media: You spent about six minutes at the top, reading through the list of changes. Do you think it was dishonest of your office to describe today's reshuffle as minor?

PM: No, I don't believe it was. But, again, as I just answered prior, we've got two departures. The subsequent knock-on effect of those two departures does mean that you get some consequences each portfolio moves through. But, again, just to highlight, my concern was, of course, that some may have billed this as being a substantive reshuffle of the entire Cabinet. It is not.

Media: Quite substantial.

PM: To be fair, in my mind, reshuffles involve new people coming into Cabinet and people moving on in a reasonable number. We have one person leaving Cabinet and one new Minister, so that's what's I consider to be the relatively minor element of it.

Media: Minister Hipkins is known to particularly love that education portfolio. Did you offer to take it off him completely to unburden him for his new role, or did he ask to retain it?

PM: For me there's always that balance between ensuring that Ministers can see through the completion of sometimes quite significant reform programmes. So you'll know that in the polytech space and in the skills space there's still a bit of bedding in around a significant reform agenda, so keeping his steady hand there is really helpful. But at the same time, some of that work programme around curriculum, NCEA, professional teacher development—that's an area where increasingly Minister Tinetti had been playing a role. So she just expands into that role, and she has excellent experience in that regard.

Media: Did you ever offer to take it off him completely to totally unburden him from that?

PM: Sorry?

Media: Did you ever offer to lift it off his shoulders completely—

PM: I take a very consultative process. I often will have a view. I'll put it to a Minister. We'll talk through what we believe is manageable. If I believe a Minister's taking on too much, I will manage that.

Media: Can you explain the decision to give Kieran McAnulty associate local government—was that to ease some of the pressure on Nanaia Mahuta and maybe to get farmers more on board with the three waters reforms?

PM: Very simple explanation there. Minister Mahuta—it's very important to us that she continues on the three waters work. At the same time, with the borders reopening, we can anticipate that Minister Mahuta will also be travelling more. So really helpful to have someone else in a supporting role. She had no associates in local government. So that is just a very practical way that we can support a Minister who has many draws on her time.

Media: And do you think his rural background will be beneficial for the three waters reforms?

PM: Do I—sorry?

Media: His rural background—do you think that will be beneficial for—

PM: I think, generally, the role that Kieran McAnulty will play as a Minister will be important in our Government because he has a lot to offer. I have a particular intention for him in the transport space to take up a regional focus, and, of course, alongside national emergency management where often you're dealing with infrastructure issues that affect often smaller councils with lower rating bases, I think his mix of portfolios will make a lot of sense.

Media: Prime Minister, could you go through the reasons why you requested Mr Faafoi to stay on? What was going through your mind? Were you concerned that it was just a moment in time or what was your reason?

PM: I felt he still had something to offer, and he did, and he made that contribution over the course of this term. The reason I wanted to point that out was because I'm grateful that when he came to me, he was willing to stay on, because that did represent a sacrifice for him and his family, but he did that because he saw that there was an ongoing role for him to play as an experienced member in our team as we were transitioning into a second term. Kris is an extraordinary person. He brings a really important perspective to our Cabinet. He's a colleague who has built relationships with everyone. He's worked across some really difficult portfolios, but he's always done it with good humour and having built strong relationships. So I'm grateful for the role he's played.

Media: So was that conversation before the last election?

PM: Yeah, it was around the time that he was making the decision around Mana. So you can see that—obviously, moving into the list.

Media: So he was thinking about going. You asked him to stay for a year. He stayed for—

PM: I asked him to stay on, you know, for up to a year, or at least into the term rather than departing at the time of the election.

Media: Does Trevor Mallard have the temperament for a diplomatic posting?

PM: Yes. Look, again, as I've said, the role of Speaker has always been a difficult one. There's not many people who would opt to be the referee for over 100 members of Parliament. It's always been a highly political job and a difficult one, and he particularly has had to manage through five years of, you know, really difficult circumstances. But what's really interesting to also point out is the changes that he's made in Parliament to make it more family-friendly, to give the Opposition more opportunities, and to hold the Government to account. In my mind, he is well placed to take on a further role on behalf of New Zealand, as many other Speakers have done.

Media: One of the reforms that Minister Faafoi wasn't able to get done was hate speech. Are those reforms [*Inaudible*] election promise. Is Kiritapu Allan going to achieve that?

PM: Yes, well, it remains on the agenda, and it remains one of the recommendations, of course, and commitments as part of the royal commission work. But of course, there's also wider community expectations around that piece of work. There will always be some things that aren't seen through to completion, and that'll often be because you do undertaking the really important consultation work that's required for these changes. My hope continues to be that we'll build as much cross-party support for these changes as possible, because we do want to see them have longevity.

Media: So are you softening the ground, though, there with those comments to say that you won't do it unless you get National members' support?

PM: No. No, no. Not at all. But I do think that all the way through, you will have heard me say that I wanted to see, as much as possible, some consensus built around these changes because, actually, the intent and the need for them is—you know, we need consistency. We need to make sure that we don't simply have them implemented and then withdrawn. They're needed by our communities, the royal commission recommended them, it would be beneficial to all of us if we could see cross-party support, but, no, it's not contingent on progression.

Media: Could you explain the reasons to remove building and construction away from Poto Williams, and are there any particular issues in that sector you're worried about?

PM: It's very simple. It's not about the Minister who's held the portfolio; it's about the Minister who's going to hold it. So Megan Woods takes on the portfolio, and it means now that we have the Minister who was in charge of the Crown building programme also in charge of building and construction. One of the observations I've made is that Minister Woods is, of course, day to day, seeing some of the issues within the market around building and construction. This gives her the opportunity to work with those agencies who have those responsibilities to try and troubleshoot those issues.

Media: Because at the moment, there is a GIB crisis, which—

PM: Yes, there is.

Media: —seems to be a problem for lots of—

PM: And it affects our building programme as much as it affects others, so I think Minister Woods is well placed to work on these issues.

Media: Is Paul Eagle doing a disservice to Rongotai and Wellington local government voters in not outlining his intentions to run for the Wellington mayoralty?

PM: I think what I've outlined today is significant enough to comment. I have nothing to say on any other members of the caucus at this time.

Media: Has he spoken to you about his intentions for the Wellington mayoralty?

PM: Again, I have nothing to say currently on Paul or his future at this time.

Media: Given you've called this a "minor reshuffle", how many people are you going to change into Cabinet during your actual reshuffle?

PM: Look, I think probably if I'd come out and said it was major, you'd then say, "It's only two people; why did you call it major?" I think it's probably possible to get slightly too hung up on the language. There's no easy way to describe this; there's one person leaving Cabinet. So do I consider that to be major? No. Some people who have an interest in these portfolios may, though. So I guess that's open for interpretation. Our intention is to try and just keep it relevant to the proportion of what we think is changing.

Media: I suppose if "minor" is two significant people moving on, then a normal-sized reshuffle might be sort of four or five next year?

PM: I don't think you would expect me today to put a quantitative analysis around what different words will mean in relation to numbers of portfolios. I think the reason that I wanted to flag that, though, is because for those who may assume that that's it to election time: that is not my intention. And that is simply what I wanted to flag today.

Media: Have other Ministers signalled to you their intention to retire at the election yet?

PM: Even if they had, that isn't something that I would publicly discuss until it was appropriate for them to announce it.

Media: Opposition parties have run quite conserved campaigns to have Poto Williams removed as Police Minister. Does your decision today mean that they're a success?

PM: No.

Media: Is it disappointing, though, that your decision to give Police to Poto Williams, who is not that hard-line law and order stereotype—is it disappointing that that punt didn't play out?

PM: Again, what we need now in this Police portfolio is not back and forth around political grandstanding and rhetoric. We need to acknowledge where we have issues, and we have gang tensions at the moment that are causing issues. We need to make sure the Police have the tools that they need, and that is why we have the largest number of police officers on record and an increase in their resourcing.

The third thing we need is to make sure that they have all the tools they need, and that's where we've specifically said to them, "What more can we do to support you that will make a difference—not to the politics but to the people?" That's what we've sought in this portfolio, and Minister Williams and I sat down and had a conversation about whether or not we were able to focus on those issues clearly in the current environment, and both agreed that we couldn't, and so we've made these changes. Right. OK. I might finish up with Ben.

Media: This is a bit speculative, but it's the last time we might get to speak to you before Matariki, so I just wondered how you planned on commemorating or what—

PM: No, you'll see me again.

Media: You can answer now if you'd like.

PM: Yeah, yeah, I'll go for it. How I'll plan on—

Media: What personally you'll be doing for that—

PM: Yeah, so I will have an opportunity to say a little bit more on this slightly closer to Matariki week. But currently my intention at this stage is to be a part of some events that are being planned to mark the first Matariki, and they'll be in keeping with the traditions of Matariki—and they will be early in the morning. My hope, though, is that every New Zealander and their family will build their own traditions around Matariki, and this first opportunity and this first celebration is a chance to do that. Of course, many whānau have celebrated Matariki for many, many decades; this is a chance for New Zealand to do that as a nation. Thank you.

Media: Just one more, Prime Minister. Are you ready for the public backlash to Trevor Mallard getting a plum job in Europe?

PM: Well. That would assume you know what that is. Again, a role—

Media: A recent poll shows that many of the country—

PM: Look, we've had five of our most recent Speakers—of our five, we've had now three go on to represent New Zealand in various roles. That is not out of step with what we've seen in the past, and that's because if someone of over three decades experience in Parliament, who've worked across multiple issues, have something to offer New Zealand, and so we're looking to make sure that that is best matched with a placement. I wouldn't make any assumptions about what that is until we can make some final announcements, but I consider it in keeping with what Trevor has to offer New Zealand. Thank you.

conclusion of press conference