

POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 5 SEPTEMBER 2022**HANSARD TRANSCRIPT**

PM: Kia ora koutou katoa. Good afternoon. I'm joined by justice Minister Kiri Allan today to outline the details of the Criminal Proceeds (Recovery) Amendment Bill that the Government is introducing this week to provide the Government new powers to strip gangs of the benefits of their criminal activity. Police Minister Chris Hipkins is also here to take questions; a special birthday treat for him.

Through this week, you'll see the Government continue to step up our efforts to respond to gang and criminal activity, while at the same time investing heavily in new opportunities for young people to break the cycle of crime in our country. Our goal has always been to make our communities safer; and to that end, we have delivered the largest police force in our history, with greater powers to tackle criminal activity.

But we know there is more to do. Some parts of the country have been experiencing gang tension; and Auckland in particular is experiencing a spike in youth offending, including 357 ram-raids across the country this year, with some shops and business owners experiencing multiple events. Of these, we can see police taking direct action: nationally, there've been 225 prosecutions and 94 youth referrals since January.

While it's important to remember that actually, overall, youth crime has been gradually decreasing over the past decade, there is unquestionably a problem right now that we need to keep working hard to fix. To some degree, COVID looks to have exacerbated an existing lack of engagement amongst some of our most vulnerable young people, who have disengaged with school, training, or job opportunities.

To help address that, tomorrow, Minister Hipkins and Minister Sepuloni will launch a package of measures called Better Pathways that will ramp up our investment in young people to create even more opportunities for them to earn or learn. The package will extend the reach of community programmes that results are already showing success in diverting young people from criminal activity, with a particular focus on Auckland.

One existing example of this is the cross-agency support, based in South Auckland. Over the past four months, all children under the age of 14 who were apprehended as a result of a fleeing driver, or ram-raid, or other serious offending in Counties Manukau have been referred to the board—who support them, then, into programmes that steer them away from crime. As a result, three quarters have not reoffended. This is the type of initiative we'll be looking to invest more in, but more on that tomorrow.

One of the reasons we're working hard to break young people's engagement with crime and the criminal justice system is because we know where that cycle leads, and so protecting kids from such a pathway also means making sure we tackle things like organised crime. Half a billion dollars was invested in this year's budget to progress our law and order work. This has allowed an increase in the team's dedication to organised crime work, but they also need the right tools to do their job. Police already have a proven track record in recovering proceeds of crime: with over \$1 billion seized since the legislation around proceeds of crime came into being.

But as gangs get more sophisticated, we must step up our response too, and the Amendment to the Criminal Proceeds (Recovery) Act will give our police greater power to deal with the financing of gangs. But for more detail, I'll now hand over to Minister Allan.

Hon Kiritapu Allan: Tēnā koe. [*Speaks te reo Māori, translation to be inserted*].

New Zealand is fortunate to have a highly effective regime, targeting the ill-gotten gains of organised crime. The intergovernmental Financial Action Task Force has rated New Zealand as one of just five countries with a high level of effectiveness at confiscating the proceeds of crime.

However, the success of the regime has driven leaders of organised crime to seek new ways to evade law enforcement; hiding and disguising their ownership of property by using their associates and friends. Today, I want to outline some planned changes to the Criminal Proceeds (Recovery) Act 2009, which Cabinet has agreed to—continuing the Government's multifaceted approach to target the harm caused by organised crime.

The amendments are designed to restrict gang leaders from hiding their profits—gained from the criminal activities that they do—and perpetuating the misery of others.

Firstly, I want to provide some background on the Act. It is a civil regime, where police investigate and apply to the courts for restraining and forfeiture orders, against property derived from significant criminal activity. The key changes we are proposing include new powers to seize property from people associated from organised criminal groups, who are believed to have obtained the property through criminal means, and who cannot prove it was acquired legally.

The reason for the change is due to the significant number of investigations revealing organised crime leaders are structuring their affairs to hide their property, putting their ill-gotten gains in the name of their associates to avoid them being seized. This change will send a strong message to gang leaders causing significant harm in our communities: you will no longer be able to keep your hands clean while still making a profit. We've ensured that there are appropriate safeguards in place for this change, and these include: defining what constitutes an associate, which will be somebody who is more than just a mere acquaintance; the value of the property that cannot be explained as being worth more than \$30,000; and that the court must decide whether the order is in the interest of justice.

The threshold of \$30,000 is advice that we have received will be BORA-compliant, but we know that police and others may have a different view. We are actively seeking to hear those expressions and views through the select committee process and are approaching that with an open mind about the threshold.

Another key change to the Act is overseas source orders. The amendment will allow authorities to pursue and seize the New Zealand - based assets of criminals, no matter where they are in the world. Currently, criminals are able to avoid the reach of the criminal proceeds regime in some cases if they are overseas and simply refuse to cooperate with the legal process. Those issued with a notice will have two months to prove their property was acquired legally, or risk it being restrained and forfeited.

We are also making a change to eliminate the potential for criminals to harbour illegal funds in their KiwiSaver accounts by making the scheme subject to civil forfeiture orders. Currently, the KiwiSaver Act prohibits funds being withdrawn from the scheme, even when a court is otherwise satisfied that the property should be forfeited.

And, finally, we are fixing a technical gap in the authority of the Official Assignee, the Government body that manages the assets restrained under the Act, to temporarily hold property seized under a warrant. This will allow seized property to be held beyond 28 days where a court is considering an application for a restraining order. To give effect to these changes, the Criminal Proceeds (Recovery) Amendment Bill will be introduced to the House to protect New Zealand's reputation as a safe, secure jurisdiction, highly resistant to efforts to launder illicit funds.

These new tools will add to the significant number of changes this Government has made to target gangs and illegal behaviour, including delivering the largest ever police force, investing \$562 million over four years into the police, and enacting the Firearms Prohibition Orders Legislation Act. Finally, legislation to implement the additional tools for police that Minister Hipkins and I announced in July, focused on tackling gangs and intimidating behaviour, will also be introduced in the coming weeks. Thank you.

PM: Thank you, Minister Allan. We're happy to take questions, and we also, as I say, have the police Minister available.

Media: Handing over property to associates or friends or family is hardly a new problem. Why are you only just acting on this now?

Hon Kiritapu Allan: Yeah, look, the focus on both restraining orders and forfeiture orders has been in the policy development for some time. I think it's fair to say that this is one of the areas which we as a Government have committed to in terms of getting tough on crimes and, indeed, the ill-gotten gains that they have received through criminal activities. It's a technical area of law that's required a significant amount of engagement, and one that we know will go to really addressing the ways in which criminal gangs have structured their affairs.

Media: How many criminals are putting their money into KiwiSaver?

Hon Kiritapu Allan: This one's an interesting one. We've had a range of different cases that have really shown where there has been a loophole that needs to be closed here. So there's a number of cases that have come up through the courts that have highlighted this as an area where you can see that property has been gained illegally and improperly but that no action can be taken to take those funds away, so this is a more technical fix designed to address that.

Media: How many?

Hon Kiritapu Allan: Oh look, I don't have that number with me, but it's certainly a sufficient number that the police, in particular, have asked us to make a fix, and we're happy to oblige.

PM: Of course, you wouldn't want to see—

Media: Minister, in relation to the—

PM: —if I may, sorry, Sean—you wouldn't want to see an area where we have an opening where the police have said they have a concern that it may be used in the future as well. So we've seen, I think, some white-collar examples where KiwiSaver has been used, so this is just making sure that we're tidying that away.

PM: On the wider issue, as well as—I understand, Minister, there aren't many countries who have moved into this space because it is a difficult area of law. You want to make sure that you are defining appropriately associates, capture those who are very openly being used by gangs to hold the proceeds of crime. But we are venturing into this space because we believe that this is an area, now that we've moved on criminal proceeds of crime, that this is the next frontier.

Media: Minister, I'm just trying to clarify the overseas issues.

PM: Yes.

Media: You talk about people being overseas, does this also give you the ability to seize assets in other countries, that if the money's been taken out of here or not?

Hon Kiritapu Allan: No, it's seized assets in New Zealand. So, for example, if you acquire a house with funds that have been obtained illegally or improperly, or where there's a reasonable belief that that is the case, and then you leave or depart New Zealand and then no longer comply with, or no longer engage with, police's efforts to be able to reach that secondary threshold, on the balance of probability, that these items have been obtained illegally. This reverses a presumption on you that, if you are that person that is subject to these inquisitions from the police, you have to show positively that you have not received the property improperly.

Media: Minister, are you able to expand further on that associate definition? There's some concerns around that whānau, for example, who are unaware that perhaps they've received money or an item, and getting caught up in this.

Hon Kiritapu Allan: Yeah, absolutely. And I think this is an area we've really turned our mind to. So there's a couple of parts to this. So the first part is that an associate has to be somebody who is more than a mere acquaintance, so not somebody simply that you pass in crossing, but there is a tangential relationship. Secondly, to that point around whānau, this is

something that we've put a lot of time into thinking about. Often it is families and those loved ones that are the most vulnerable to have to be the people that receive goods that are often obtained illegally or improperly. So there, there's two things that we've done to protect there. One is that the threshold, it's relatively high—and this is the BORA compliant issue that we were discussing prior—to around about \$30,000. If you were to find that you had \$30,000, or property thereof, randomly and unaccounted for, I think that there's probably fair call to be able to say that there's reasonable belief that maybe that this has come from an improperly gained method.

But there is also a threshold that the courts are required to apply as well. There has to be an interests of justice test. This is the third kind of caveat or protection for those family members. So the net is a little wider, but there's three caveats that we've included to ensure that the wrong people aren't being caught, and that the ones that are are those people that are the leaders of these criminal organised groups that are, essentially, conducting these criminal activities but aren't getting their hands dirty in the process.

Media: What is your message to people who are knowingly hiding assets?

Hon Kiritapu Allan: Well, time is up. You no longer have the opportunity to be able to do this anymore.

PM: Ultimately, because this is a new area of law as well, we really will legitimately be looking at the select committee process as a way of continuing to make sure that we've got that balance right. So yes, there are tests there in place to make sure we're targeting the right people, but we do want to lean on experts in the field and those who have practical experience. We also do want to make sure that some of police's views are being heard in that environment too because their views in this space, you know, may lend itself towards different thresholds. Let's have that conversation at select committee.

Media: Would it be better, say, that the police's view is that that threshold of \$30,000 should be lower or who—

PM: Yeah. So yep, there has been a range of views. We've landed on \$30,000. That is something that we're now putting to the select committee, but, as the Minister has said, retain an open mind. But, as you can imagine, yes, there is a view from the police that it would be helpful for them if the threshold was lower.

Media: And where does the \$30,000 threshold come from? The BORA—is there a previous precedent of that or something?

PM: Yes.

Hon Kiritapu Allan: Yeah. In the actual Act, a significant criminal activity is defined, and there's two parts to it. Either, first, that the ill-gotten gains are of the value of \$30,000 or more, or the second tranche is that the activity carries a maximum penalty of five years or above. So that's written—hardwired already into the Act, and that's been carried through as the threshold. What I'll also say there, too, is that if you're thinking about the gangsters that are driving around in the ill-gotten gains—you know, whether those big cars or the Harleys or whatnot—those bikes are expensive; those cars are expensive. They are—I had a little look today—in excess of \$40,000, \$50,000. So you can be assured that those types of, you know, assets that we see plastered on the front page of the paper—those types of assets will be caught by this threshold.

PM: And cumulative, as I understand.

Hon Kiritapu Allan: That's right, and cumulative.

PM: And cumulative.

Media: At this stage, have you got any estimates about how much per annum that you're going to be receiving?

PM: \$25 million.

Media: How much, sorry?

PM: \$25 million.

Media: That's a year, is it?

Hon Kiritapu Allan: That's from these amendments—

PM: From the amendments.

Media: OK.

Hon Kiritapu Allan: —and currently there's about 50 cases that are progressed currently. And they, on average, per case, you acquire about \$1.5 million of property per annum, as well, per case. And there's about 50, plus the addition of \$25 million.

Media: So what do you plan on doing with all this extra money?

PM: That goes into the Proceeds of Crime Fund, and the very explicit purpose of that is we are often using them to reduce reoffending, and into programmes that, for instance, are aimed at breaking the cycle of criminality. So often drug and alcohol addiction treatment programmes; other initiatives that often the police are bringing to us and they do include youth rehabilitation programmes.

Media: What about any, sort of, anti - ram-raid programmes? Is that on the cards?

PM: I think—my recollection is the \$6 million did come from the Proceeds of Crime—

Hon Kiritapu Allan: And the original funds for the fog cannons, as well.

PM: Yeah. Minister Hipkins, on this, anything further that you want to add as well?

Hon Kiritapu Allan: It's your birthday.

PM: I just want to give you an opportunity. Further questions? Anything that people want from the Minister of Police? Yeah, and then I'll come to you, Amelia. Sorry, yes, sorry.

Media: Oh. I'll ask a question of you if that's all right?

PM: Yup. Go ahead. Oh is that different?

Media: Just one last. I just want to get—so this essentially means that you're flipping the onus, right? So you're no longer innocent until proven guilty for some crimes in New Zealand—

Hon Kiritapu Allan: No, not quite.

PM: No.

Media: Not that far?

Hon Kiritapu Allan: No. So the criminal proceeds—the regime introduced into 2009, this is a civil regime so it already has that lower threshold of on the balance of probabilities. What it is looking at is, though there is a positive responsibility or a positive onus on people in certain circumstances that, once the police are satisfied that there is a reasonable belief that the property that they have acquired is through ill-gotten gains, that's when they can apply for the restraining order.

If they want to go to that second phase, that forfeiture of property, that has to be—on the balance of probabilities—that it's likely to be gained from improper means. As well, you have to go to court to prove that threshold. So, no, it's not the complete reversal.

PM: Anything further on this?

Media: Yup. Well, a question for the Minister of Police, seeing he's here, and happy birthday, Minister.

PM: Why do I feel like the follow up question will not be in keeping with the tone that you've just set there, Sean?

Media: Well it will be for the Minister of Police, and I'd hate to miss the opportunity to answer it.

PM: Minister Hipkins? Perhaps we'll then finish for you two on this question.

Media: OK. Minister, what criteria do police use—now that we have confirmation that a memo from Interpol Wellington suggested police decided they did not want an Australian journalist—inverted commas—and his colleague to come here, simply that they didn't want him to come here and went on a phishing expedition. What criteria do police use to make the decision that they don't want someone to come to New Zealand?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Ultimately, that's not a question for police; it's a question for immigration. Obviously, immigration—

Media: Well, immigration tell us it's a question for police.

Hon Chris Hipkins: Immigration work with police, of course, but intelligence gathering at that level of detail isn't something that Ministers would routinely get involved with, and I haven't gotten involved with it, and I don't intend to.

Media: OK. So it's OK for police to decide—we give them a free hand to decide who they want here and who they don't?

Hon Chris Hipkins: No, I certainly don't accept that assertion.

Media: But that's what's happened in this case.

Hon Chris Hipkins: I don't accept that assertion necessarily, either, Sean.

Media: Could you tell us how—

PM: Last one, Sean.

Media: —the investigation into who leaked the memo is going?

Hon Chris Hipkins: I haven't had an update on that.

Media: But that is ongoing?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Again, that's a question for the police.

PM: All right. Thank you. And if that's anything for—great. Thank you; again, happy birthday, Minister Hipkins. Thank you for interrupting your birthday afternoon tea, as well, for us. We'll start down the back.

Media: Prime Minister, does there need to be an independent investigation into Government contracts with Visions of a Helping Hand?

PM: Yeah, so look, I understand that the Minister was part of the interview for the *Sunday* programme and did give an extensive hour-long interview for that programme. And I do believe we'll also be giving you some follow-up response directly to some of the details of that journalistic piece.

Media: So the position hasn't changed? You don't think there needs to be an independent—

PM: Sorry, I'll just then come to—just because the level of detail around the different allegations there, the Minister will be able to respond to some of those in a bit more detail.

Overall, look, our focus continues to have to be, of course, housing people, but doing that safely. I'm aware that the Minister had, some time ago, concerns and some allegations raised around some of the nature of the emergency housing being provided in Rotorua. She immediately, as I understand, followed up with appropriate agencies to gain assurances from the likes of police that clients were being kept safe. I also understand that they are working with—and have been for some time now—working with HUD to make sure that when complaints are raised that there is an appropriate process there—again, so we can make sure that people are being kept safe.

Media: In your view—yes or no—did there need to be an independent investigation?

PM: Well, as I've just said, you have now a QC that's been brought in to look at the complaints process, to make sure that if someone does raise a concern that that's being appropriately followed up on. Also, I believe these issues were referred to the police, and that is what you would expect.

Media: What is the threshold for triggering something like that? The allegations seem well evidenced and pretty serious.

PM: An independent investigation? I can't answer that, Thomas, at this point. So, yes, you're right—some serious allegations have been raised, and when they were raised they referred to the police. But I can't comment beyond that; I just don't have the detail about then what subsequently happened with the police. But, as I understand, that is where you would expect those issues to be followed through, and that is what I understand happened.

Media: There are people—there are clients in emergency housing across the country in vulnerable situations. The complaints process has, you know, been found to be lacking, and it's still relatively recent. I mean, this is not a new problem. There have been several flags and reports, including from police, about the safety of people. What is the Government, outside of Rotorua, doing to actually ensure the safety of these people?

PM: Yeah, well, we do want to make sure that when people raise complaints that they are being looked at appropriately. People should be safe in their housing, particularly when it's provided—

Media: But they're not.

PM: —by the Government. And so—

Media: They're not safe.

PM: —if I may answer your question—and so, as I've said, HUD has brought in a QC to take a look at that process and check that it is operating as we would have an expectation that it should, and as the public would. I can't comment beyond that at the moment because I don't have the details of what they may have found to date.

Media: But what about looking at the basic situation of these contracts being—well, there are no contracts; there's money being handed out to hoteliers and moteliers who have no—

PM: Well, no, there are contracts as well. So it depends whether you're talking about emergency housing special needs grants, where—you're right—someone will individually go and then find their accommodation, versus a contracted motel.

Media: Which is where a huge amount of money is going, through the special needs grants, and there's no contractual obligations on these hoteliers to provide a safe place, and it's been going on for years.

PM: That's exactly—

Media: Is that something that the Government is addressing, that the people are there in the first place in the environment?

PM: Well, Jane, if I may, that's exactly what the initiative in Rotorua was designed to address, where we had a situation where people were coming through the system needing immediate accommodation. The emergency housing special needs grant is just that: a grant to enable someone to find housing to accommodate themselves, and it's designed for short-term stays. What we're seeing, of course, is that there were longer-term stays and that it was resulting in, often, unsafe environments, particularly for people with children. That's where, of course, work was done to try and then make sure that we had accommodation where there was greater control over placement and, therefore, greater control over safety. And here we have examples where, even where security was being provided, there's been concern that that wasn't appropriate. Look, when that's been raised, we have to act on it. I—

Media: There's been action in Rotorua.

PM: And that has been referred to the police. I can't then comment on detail beyond that because, sorry, I just don't have that.

Media: I suppose my point is that it's more fundamental, about a complaints system. It's actually about everything in the lead-up to that, about the situation that people in, and what is the Government doing to actually address what was a very well-intentioned—and no one's arguing that, but what is being done to address the—

PM: And I've just explained that.

Media: —the circumstances outside of Rotorua, because nothing's been done in other parts of the country?

PM: Well, I disagree with that, first of all. Second of all, we saw a particular issue in Rotorua. I mean, let's—I think it's important here to keep in mind some of the context we have, and Rotorua's a really good example. Since 2013, the population there grew by 9,000 people. In that time, we had 1,500 homes consented, and over that period of time we had 44 fewer public houses, until 2017 when we came into office. So, right there you can see there was an immediate gap in meeting the accommodation needs of the people of Rotorua. So, enter into the last five years: we've seen increasing demand for emergency housing. Now, we've worked very hard to build the houses they need. We've had 200 built, another 300 under construction, and we have the infrastructure enabling fund, which is not just public housing but, more generally, housing in general, which will deliver thousands of homes. The question is: what do you do in the meantime? Now, you're right: the emergency housing special needs grant, which the National Party brought in, was designed for small scale and short term; we know it's been neither, while we tackle this housing crisis.

So on Rotorua, what we attempted to do then was actually designate particular areas and say, "These are the areas where all people in emergencies will go into, so that we can make sure that only we can appropriately place people, particularly if they have kids. We can put in wraparound services. We can put in security." Now, we haven't wanted to just carte blanche roll that out across the country without knowing that it has worked, and we do know there are some things we learnt from Rotorua that won't apply everywhere, because, as I've just said, Rotorua has had some particular challenges, we haven't always got it right, but we have not allowed a situation where people, for instance, continue to exist in their cars while we build proper housing for them.

Media: Prime Minister, do you not believe these alleged victims who are speaking up?

PM: Sorry?

Media: Do you not believe these alleged victims—

PM: I don't think there's anything I've said that would lend itself to that assumption. As I've said, I'm told that as soon as the Minister had these concerns raised with her, they were referred to the police, which is appropriate, given the nature of the issues. Secondly, a QC has been brought in to look at the complaints process, to make sure that when such issues are being raised that they are being dealt with appropriately. I think that demonstrates that the issues have been taken very seriously.

Media: Some of these people are highly vulnerable—

PM: They are, and often very—

Media: They live in their cars, they don't have access to computers and phones, and ways to make formal complaints.

PM: And, again, I'm not suggesting here that this is just about that. We've got to make sure that no matter in what form a complaint is raised that it's being dealt with appropriately. And you're right: often we are dealing with people who are coming from extremely complex situations, very difficult situations, and we do have a responsibility to make sure they're being kept safe, and that is why, for instance, the police were involved.

Media: Prime Minister—

PM: If I may, beyond that, I think it would be most helpful if we allow the Minister to also get through to you a time line of some of the things that have occurred since, alongside her hour-long interview with you.

Media: Prime Minister, are you able to give us a bit of a time line around the Government's decision on the next COVID restrictions. Could you tell us when you're receiving advice when Cabinet's going to be making decisions, and then when you will ultimately making an announcement?

PM: Ah, well, I think, rather, I would just say that these issues are under active consideration and we'll be looking to make announcements and final decisions next week.

Media: So, you're—

PM: And that's—I'm going to leave it at that, if I may, Jason.

Media: But this is going through Cabinet next Monday?

PM: I said it's under active consideration, and we'll be getting into details of that next week. Ben. If I may, do you mind if I just pan around a little bit? Ben.

Media: Is the Government any closer to knowing how many New Zealanders are currently in the Ukraine, how many are fighting in Ukraine, and is it even possible to even know those answers?

PM: In short, no, it's not. I mean, we're reliant on two things: firstly, New Zealanders who are in Ukraine registering with SafeTravel. Last week, the update I had was that we had six in total who had registered with SafeTravel. The second—

Media: Fighting, or just in Ukraine?

PM: Sorry, in Ukraine. In Ukraine. Obviously, at any given time, we have a large number, but just for Ukraine. That's an increase on the weeks prior, where I believe we started out with two. The second way we may know, of course, is if someone identifies themselves through, for instance, the NZDF paid leave, but, of course, there's an expectation that no one who is currently enlisted with the New Zealand Defence Force would be travelling into Ukraine, so New Zealand Defence Force are looking at whether or not they've got the appropriate questions when someone is identifying that they're looking to take leave.

Media: Are you aware of anyone that's resigned from the NZDF to travel to Ukraine?

PM: No. No I'm not, no.

Media: Can I just ask on the Jobs and Skills Summit held in Canberra last week. It was a pretty blue-sky exercise. I'm wondering if this Government might have picked up any ideas, and, in particular, whether the increase to the immigration quota might be of concern to New Zealand?

PM: Well, look, it's actually, you know, through the Australia New Zealand Leadership Forum, we have been exchanging ideas, and, you know, I'd like to think that, actually, you see Australia looking over at some of the things that we've been doing as well. This is not to pick up a specific model, but, for instance, we're very proud of things like the Apprenticeship Boost, which we'll be talking about the results of a little bit later this week. We've had a number of initiatives that have, I think, demonstrated that we've worked very hard to keep New Zealanders training and upskilling in the areas where often in these times, including in the GFC, we saw people disengage, and the long-term problems that's created, for instance, for construction. But, you know, one thing that we do know is likely to continue to change for the better is that in a week period in the previous weeks, we saw 800 people, in just over seven days, come in and take up their working holiday visa. So we know we've got over 20,000 of them out there issued, but people have been waiting probably for New Zealand's weather to get a little rosier, and we can see those numbers starting to pick up. So that will make a difference for a number of those sectors that are under pressure.

Media: In terms of that review, will it be Cabinet or will it be the group of COVID Ministers that makes the decision?

PM: Ah, Cabinet.

Media: Have there been any further discussions within Cabinet about a response to the United Nations report on Xinjiang, around possible crimes against humanity there?

PM: Yeah. I mean, here you will have seen that the Minister's already made a statement on behalf of Government, and here we continue, I think, to take a very consistent view. We've always raised our concerns. We've continued to look at ways that we can support industry and so on to be aware of their supply chain issues. For us, the report only reinforces, I think, the position that we've always taken.

Media: The Chinese Ambassador has described the report as being full of lies, with zero evidence to back them up. Do you share that view? Do you have any concerns about what the ambassador is saying? Is that—

PM: No. I mean, in fact, one of the reasons that we've been long supportive of Michelle Bachelet being able to complete the report is because there has been, of course, every other occasion, where it may have been, for instance, journalists releasing reports—it's turned into then a contested response from the likes of China. Having one of our multilateral institutions able to engage I think helps us to continue with the ask of China to engage in these allegations that have been made.

Media: Does that give you concern, though, that that is—even with that higher-level multilateral report investigation, you're having the same response from China, which is to say that this is all lies and not true?

PM: Look, I mean, I guess the issue for us is that we need to continue, as an international community, to be consistent. I think you've seen to date that the international community has been.

Media: Before I ask a bunch of questions, have you had a chance to have a look at the COVID-19 Aotearoa modelling around test-to-release?

PM: Yes, I have, but I'd struggle to recall some of the exact numbers with you.

Media: That's fine. And then just in terms of the sort of the sort of win-win—

PM: I've got the summary versions.

Media: —scenarios that they painted around bringing isolation down to five days but then relying on those two negative RAT tests and therefore you stop infectious people going out but allow people who aren't as infectious as long to go out—

PM: But you end up, I believe, overall, with a longer isolation period, on average—I believe, if I recall correctly.

Media: Slightly shorter, with the 5-day example. Anyway, in terms of that modelling, is that something that you see merit in—is it a discussion, basically?

PM: So one of the things that you'll know that we routinely look at in our assessments is the isolation periods. As I say, these are all under active consideration by Cabinet.

Media: But, I mean, there's shortening isolation periods and then there's exemption lists and all those other things, but this is a very different situation. Test-to-release is a different example to just releasing after a certain day. So are you looking—

PM: They are totally connected, because you either take the option of just releasing after certain days based on the balance of evidence, or you move to a test-to-release policy which means some people might be released at five; some might be released at 10. It's, ultimately, what ends up being the best option for your population base.

Media: It is on the table, then, along with everything else?

PM: As I say, this is all—the question is—yes, we’ve always said that when we review we always look at the periods of isolation.

Media: Australia’s reviewing TikTok and other apps similarly hosted in authoritarian countries. They’re concerned about data harvesting practices. What concerns do you have about TikTok?

PM: Look, I think probably the most important thing I can say is here is I’m not aware of us, the Government, doing any work in this space. Of course we want users to be aware of the way that their data is being used, but we’re not undertaking the kind of work that I understand Australia is.

Media: Are there any plans to look into mitigating these risks, and—

PM: Look, again, as I say, I want all users to be aware of risk, and, of course, that means them understanding the risk that may be presented by using some of these app. But we’re not undertaking any work to, for instance, stop New Zealanders being able to access them.

Media: Could you tell us a little bit more about this Labour caucus event that’s happening at the end of the week—what’s going to be discussed—

PM: It’s just a caucus meeting, Jason.

Media: Yeah, but, I mean, if you could give us an insight about why—I mean, is it a little unusual to have it—

PM: No. We frequently have catch-ups that are longer form than the two hours, just because the meetings that we have midweek only lend themselves to transactional business—just checking what we’re voting on, members’ bills, and so on. So, no, it’s not unusual at all. In fact, the only thing is I think it’s probably a little bit later than we usually do.

Media: So it’s not a time to come together to talk about the Gaurav Sharma—

PM: No, it is not. No. That would be a considerable overstatement.

Media: So your Government has significantly lifted welfare. Do you have any thoughts on getting an independent commission to sort of look at the impacts of that, particularly on your child poverty ambitions?

PM: Well, I mean, ultimately, we do have that independent insight, in the sense that the Government Statistician—who, of course, has that statutory separation, in many ways, from Government—undertakes measurement around the impacts of all of our policies on poverty. We’ve also funded the Chief Statistician to undertake more detailed work around poverty persistence. So I think we’ve already got the tools to do that and, of course, through the child poverty legislation, there’s a requirement on Government to not only continue to report on that but to give a response if the Government of the day is not meeting their child poverty targets, and we’ve worked very hard to try and embed a bit of independence in that child poverty process.

Media: So you don’t have any sort of—a bit of a sense from the sector that you’re still maybe marking your own homework there, sort of without—

PM: Oh no, not at all, because, for instance, you’ve seen examples where we’ve met or succeeded, and others where we’ve been shy of our own targets based on the measures that we have come through the survey data that, in fact, NGOs use themselves for their own scorecards of the Government. So I feel really confident that, actually, that we’ve built a really robust process there which is quite separate from us.

OK, I’m going to start to wrap. Two last ones, back here.

Media: *M. bovis* on three farms—is that raising alarm, and is it going to prompt any more action from the Government? And also Gloriavale—I probably see it’s still before the courts, but more generally, is there anything more agencies like MSD, police—anyone else—WorkSafe needs to do in that space as well?

PM: Yep. So on *M. bovis*, there's—I'll just speak generally, because I can't speak to the specifics of each farm, but certainly Minister O'Connor would be able to speak in a bit more detail. The one general thing I'll share is that this is the season where you would expect that if we do still have *M. bovis*—and remember, of course, this is a 10-year programme for eradication. That this is the season where you would tend to see cases come through if they are going to come through, so, again, whilst it would be for the Minister to comment, I don't think he would necessarily be surprised by that, and nor does it, I believe derail our wider long-term programme.

Media: It wouldn't be an unexpected surge, for example, that might—

PM: No, I would not have—without knowing the specifics, I would not have thought so, given the season that we are in, because, of course, you do see manifestations of *M. bovis* when herd are stressed. And so, no, I would not believe so, but, again, he could give you a bit more detail. On Gloriavale, we've been working hard to make sure agencies are working together—because, of course, you can imagine it's not just WorkSafe but, of course, Oranga Tamariki, police, and others—to make sure that we're really coordinated in our response. We do have obligations here as a Government, and so that's where agencies are quite focused—making sure that they're meeting those expectations, even though there's quite a reliance on a greater degree of access and openness to be able to uphold our obligations.

Media: Do you think there's greater momentum or greater—or should there be greater focus—or is there greater momentum, I suppose, over the last year, with a lot of attention and focus on the practices at Gloriavale—

PM: Yeah, I think there is, and I think there's good reason for that.

Lillian, and then we'll finish with Isabel.

Media: The ACT Party is proposing a policy that would force job seekers with substance abuse issues to go to rehab or get treatment, and would sanction them if they didn't do so. What do you make of that policy? And also, just for my colleague, in regard to the Visions of a Helping Hand emergency hotel, when were you first made aware of those concerns regarding Visions?

PM: Following the reports. But nor would I necessarily—

Media: When was that?

PM: Following the public reporting.

Media: You weren't made aware—

PM: No, but nor would I expect to be made aware, necessarily, of something at that level of operation.

Media: Even if it had been emailed to your office?

PM: Again, as you can imagine, a number of—I receive a huge amount of correspondence. We always make sure that the Minister who has direct responsibility and the ability to respond is the immediate priority.

Media: On the ACT Party also—

PM: Look, ultimately, we already have a sanctions regime—I mean, if people are not engaging with their work obligations that is available to a front-line worker within Work and Income. Of course we have an active labour market policy that, basically, means we want everyone who is able to work to be working, and whatever barriers may exist to that is what we will work on to address.

Media: So you'd commit to not adding any more sanctions?

PM: Well, to date, our view has been we've got a range that are already available to us that we utilise, and we have a range of responses that we utilise to deal with whatever barrier may exist for someone returning to work, and we use those actively.

Media: When you made the promise in 2017 to ban new mines on DOC land, did you underestimate how hard that would be to implement?

PM: No, I think it was—look, we remain of the view that, of course, some, ultimately, when land is part of the conversation estate, we should treat that land very carefully. What we've had is a long-term issue of land that exist in a grey zone, and we are the first Government in a long time who's been willing to address that, so that land that's sitting currently under stewardship land, where it has conversation value, is equally treated with the care and respect it needs, but, where it's not, that we equally make sure that it's properly classified.

Media: So can you commit to fulfilling that promise by the next election?

PM: Well, one of the things that we're looking at the moment, of course, as you know. We've said, "Look, we're finally—where other Governments haven't been willing, we are finally willing to address the issue of stewardship land." So we're getting on with that. At the same time, looking at how we can make sure we still get that no new mines on conversation land policy implemented as well. Thank you.

Media: Thank you.

conclusion of press conference