

POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 31 OCTOBER 2022
HANSARD TRANSCRIPT

PM: Kia ora koutou, and good afternoon. It's a busy recess week ahead. Tomorrow, I'm in Auckland for New Zealand's hui on countering terrorism and violent extremism. This hui is the second of its kind and delivers on one of the recommendations of the royal commission of inquiry into March 15. While we have delivered on many of the recommendations in this report, there are some which will need to be ongoing, including the suggestion that as a Government and as a nation we speak more openly about the threats we face to ensure we are better prepared and more able to respond. This week will be an opportunity to do that.

National security agencies will release tomorrow a draft national security long-term insights briefing, the first of its kind for these agencies. As you'll know, insight briefings are independent of Government and provide an opportunity for agencies to cast forward not just years but decades into the future. The release of this briefing is an opportunity to talk openly about the most significant threats New Zealanders are concerned about for the next decade, as well as the work we are doing to combat or prepare for those risks.

I'll also attend a couple of sessions at the hui before speaking at the Spark Innovation Studio, as they release some important research into digital technology that will help us to meet our climate goals.

On Wednesday, I'll help to launch Kai Commitment, an initiative to reduce food waste supported by the Government and hosted by Fonterra, and I'll also be attending the Business New Zealand annual CEO dinner where I'll be providing an update on the economy and our work to protect New Zealand from gathering international headwinds.

On Thursday, I'm in Tauranga before heading to South Auckland on Friday for our annual Labour Party conference. That runs through until Sunday.

For now, though, I wish to speak to recent events. Last week, two New Zealanders held in Iran were able to safely exit the country. The New Zealand Government and especially our embassy officials in Tehran worked hard over several months to secure their safe exit amid difficult circumstances, and I sincerely thank all those involved for their tireless, especially our embassy staff. Through this period the Government issued strong condemnation of the Iranian Government's treatment of women and girls in the wake of the death of Mahsa Amini's and the subsequent civil society protests that have arisen in Iran and around the world, including in New Zealand. Our actions included calling in the Iranian Ambassador. It was important we uphold our firm position on human rights while also working to secure the safe passage of the two New Zealanders out of Iran—a balancing act, given what we know about the different experiences of other countries who have had nationals imprisoned for significant periods of time.

The Government has maintained a consistent and long-term position on the lack of human rights situation in Iran. In 2021, we took a stand in the UN Human Rights Committee 46th session, where we urged Iran to take further action to protect and uphold the rights of women, girls, and the LGBTI community. In 2022, we went further, to condemn the damaging consequences of Iran's law on young people and urged the repeal of laws that violate the rights of women and girls. Every year, we support a resolution on the situation of human rights in Iran in the UN Third Committee, which outlines a wide range of areas of concern and calls for action.

We're also one of the few countries in the world which has a human rights dialogue with Iran. Through direct engagement, we've held on to the hope of achieving change, but the death of Mahsa Amini rightly stirred an awakening for many and reason to review this approach. What we have witnessed in recent months is Iran moving backwards on human rights from when we established the dialogue in 2018. Human rights groups estimate hundreds of Iranians have been killed in violent crackdowns on the protest movement, with thousands injured and arrested.

We have always believed in dialogue and diplomacy as key tools, but we also believe in sending clear messages on behalf of those who are less able to. So on that basis, New Zealand will now suspend indefinitely our human rights dialogue with Iran. We don't see the utility of holding talks that aren't accompanied by progress, and, worse, provide a legitimacy to them that their actions don't warrant.

On that basis, we are also calling on United Nations member States to remove Iran from the UN Commission on the Status of Women. It is not sustainable for a country that continues to so brutally attack the rights of women to belong to a pre-eminent global body dedicated to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. As a member State, it is our duty to add our voice to this call and to uphold the mandate and values of the commission. We have requested advice on further actions the New Zealand Government can take to amplify our condemnation of Iran's human rights abuses and demonstrate our support to all those in Iran, especially women and girls standing up for democracy and human rights at very significant risk to their lives.

We'll now take questions. Yeah, Jenna.

Media: The couple that were in Iran—it's been said that the Government didn't make any deal to get them out of there. Was there any private money given over to the Iranian regime?

PM: Speaking from the Government's perspective, we upheld the same principles that we would under these circumstances. We use dialogue and diplomacy. The Minister was directly engaged, MFAT was directly engaged, but we strictly kept to dialogue and diplomacy. We have seen through other examples internationally where we've had situations where foreign nationals have been in extraordinarily difficult circumstances. It is, I think, a tribute to the actions of MFAT that these two New Zealanders were able to exit Iran under very difficult circumstances and times.

Media: How significant is you adding your name—you're the only world leader to add your name to that letter calling for the removal of Iran from the UN women's body.

PM: And here you can see me reiterating again today two things: firstly, an end indefinitely to the dialogue between New Zealand and Iran on human rights, to send a clear message that not only have we not seen progress as a result of that dialogue but we have seen a retreat, a regression, in the rights of women and girls—and we're taking a very clear stand on that. Secondly, we are calling for Iran to be removed from the UN Commission on the Status of Women, because how can we argue for a member State that has taken such a counter-position on the rights of women and girls to be a member of that commission, which scrutinises other countries' positions on the rights of those same groups? It is unsustainable and, in our minds, untenable.

Yeah, I'll pan around to you, Jane.

Media: You described it as balancing act when the couple were still in Iran. Are you now freed to make these acts and responses where you were not last week before they were allowed to leave?

PM: My short answer is yes; my longer answer is it did not stop us from taking a very clear position. So I will push back on any suggestion that we did not condemn Iran—we did. We took a very clear view on what was happening to the status of women and girls. We took a very clear stand on what happened to Mahsa Amini, but this now allows us to take further action, and that is only right, particularly given we have seen the protest action and the curtailing of the right of people to express their views peacefully and democratically being fiercely shut down.

Media: Has New Zealand's position on the world stage been compromised because of it and because of the time—

PM: No.

Media: —that you argue is necessary before making these moves?

PM: New Zealand—all the way through, regardless of the experience that we were having behind the scenes with two of our New Zealand nationals, New Zealand maintained a totally consistent position with other international comparisons and with other countries. You'd be very hard pressed to find a difference in the positions that we took, so, again, I fiercely defend the fact that New Zealand managed to take a strong position on Iran whilst also working very hard to ensure that two New Zealanders in a very difficult situation could leave. It is clear, however, though, we are now in an improved position to be able to continue to ramp up our response.

Mark, and then I'll come to you, Jason.

Media: New Zealand has a seat on the UN Economic and Social Council, which determines the membership of that UN [*Inaudible*] group. Will New Zealand introduce a resolution for Iran to be removed?

PM: The starting point will be engagement with the UN Secretary-General. Then, more broadly, I think it will be key to gather momentum and support from as wide a range a group of UN members as possible, and, of course, then you would look to instigate the specific process required. But I think building a broad base of support, as with any movement or resolution in the UN, will be key.

Media: Prime Minister, this dialogue group that you're talking about—you said it was established in 2018. So far it's had one meeting last year and it was supposed to have another meeting in a few weeks' time. Basically, today, you're saying that this meeting has been canned. This is a pretty limp response to something that's pretty significant happening in Iran, isn't it? You're just, essentially, saying no more meetings.

PM: No, I disagree with that. We're one of few countries that has a human rights dialogue, and dialogues such as that are often valued, of course, by those countries from which you engage. Again, here we're taking a very strong view that despite having only established this in 2018, we're of a view that it should not continue. We are indefinitely suspending it, and we are also taking a firm position—as has been pointed out by one of your colleagues, we are one of only, I believe, two countries with politicians who have signed on to a view that they should also be removed from the UN Commission on the Status of Women. We have also sought further advice from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade as to what additional action can be taken. Keep in mind New Zealand already has sanctions against Iran which have been in for a number of years, and this is about what additional steps we can take, alongside our strong condemnation.

Media: Well, why didn't you put in place those additional steps today, rather—or in addition to this, and go further than you have?

PM: Sorry, can you just clarify what—

Media: Any additional sanctions?

PM: We have sought from MFAT further advice on what additional steps can be taken, and while we await that advice we've already taken these moves on the dialogue on the position on the Commission on the Status of Women.

Media: But would it be your perspective that you would like to see more sanctions—your position as the Prime Minister? Would you like to see more sanctions on Iran because of what's been happening domestically?

PM: We already have them in place. For me, it's always about what is actually going to make a meaningful difference to the lives of those who are affected by this regime.

Minister Mahuta, anything that you want to add generally on the further measures?

Hon Nanaia Mahuta: Yeah, in relation to travel bans and export controls in the sanctions regime we currently have access to, we do take decisions based on UN actions, and that's what the Prime Minister is referring to. The other thing in terms of the nature of our engagement in Iran, we have a relationship that dates back to 47 years in terms of our

presence and having an embassy in Tehran. That enables us now at this moment, under the current difficult situation, to continue to advocate for those 19 New Zealanders registered on SafeTravel, should they need our support. So the consular services are an important element of retaining our footprint in Tehran.

Media: Would you need to change the law to expand sanctions further for Iran specifically and with these circumstances, as opposed to anything to do with Ukraine?

Hon Nanaia Mahuta: Yeah, I think in relation to questions that we have been asked in terms of Iran's broader participation in other aspects around the world, I'm certainly seeking advice on that, and whether or not the Russian Sanctions Act can be used for that particular purpose.

PM: Because we've got two legal bases on which to implement sanctions, as you know: when the Security Council in the UN mandates them—and that's the basis on which we've had sanctions on Iran in place since 2016, I believe—and the second mechanism, of course, is the current bespoke regime we have around the war in Ukraine. There of course has been some suggestion around the contribution, potentially, of Iran to that war, so we're looking to seek advice on that.

Media: It's a pretty long bow, though, to then connect it to civil unrest and the treatment of protest, isn't it, under that legislation? So, presumably, you'd have to push out—

PM: If it were to be specific on that, you would need, therefore, but, however, keep in mind we already have a regime which includes travel bans, asset freezes, and so on, which has been in place for a number of years.

Benedict.

Media: Is the Government giving any thought to declaring Iran's Revolutionary Guard a terrorist entity?

PM: Two things that I think is useful just for context on the status of Iran's Revolutionary Guard: currently those countries who have declared them to be a terrorist organisation are the United States, which was put in place under Donald Trump; Canada, but they have narrowly defined it so it doesn't apply generally but more to the international operation of the Iranian Guard; Bahrain; Saudi; and Israel. So it is a relatively limited number of countries who have taken that step. We have not yet ruled out future action, but I would just give the context that it is not something that has been widely used by other countries in these circumstances.

Media: That's not something you're getting advice on at the moment? That's not one of those things you're—

PM: We're getting a broad range of advice. We've asked very generally for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, so I don't want to rule anything in or out at this stage.

Yeah, Jenna and then Ben.

Media: What do you say to the criticism that New Zealand has defined the Proud Boys as a terrorist organisation, but won't define—

PM: I just refer back to the answer I've just given. We have a very specific process we go through for the designation of an organisation as a terrorist entity, so it's not simply a political decision; it is a decision that goes through a proper, full process. Very few countries have done that with the Revolutionary Guard. I'm not ruling it in or out, but, actually, I do want to make sure that we use the same rigour that we have, for instance, for the designation of the Proud Boys.

Media: So the New Zealand Government opted to use the so-called quiet diplomacy in this case to try and secure their—

PM: Yep.

Media: —release. Can I just get a feeling from you on the decision-making process around that: was it with the support of the couple, and what evidence you were relying upon that that type of diplomacy actually works?

Hon Nanaia Mahuta: Well, in this case it did work—they are out; they are safe. And we make determinations on a case by case basis as best we can, understanding the detail of the matters—of which we can't disclose in public—but as we make that assessment and our ability to use the influence of our diplomacy, we will always try and use diplomacy and dialogue first, as our first port of call. I have to say and commend the ministry officials who've worked really hard to ensure a positive outcome in this regard.

Media: So why did you decide that public reporting of the case was not in their interest, and can you also reveal the timeline as to when they were released and when the public deploy took place?

Hon Nanaia Mahuta: It's not common practice for the private details of consular cases to be put in the public domain as we're working through these issues, and that's been a long-held convention.

PM: In terms of the decision making around what approach to take, for us what was really important was to understand what has occurred in other examples, and there are other examples of foreign nationals who have either been detained or have been unable to leave the country. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade reached out to those who have had that experience and sought from them the most effective strategies that were used in successful and unsuccessful cases in order to determine what the best approach would be for us here.

Media: Regarding this case, you actually reached out to previous—

PM: We did—we did. So we actively sought out the experience of others to determine the approach that we would take, and the universal view was that we would have a greater likelihood of a quicker resolution and a more successful resolution if we were able to conduct that diplomacy directly with Iranian officials without the public scrutiny around it, which could jeopardise their release. That was a very clear view.

Hon Nanaia Mahuta: And that outcome speaks to our presence in Tehran. As I say, we've had an embassy there for 47 years, it's a longstanding relationship, and, when needed, we're able to use our influence in ways that many other countries aren't able to. Again, if I point to another example as to why having a presence there has made a difference, it's in the support and relocation of visa holders from Afghanistan to be returned to New Zealand. That is another example of what we're able to achieve through diplomatic channels.

PM: An incredibly difficult set of circumstances, where one of the benefits of having diplomatic representation and diplomatic relations in Iran has been to facilitate refugees from Afghanistan, including women and girls, and yet that is the situation and circumstance that we find ourselves in. That is where having that presence has materially made a difference in our ability to support the exit of high-profile individuals from Afghanistan who were at threat as a result of the changing regime.

We'll just—we'll stick on the theme, then, if we may. Bernard, is that yours on—yep, go ahead.

Media: Yeah, so just on the further measures you've asked for advice on, do they include measures that might affect trade—so any sort of trade sanctions?

PM: We've asked very generally. Minister?

Hon Nanaia Mahuta: As the Prime Minister has said, we have sought broad advice on a range of measures that can be considered as we take decisions around our next steps.

Media: But you haven't ruled out trade?

Hon Nanaia Mahuta: As the Prime Minister has said, we've ruled nothing in or out; we are awaiting that advice.

PM: Yep.

Media: When do you expect to hear back on that advice, roughly?

Hon Nanaia Mahuta: In the coming weeks, I would say, and—an optimistic view—I would hope within at least the next 10 days. This is something that we've reflected on as a necessary next step in our stance but also in the way in which we address issues in line with multilateral like-minded people that we have been involved in other this period of time.

PM: If in the meantime we identify moves that we can make in the meantime, as we have done today, then that's action that we can potentially take in the meantime. But some of the advice does require quite a bit of analysis and work.

Media: And if the advice is to pass new legislation to sanction Iran, will you do that?

PM: Again, here I don't want to pre-empt any advice, but, you know, suffice to say that once it's received and we've had a chance to consider it, we'll talk about the decisions that have been made and the things that we have weighed up along the way.

Media: Three mayors from Auckland—

PM: Do you mind if I just—Jane, I can see where the segue is coming. Would you mind if I just canvass around on this topic for a little more. Thomas?

Media: Just on the use of the Russian sanctions legislation—

PM: Keeping in mind that that's not—I'm not suggesting here as a mechanism to deal with, but there is separately the question of whether or not there is direct assistance around the war in Ukraine being offered by Iran.

Media: Yes. But just on that, I think that that legislation has already been used to target people from Belarus in the past—

PM: Correct.

Media: —so what is the test there for the threshold of assistance in the war, or the proof of assistance in the war, to trigger the legislation?

PM: And that in itself is the question—it's around the proof point of it.

Hon Nanaia Mahuta: That's right, and that will be part of the advice because the legislative threshold in the Russian sanctions—that is the threshold. And while some surmise it could be easily applied in many instances, we have to assure ourselves as we make decisions going forward that that legal threshold can be met. It's section 10 of the Act, at my recollection.

Media: And I suppose the challenge, I guess, is that for many countries supporting the war, their support will be in the form that Iran's support appears to be, which is a shady form of support where it would be difficult to prove, in some cases. Does that compromise the effectiveness of the legislation and the sanctioning of regimes if it is so difficult to prove?

PM: It's definitely demonstrated it can be very effectively used—on the question of the invader, we've demonstrated that it can be used, obviously, in the case of Belarus. So where you have that subsequent support—

Hon Nanaia Mahuta: But I don't want to get ahead of ourselves. As we've indicated, we're seeking advice. It's a broad range of advice on next steps that we can take on these issues that are directly impacting on people in Iran, especially women and girls, but also perhaps broader considerations that may be taken into account.

Media: And back on to Iran and the current protesters, is this current situation feeding into your calculus around a potential autonomous sanctions regime for New Zealand?

Hon Nanaia Mahuta: Oh look, we'll consider that in light of a number of things. As I say, we are getting advice on next steps, and that may well be a consideration—we've not ruled things in or out. The most important thing, though, is that we signal that we are standing alongside our multilateral partners in taking action on the direct issues that are impacting on the Iranian people as well as women and girls. We've already messaged out that we're seeking an independent investigation that is prompt, and we have supported the call for a special rapporteur to go and assess measures there in Iran.

PM: Yeah, Jo.

Media: Just on the advice that you're getting, can I just clarify: have you given MFAT a bunch of options to consider, or is MFAT very much casting the net itself to see what could or couldn't be on the table?

PM: Oh, a bit of both—

Hon Nanaia Mahuta: Hmm, hmm.

PM: —yeah, a bit of both. Yeah, because we don't want to be too narrowly—we don't want to be too prescriptive. There will often be measures or tools that we may not have considered. So there are questions that we've put that we want to be covered off in the advice, but it's not an exclusive list.

Media: And in terms of sort of what that list is, is there also an element of MFAT reaching out to other countries to see what they are doing, and would we be looking to want to do things in line with other countries or very much run our own independent policy in this area?

PM: We'd look at both.

Hon Nanaia Mahuta: Yes, at both, and New Zealand takes a stance on matters such as this to join multilateral efforts.

Media: So it could be that we come up with something, for example, and reach out to other countries and say, "Would you join"—

PM: Absolutely. Look, at this stage there are a limited number of countries who are calling for, for instance, the removal of Iran from the UN Commission on the Status of Women. So whilst we're one of the few who have suggested that, we will be looking to build broad-based support for that because, obviously, it's a multilateral forum. It will be much more successful if we're able to do that, and, in fact, it relies on it. It doesn't stop us, of course, then from looking at what are New Zealand's distinct measures it can take too.

Media: Are there any other obvious forums, organisations, dialogues—whatever you want to call them—that could end up being a solution here as well, or something that you would go to other countries to ask if we remove or take ourselves out of that conversation?

PM: Two very obvious ones for us today; we'll look to come back when we look at a wider suite of measures to reflect on some of the other options.

Jenna.

Media: Will either of you attend any of the local protests in person?

Hon Nanaia Mahuta: I haven't.

PM: Look, I haven't to date, but that's been for no other reason than in this role, I haven't tended to engage in protest activity as much in this role. I see my job more of being very clear on New Zealand's position, and often that will be in line with what many of the protests are focused on. But I haven't tended to participate in protests.

Hon Nanaia Mahuta: And I haven't either, and neither have I stopped any of our members of Parliament from participating, because these are heartfelt issues that they want to ensure are signalled to the Iranian community, women and girls, that they are listening and they are mindful of the issues that are being faced over in Iran.

Media: And just while you're both still here, on three waters—

PM: Oh yes, if I may, if we're moving, I need to be fair. Jane sought that segue a little bit earlier, so we'll come to you, Jane, and then back to you, Jenna.

Media: Would you consider—and this is for both of you—the proposal that these mayors have put forward, given it might address those issues of ownership and influence that are at the crux of a lot of the opposition?

Hon Nanaia Mahuta: Well, a couple of things. Firstly, both new mayors—incoming mayors—of Auckland and Christchurch have recognised that the status quo is untenable, and they're both also worried, as we are, about the ongoing challenges for ratepayers and the potential for increased rates, certainly during this time where there are extenuous cost of living challenges of many kinds. I'm really pleased that they've signalled an opportunity to commence a dialogue, and we'll consider, certainly, matters that they have raised. Some of the areas we've traversed already, but the most important thing is that the dialogue on this particular challenge remains open, and, as I say, I've met with Mayor Brown. He didn't foreshadow those particular issues when I met with him, but he did foreshadow that we need to remain engaged on this pretty challenging issue.

Media: But these have been consistent lines of opposition, the perceived or otherwise, the lack of ownership, the lack of influence—that there's something that would credibly be on the table as you'd like try to find a way through significant opposition to this policy.

PM: Well, we've said—look, we're at a juncture now where we've been receiving public feedback, and of course we've said we're open to making refinements and changes that improve the reforms here that are just so necessary. But our bottom line is we don't want to change those matters which are focused on keeping cost of living in check. Without reform, ratepayers will see increases in their water bills. We don't want to change the fundamentals of these reforms that are designed to make sure we don't see exponential increases.

Media: Does that come back to having the assets split from the balance sheets of the councils—

PM: Correct—that is key.

Media: So that would not meet that threshold in this proposal?

PM: But look, I don't want to shut down what is, I think, in good faith an offer here for us to keep working together, because I think the mayors—they do have a focus on making sure that their ratepayers don't experience that spike in cost of living. We've got the same focus, so let's see how we can keep working together.

Media: But, to be fair, this proposal wouldn't meet some of the fundamental bottom lines in the three-waters policy—

PM: I think we'd both rather not traverse a negotiation in this manner, but actually talk directly. But so long as at its heart we're all focused on making sure ratepayers don't experience those large projected increases, then we have common ground.

Hon Nanaia Mahuta: In our conversation, Mayor Brown was mindful—because I did map out the legislative timetable—that the select committee continues to make its determinations based on the public submission process, and I urged him to think about, you know, how the select committee are responding to many of the issues that the councils have raised, and let's wait and see what recommendations they come back with also.

Media: But how flexible and willing would you be to move away from the stated and specific model that's making its way through Parliament at the moment?

PM: Yeah, again, as I've said, we are open to making changes that improve the proposals, but we say that with a complete and utter focus on making sure that those changes don't undermine the fundamental principle, which is making sure we don't see an increase in costs for ratepayers beyond what is currently projected, which for many areas is dire.

Media: But Prime Minister, you just said that balance sheet separation—

PM: As a fundamental part of keeping costs down.

Media: But the proposal today is to not have the balance sheet separation, but to have a co-investment fund which would address the cost of living issues—

PM: Bernard, they've made a range of suggestions, and I think, again, they've made them in good faith. They'd rather us just have conversations with the mayors directly rather than traversing it here.

Media: But you haven't, in fact, ruled out their proposals by saying that there has to be balance sheet separation?

PM: I've said that those things which ensure we're able to keep in check what are proposed to be significant cost escalations for ratepayers need to be a focus for us as a Government and, I would hope, the councils, and from everything I've heard so far, that is a shared priority. But look, again, we have been open to those refinements, but we are going to keep that at the heart of what we're doing.

Media: Can you guarantee that the three-waters legislation will pass its third reading before the election?

PM: Well, of course, we're in trajectory for—there are a range of different bills, but, of course we are on a trajectory for that, and, again, I'd say here it would feel irresponsible to me if we stood by as a Government, knowing what we know about what is coming for ratepayers, and not do anything. I don't think in good conscience we can do that. That doesn't mean we can't continue to make changes and refinements to improve the proposals.

Media: Yeah, you say you're on the trajectory for it, but given Labour's majority, I mean you control the Order Paper and what gets through when. So can you give an ironclad guarantee that that will happen?

PM: Well, if that's what the scheduling allows us to do, yes.

Hon Nanaia Mahuta: Can I just make a comment, which is that the important juncture that we're at is the select committee. So the select committee is, in good faith, listening to the range of views coming through the submission process. They have not yet finished their task. We have already officiated, as a Government, where there are improvements to the legislation to improve the workability of the legislation and be responsive in key areas that don't upset the overall balance of objectives for water reform. We're very open to receiving those recommendations, and we look forward to their report.

Media: Some of the submissions to the select committee have proposed pretty fundamental changes to the legislation, like perhaps increasing the number of water entities that you'll form. Are you open-minded to altering the legislation to do something like increasing the number of water entities? Is that—are you able to be that open-minded?

Hon Nanaia Mahuta: This, in part, comes to the question around balance sheet separation and getting economies of scale well pitched in order to achieve that. Perhaps I'll just round off on finishing the response in relation to that, because a co-investment fund would assume that both the Government and ratepayers would be responsible for funding that solution, and, again, while we can't go into the detail, because that would require another conversation with those particular councils, that would have to be a fundamental consideration about whether or not it would actually achieve balance sheet separation to have a financially sustainable way to invest in infrastructure.

Media: So, likewise, no change to the number of entities that—you think that's just [*Inaudible*]

PM: Again, we've said in good faith that we want the select committee process to finish and that we're open to refinements, but it's hard making sure that we don't see significant cost escalation. Let's let the select committee finish its process.

The one thing I would just, perhaps—I saw that the news made some reference to the fact that a 7 percent increase in Auckland's water and waste-water services was a theoretical scenario. Just to clarify: Watercare have already issued those proposed increases. So, according to Watercare, it is not theoretical that ratepayers are facing those increases.

Media: Is co-governance [*Inaudible*]

PM: Well, I think one of the issues is that, actually, for Local Government New Zealand, and even when we've set up the group of those councils who had concerns to go away and make proposals to improve the water reforms, that was not a suggested change they came back with. So I think it's just probably worth making that point.

Media: Prime Minister, just a couple of questions about COVID. With COVID cases increasing, are you going to consider making masks mandatory on public transport again?

PM: No, it was not so long ago that we made the decisions around public transport. Our public health officials continue to encourage the use of masks on things like buses, but, again, I'd just acknowledge when we made those decisions around our health measures, we did so knowing that there would likely be an increase in cases prior to Christmas, and that is what we're experiencing. The most important thing we can continue to do though, of course, is make sure we isolate people with COVID.

Media: Michael Baker is asking for the Government to better communicate COVID risks to the public and the guidelines, depending on what the risk is. Would you say you're doing a good enough job as it is?

PM: I feel as though all New Zealanders have been on this journey. We've had, you know, going on three years of living with this illness. We continue to take it seriously, and I believe the public do too. The buy-in we've had, for instance, around ongoing isolation of COVID cases I think illustrates that people do take it seriously, and we do need to continue to do so. That doesn't mean we need an increase in restrictions.

Ben.

Media: Prime Minister, do you share the enthusiasm of Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese for the re-election of Lula in Brazil, particularly what it might mean for the future of the Amazon?

PM: Look, I do want to acknowledge the outcome of the election results that we've seen today and congratulate President Lula on his election to the role of President in Brazil. Of course, we think of these issues and democratic elections from the perspective of what it means for New Zealand and what it means for progress on issues of international concern that mean a lot to us as a nation too, and, undeniably, climate change is high on our agenda, and it is clear that there are some very different positions held by President Lula on that issue.

Media: On the anti-terrorism hui, they've heard today the considerable threat that anti-Government extremism poses. What's the Government's response to the increased threat, and is there any talk about increasing the SIS budget, seeing as a third of their workforce is dedicated to that now?

PM: So two things there: obviously, there's been no suggestion, given the range of threats that New Zealand faces on ongoing basis, that there needs to be an explicit change in the budget as it stands for the NZSIS, and if there were, of course, that would go through a Budget process. On the issue of counter-terrorism, or just generally the threatscape in New Zealand, I think it would be wrong to imply that we have this significant surge in threat in that regard. Are there individuals who subscribe to a particular ideology that may border and dip into violent extremism? Yes, and that will be the case across many international partners. And in some cases, we've seen that more openly—it's been exacerbated by certain issues. We take that very seriously. Our agencies continue to work hard to make sure that we focus on successful ways of de-radicalising, but we are not alone in this challenge.

Media: And on the back of that, Kiritapu Allan said on Q+A that she could guarantee that hate speech laws could be in place by next year. That kind of came as a surprise to some.

PM: So, yeah look, it shouldn't because, of course, you'll recall that we've gone through a process. The royal commission suggested, as did the Human Rights Commission many years ago, that religion needed to be added to the list of those areas where that is covered by incitement and hate speech. We went through a process after the royal commission reaffirmed that. They made some other suggestions for how the law could change, and we

went through a process of going out and submitting on that and getting feedback. We got very strong feedback on that. We've taken that away and we're working now on solutions to try and factor in the many different views that we've heard. We believe there is a way through, and so what Minister Allan was articulating was that we believe we can speak openly about the solutions we've generated relatively soon. But what we will be looking for is, as much as possible, bipartisan support. I would like to be in a position where when we introduce some changes, that we have broad-based support across the House. We may not have everyone, but I would like to see general support for the changes proposed.

Media: The German Chancellor will be visiting China this week. He's the first Western leader since COVID, I think, to visit. Would you like to visit before the election next year?

PM: Yeah—oh look, I haven't put a time line on it, but would I like to visit again? Yes. In fact, when I visited in 2019—I believe it was May—there was a suggestion that I would visit again in short order. Unfortunately, COVID put paid to that. One of the things we'd like to do, though, is take a trade mission, and so whilst there would probably be ways to instigate a bilateral visit, I think there would be extra value-add if we were able to take more than just political leaders.

Media: So if you can't take a trade mission and it is just you—a diplomatic mission—it's probably not going to happen before the next election?

PM: Oh, I'm fairly realistic about the practicalities of travel into China at present. So I think our focus will be—yes—while we're very eager to engage, looking for the best opportunity from their perspective and ours to do that.

Jason, than Marc.

Media: Prime Minister, a Hamilton business owner who has said that they've been ram-raided three times is now shutting down their business because of this. Why is the Government so slow to respond to this issue? It's happening literally every single night.

PM: Look, I've seen some of the discussion about a particular business in the Waikato. All I can say is I cannot even imagine the distress of that business owner, to have been repeatedly targeted. I have asked the Minister of Police's office to look into the police directly engaging with that business, because we do of course have a fund available in order to try and put in preventative measures to ensure that they do not continue to be targeted. I understand the police actually already intended to do that anyway.

Media: Are you satisfied with how quickly this fund is working? I mean, the last time we checked the numbers, there'd been about \$170,000 out of, from memory, about \$6 million.

PM: Yeah, you will have already heard me say that I do want the funding to roll out as quickly as possible. But, actually, if I'm honest about my greatest source of frustration, this is a small number of young people. In the Waikato region alone, there have been 300 arrests. The police are working diligently to crack down on what is an issue that is being created by a relatively small group of young people. Now, we will continue to go out—and the police will continue to go out and arrest them when it occurs, but we have to make sure that we are all working together to solve what is an incredibly difficult and painful situation for all those who are involved.

Media: Could you explain why it's so difficult—people at home might be listening. You're saying that there's a small number of people who are doing this. Why are they still allowed to do this—

PM: A range of issues at play here: (a) it's small number and often very young—children, in some cases. And so, you know, there are constraints—and rightly so—on the way that the justice system can't simply throw a child into an adult prison, and for good reason. That means that there are still measures that can be taken. I would not want anyone left with the impression that there are no repercussions for children who engage in these activities—there are. But, at the same time, repeatedly having individuals involved in these situations—we have to get to the root cause of it. We don't want children getting into an

ongoing life of crime. Curtailing that, stopping that, and turning them around is not a quick fix, but we do need to make sure we're doing all we can to prevent these young people from causing the huge amount of cost, distress, and aggravation that these business owners are experiencing.

Media: And are you confident at the moment the Government is doing all it can?

PM: We do need a wider range of tools—that's what's clear to me—because for this particularly small group, we don't necessarily always have some of the options that we need. That is not new to this Government. That has been a persistent problem, so we are looking at what more can be done, and I want to give people that assurance. We don't take this issue lightly.

Media: Is there not enough space in youth facilities to get them off the streets, or—

PM: I think it would be a bit short-sighted to say that's the only issue; I think we need a greater range of options. We also need a range of options to try and get ahead of a wider network—siblings, for instance, who may look to become engaged—and there is an issue here where the proliferation, based on the fact that these kids are, essentially, advertising within their own network these activities, and that is then growing the issue. Of course, it is in two particular centres we are particularly seeing the problem, and there's reason for that too.

Anyway, Marc.

Media: On hate speech, how confident are you that you will get that bipartisan, cross-partisan support?

PM: It's too early to say at this stage, but I would have thought that amongst politicians there should be good support for saying, actually, you should not experience hate speech and incitement based on your religion. It's a fairly simple concept. Where there were issues last time was because there were other amendments around some of the thresholds in language that caused some concern, but let's get back to our first principles on this one.

Yeah, I might just finish here, and then in the back row.

Media: There's still 1.6 million eligible Kiwis yet to get their booster. Are you looking to encourage them, or are you just—

PM: Of course—of course. What becomes a little more difficult is to say how many of those should have, based on their last experience of COVID—because, of course, there are guidelines around when you should next receive your booster once you've had COVID. So a bit difficult to say precisely the eligible group, but of course I continue to encourage people: please do check your eligibility for your booster, particularly if you are an older New Zealander or have health conditions that may make you more vulnerable.

Jo.

Media: Another issue that came up in the Allan interview at the weekend was about name suppression. Do you personally believe that money and resource buys you name suppression in this country?

PM: It certainly should not. There may be that perception, but I don't think anyone would want a system in New Zealand where that would be the case.

Media: So do you think—I mean, the Minister said that it was a high priority for her and that she did think that money and resource was buying name suppression for people. You're obviously—

PM: I think she'd agree with me that in principle, it shouldn't, though, of course.

Media: No, but the point is do you see it as a priority as well, and do you think it's happening and is an issue that needs to be addressed?

PM: Yeah, look, it is one of those issues that's been continuously raised, and there's a number of priority issues within the justice portfolio. You can see we've talked about some of the key ones today. So look, the Minister has said she wants to do some work on it, and I think there'd be support for that, but we really also need to prioritise some of those pressing issues that we're facing at the moment with a small but persistent group of offenders at present.

Media: So she doesn't have your support for it being a priority—

PM: No, you're completely misinterpreting what I'm saying. I'm saying there's a number of priorities. The Minister wants to progress the work on this. I would support her, but we also need at the same time to really focus on some of the issues we've traversed today.

Last question—Thomas.

Media: On your remarks about the Government's working group on three waters—the council working group to look at some of the issues that were raised in the first iteration—you said that they didn't dispute the co-governance or recommend changes against co-governance, but the terms of reference for that working group were that mana whenua should have joint oversight over any water service entity and that mana whenua should have the same rights and mechanisms of influence over the water service entities as councils do. So it seems pretty clear that the terms of reference of that group would not have allowed that working group to dispute the governance—

PM: Equally, Local Government New Zealand have—keep in mind, even Christchurch currently has arrangements that amount to co-governance at present, and LGNZ have not spoken against it. I think the point that I'm trying to make is it has not actually consistently been raised from councils as core to their issues.

Media: Do you think that councils feel like they've actually been asked that question over whether councils want co-governance?

PM: The Minister has engaged much more frequently with them.

Hon Nanaia Mahuta: Yeah, and look, right at the beginning, one of the factors that was considered in terms of the design of the reform was that many councils said, "Look, on the way through, we don't want to lose the relationship"—the positive relationship—"we already have with iwi and mana whenua., and certainly from a water perspective, they were very mindful that Māori aspiration to have good drinking water and improve water going into the reserving environment and, on top of that, Treaty settlements. It was all a part of trying to ensure that we didn't lose anything along the way, and that's why those arrangements are there. And, in fact, the Prime Minister is absolutely correct: where those arrangements already exist between councils and mana whenua, they are pointed to as a reference point for better consensus decision-making for the whole community.

Media: So you think that the main issue that councils have is the council influence and ownership, not co-governance?

Hon Nanaia Mahuta: I think the councils have reflected concerns of that nature, and that would be a true statement.

Media: Minister, a question on the local government—

PM: Oh yeah, I'll make Bernard the last one, eh.

Media: The future of local government draft came back on Friday, in which many of the submitters said that the relationship between local government and central government was broken and put forward various suggestions for improvement, including co-investment in infrastructure. What's your view on some of those proposals and this idea that the relationship is broken?

Hon Nanaia Mahuta: Well, a couple of things. Firstly, the Future for Local Government panel is an independent panel and has canvassed widely both the local government sector,

business, and community in order to come up with its considerations. On the issue of a co-investment fund, one of the key issues that came out of the annual conference this year was that the biggest challenge facing councils was the issue of climate change, and in order to respond to issues of adaptation—potentially, managed retreat—they were looking for solutions that were a bit more innovative, and looking at the long-term challenge to support councils to respond to those types of matters. It's not a surprise to see that recommendation in the report, but, again, can I stress this is an independent report from the panel. It has been canvassed widely, and they'll continue to seek submissions right up until February next year. So we're asking people to engage with them.

Media: So what do you initially think of that co-investment part?

Hon Nanaia Mahuta: Well, I think when you look around the world, resilient responses involve central and local government working alongside community to address some pretty significant challenges around adaptation. So it's not a surprise to see a model like that referred to in the report.

Media: How were you able to hustle a ride back with the Italians?

PM: I did say that it was going to be the last question; I don't mind finally finishing on that one. Look, it is not uncommon, from what I'm told, for those who are based down in Antarctica to share transportation. It seems to be fairly commonplace, and, as you can imagine, it's such a challenging environment. Weather makes it difficult for flights to get in, there's often issues—given the conditions in Antarctica—with assets themselves, and so I was not the only different nationality on board. New Zealand, the United States, and Italians were all present on that exit flight.

Thanks, everyone.

conclusion of press conference