

**POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 13 MARCH 2023**  
**HANSARD TRANSCRIPT**

**PM:** Kia ora, everybody. I have rather a lot to get through today, so I will allow a bit of extra time at the end for questions.

Cabinet met earlier to discuss further reprioritisation of the Government's work programme. The Government is focused on the bread-and-butter issues—the things that matter most to New Zealanders—and at the moment the cost of living and the recovery from Cyclone Gabrielle are right at the top of the list. Stopping some of our plans and putting others on a slower track gives us the bandwidth to focus on these immediate priorities while also saving some money so that we can provide a little bit of extra support to help families with increasing costs. It'll also help to keep downward pressure on any domestic-related inflation. I want New Zealanders to know that the Government's doing its bit and is cutting its cloth to suit the times that we are in. Some of the things that we're delaying or stopping do mean a lot to us as a Government, but we're taking the hard decisions because we know that Kiwis are also making some tough calls at the moment, as well.

A month ago, I announced our first tranche of reprioritisations, and today I can announce the second. Cumulatively, they save over \$1 billion that is now available for reallocation to support New Zealanders with the cost of living. We also know that we face big bills to fix parts of the transport network that have been decimated under Cyclone Gabrielle. It will be a massive task for our road builder, Waka Kotahi, and one that needs their total focus. As such, the transport Minister, Michael Wood, has proposed a number of reprioritisations within the transport portfolio, which I am confirming today.

First, we'll be stopping the implementation of the clean-car upgrade scheme, where households would have been able to scrap their old cars in return for a grant for a cleaner vehicle or to pay for public transport. Trials of the scheme have already proven to be difficult, and it's not clear that this is the most effective way to increase the uptake of low-emissions vehicles. The \$568 million allocated to that scheme will now be freed up to invest in cost of living measures.

We're also refocusing our goal of increasing and improving public transport as an alternative to driving. We'll be focusing on the five main centres of Auckland, Hamilton, Tauranga, Wellington, and Christchurch, where there is the scale for decent public transport alternatives to getting around, rather than seeking to direct every council in New Zealand to make these changes. Reducing transport emissions is critical to achieving New Zealand's climate change targets, but we need to focus our efforts on the areas where we can achieve the greatest reductions, and that's in our biggest cities.

In other regions, pressing on with regional vehicle kilometres travelled targets doesn't make sense when many of those areas don't have good alternative bus networks or trains. So we're making these targets voluntary in areas like Dunedin, Palmerston North, Rotorua, New Plymouth, and those places that have been affected by Cyclone Gabrielle such as Napier, Hastings, and Gisborne. To be clear, in our major centres we do intend to keep investing in regular, fast, and affordable public transport so that people have choices about how to get around, our roads are less congested, and we are reducing our emissions. It's good for the environment, it reduces congestion, it improves productivity, and it's also good for our international brand.

Third, we will be significantly narrowing the speed reduction programme to focus on the most dangerous 1 percent of State highways. We'll also ensure that where change is proposed, Waka Kotahi are consulting meaningfully with the affected communities. That means that speed limits will reduce in the places where there have been the highest numbers of deaths and injuries. We'll continue to make targeted reductions in the areas immediately around schools and marae and in small townships that State highways run through.

We'll also be stopping the social leasing car scheme trials. That scheme was designed to provide leasing arrangements to low-income families for clean cars, but, again, it was proving difficult to implement, and several of the communities where it was due to be trialled have been affected by the recent weather. So that will save \$19 million, which will also be available to be reallocated.

Finally on transport, I can confirm today that we will be staging the way we roll out transport projects in Auckland. With around a third of New Zealand's population estimated to live in our biggest city, it's where we can make the largest single gains in futureproofing transport systems to tackle congestion and to reduce emissions. Work on Auckland light rail will be continuing alongside other city-shaping investments such as the second Waitematā Harbour crossing, more rapid busways, and better connections to growth areas like the north-west. But just like the London Underground didn't suddenly appear fully formed—in fact, it took generations to develop—Auckland light rail will happen in stages, with the first stage expected to be confirmed by the middle of this year.

There isn't anything new in taking a staged approach to significant transport projects in New Zealand. The Wellington Northern Corridor and the Northern Busway projects, for example, are being delivered in successive stages by successive Governments. The Waikato Expressway started in 1993 with the Bombay Hills to Mercer construction, and it was only finished late last year. Auckland light rail is no different. Staging the roll-out will align it with other critical transport investments, particularly the second Waitematā Harbour crossing. Investing in a modern Auckland, where people can get around, where there is less congestion and cleaner travel options, is the least that we should expect, and our Cabinet is absolutely agreed on that.

Justice Minister Kiri Allan has also sought to reprioritise some elements of the justice work programme. We've decided to defer receiving advice on the second phase of alcohol reform that related to issues such as sponsorship, advertising, and pricing. That's been pushed back to April 2024, rather than March this year. These are areas that we do need to take the time to investigate properly so that we can ensure that there aren't unintended consequences. For example, when community groups are doing it tough, I don't want to see any restrictions on sponsorship increasing costs for community sports teams. The changes we are already making around how locals participate in alcohol licensing decisions will be continuing.

I can also confirm that we are not intending to introduce legislation to lower the voting age for general elections to 16. There is a process set out for how Parliament will respond to the recent Supreme Court decision, and we will continue to pursue that, but in terms of legislation, we will be introducing legislation to lower the voting age in local body elections. Lowering the age to 16 for general elections requires the support of at least 75 percent in the House of Representatives or a successful binding referendum. It is clear that we do not have a 75 percent majority in the current Parliament to make that change.

Lowering the voting age to 16 for local elections requires a regular majority in the House through amendments to the Local Government Act. Giving the vote to 16- and 17-year-olds is something that I do support, and I'm happy to see it progressed. I also acknowledge that there is greater support in Parliament for lowering the voting age for local government elections, and that's why we have decided to focus on that now. Our intention is to introduce the legislation for that this term and see it considered by the next Parliament.

The Minister for the Environment, David Parker, has proposed that we defer work on the container return scheme that would see small refunds for those returning containers. The evidence overseas shows that this does help to reduce waste. However, it's also estimated to add small additional costs to households, and we don't want to be imposing those additional costs right at the moment. This policy does remain on the agenda, and we will look to assess it again in the future when the time is right to do so.

Finally, we'll be deferring public consultation on a new test to determine who is a contractor and who is an employee. A recent Employment Court case found that Uber drivers were employees rather than contractors. That is a significant court ruling, and it has implications

for the legal definition of a “contractor”, so rather than pushing ahead with our proposed consultation on changes, we’ll be putting that work on hold until the appeals in that case have been heard.

All up, the changes announced today and previous ones make just over \$1 billion in savings that can be allocated to other measures. That’s in addition to the over \$700 million in savings that we reallocated to fund petrol excise reductions and half-price public transport that have been extended through until the end of June. That’s \$1.7 billion in savings that represents the clear intent of the Government to focus on the issues that matter the most to New Zealanders right now, including supporting people through the current cost of living pressure. It doesn’t mean that there aren’t more areas that we’ll continue to look at. My expectation is that Ministers will continue to prioritise their own work programmes as part of their business-as-usual jobs, including re-scoping and amending those plans where necessary.

These are not the only things that we’re doing, and today I’m announcing that Cabinet has decided to inflation-adjust payments so that all of our superannuitants will receive an inflation increase of 7.22 percent to their annual payments from 1 April this year. We know it’s vital that superannuitants’ income doesn’t go backwards. This will see a couple who are both over the age of 65 receive \$102 more a fortnight, and a single person living alone receive an extra \$66 a week more.

Benefit levels will also increase from 1 April, by 7.22 percent. That means that a family on a benefit with children will receive an extra \$40 a week, and a sole parent will receive an extra \$31 a week, as we continue our work to reduce child poverty. In total, since we’ve been in Government, beneficiaries with children are, on average, \$190 a week better off, increasing to \$222 a week when they’re receiving the winter energy payment over the coldest six months of the year.

In a cost of living crisis, we can’t leave behind those on the lowest incomes, who rely on the Government for support. I know that every little bit helps when it comes to making ends meet. I’m very proud of the work the Government has done this year to support New Zealanders through difficult times. Keeping the price of petrol down, extending half-price public transport, and significantly boosting the minimum wage are all doing their bit to help families. Today’s decisions highlight our absolute focus on the cost of living and recovering from the cyclone. We’re reducing costs for households whilst freeing up our work programme so that we can be most focused on those other immediate issues.

Very quickly, to the week ahead: I’m in Wellington through to Wednesday. I’ll be chairing the Intelligence and Security Committee annual review meeting on Wednesday, as well as showing my support for the kiwifruit industry by attending the annual Zespri function here at Parliament. On Thursday, I will be in Gisborne, and I’m hoping for third time lucky in my attempts to visit Wairoa, and then on Saturday, I’ll be at the Pasifika Festival in Auckland.

With that I’m happy to open up to questions. Jenna—and while you ask a long question, I’ll just get a glass of water.

**Media:** Prime Minister, how can you justify culling climate policies in the current climate?

**PM:** That question needed to be longer! Look, I need to put these things in perspective. The climate policies that we’re talking about today would have made a very small contribution to our overall emissions reductions targets. Our emissions reductions targets have not changed, so where we are making changes that potentially mean that we have to find savings in other areas, then that’s what we’ll do.

But to put this into perspective: across the two—the clean-car upgrade and social leasing schemes—that we’ve announced today that we’re not going to be progressing with, we’ve been talking around 7,000 tonnes of reductions during the first emissions budget period. To put that into context, we’re aiming to reduce emissions by about 1.2 million during that same period through the GIDI scheme, and about 183,000 through the State sector decarbonisation work.

So these were relatively small contributions. If we look at the overall level of investment required to achieve those, there are actually better ways of achieving emissions reductions.

**Media:** Scrapping that “cash for clunkers scheme”, you’ve raided the Climate Emergency Fund to pay for cost of living measures. Is that even legit?

**PM:** Obviously, you’ll see how all of this shakes out when we release the Budget in terms of where the reallocation of spending is going.

**Media:** Are you allowed to do that?

**PM:** As I said, you’ll see how that all works out when we release the Budget back in May.

**Media:** But you’ve announced it today, so why can’t you tell us today whether you’re allowed to do that or not?

**PM:** Look, as I’ve indicated, we’ll show you exactly how the flow of money goes when we release the Budget in May.

Jason.

**Media:** How did your support partners, the Green Party, react to this when you told them?

**PM:** I had a meeting with them this morning. Obviously, we went through these in the context of a whole range of discussions. There are areas in this where they have a difference of opinion with the Government, and I expect that they will articulate that. But our working relationship continues to be a very constructive one.

**Media:** Is it still your opinion, just like Jacinda Ardern’s, that climate change is your nuclear-free moment?

**PM:** Well, look, as I’ve indicated, our emissions reductions budgets have not changed. We’re still intending to continue to reduce emissions.

**Media:** But this sends a message, doesn’t it—it sends a message that your Government doesn’t care about climate change.

**PM:** No, it doesn’t. It sends a message that the Government is absolutely focused on reducing emissions in the most efficient way possible and in the best way possible that doesn’t unnecessarily increase costs for households.

**Media:** A recently as this weekend on Q+A, you were talking about increasing electric car uptake. How else are you incentivising electric cars now that you’ve dumped the clean car—

**PM:** Well, the current scheme that we have in place is actually proving to be far more successful than early estimates had suggested, so we’re already reducing emissions by a greater amount through the current incentive schemes that we’ve got in place for clean-car uptake.

**Media:** It was supposed to be rolled out—the trial was supposed to be rolled out in April. That’s three weeks away. How much have you progressed towards that start date? And it was also supposed to take about 181,000 cars off the road—to reduce emissions equivalent to 181,000 cars off the road by 2035. How will you make up for that?

**PM:** As I’ve indicated, it was already going to prove to be very difficult to get that scheme up and running and delivered in the timetable that we had previously been talking about. As I’ve indicated, we’re talking about around 7,000 tonnes that would be reduced. There are other ways that we’re going to be able to make up that level of emissions reduction, so we’ll work through that process. We’ll have further announcements on that in due course.

**Media:** What are those other ways? You’ve extended fuel tax cuts, you’ve got rid of the biofuels mandate, you’ve taken out the climate bits from the Government policy statement on transport, you’ve got today’s announcements, but you have not announced any new climate policies since becoming Prime Minister. How will you that?

**PM:** Well, watch this space. As I've indicated, though, some of the things that we're talking about here—let's consider the GIDI scheme, for example: 1.2 million tonnes in emissions reductions during that first budgeted period. The State sector decarbonisation scheme: 183,000 tonnes being reduced in the first Budget period through those. Those things are continuing, and of course, within those, we'll look for further opportunities as well, as we'll continue to do in the transport space too. As I've indicated, we've actually got some other areas of success in the transport space, including the fact that we've had a greater uptake of electric vehicles than we had anticipated at this point. So we'll continue to look for how we can progress more of that, faster.

Claire.

**Media:** Do you have any more details on the Auckland light rail and just how far you're expecting to go and how it might be staggered out—how long it might take to get it all done, if you're still going to do it all?

**PM:** So there is a process that we're under way with at the moment which will see more details emerging in the next couple of weeks—sorry, couple of months, as part of the business-case planning process, which will give a bit more indication, including things such as the potential routes, potential timing and sequencing, and so on. So you'll see more detail of that. But I do want to make sure that, you know, people understand when we're talking about the billions of dollars, potentially, that could be invested in this, that these are not investments that are going to happen in the next few years; these are investments that are going to happen over a very long period of time.

Brent.

**Media:** How useful will that project be if you go so far, stop, and wait for the next stage to be ready to come out? It seems to me it was designed on the idea that it was going all the way through to the airport.

**PM:** Obviously, that's part of the business case process, so, basically, they'll be looking at the best way to stage it, and that'll include things such as making sure that they're considering patronage and usability of the new system within those considerations.

Claire.

**Media:** With the other Auckland projects, are they likely to now take longer, or do the time frames remain roughly where they are now?

**PM:** Sorry, what was that?

**Media:** The other Auckland projects, like the Waitematā Harbour crossing and the East thing.

**PM:** We haven't made decisions on that, but what I would say is the Waitematā Harbour crossing is something that's been raised with me almost—you know, the second crossing is something that's been raised with me in almost every visit that I've been to Auckland. I acknowledge that for the Auckland community, this is a priority for them, and so we'll certainly be considering that in subsequent future decisions that we make around Auckland transport.

**Media:** What is your plan to meet the emissions reduction targets?

**PM:** Well, we've already set out quite a lot of detail in terms of our emissions reductions plans. In terms of the offsetting of any changes that we've made, we'll consider those, and we'll release those plans in due course.

**Media:** When?

**PM:** Well, as we make those decisions.

Ben.

**Media:** Why are you doing this—are you doing this because you think it's what Kiwis want?

**PM:** No, we've been doing it because we've weighed a variety of things about whether it's a priority right now, whether it's the best way to achieve the emissions reductions targets. As I've indicated, for the cost involved, the two car schemes that I've just mentioned had a very high level of cost for a relatively small emissions reduction.

**Media:** I'm talking macro, though—like the refocus on bread-and-butter issues. Are you doing that because you think it's what Kiwis want you to do?

**PM:** No, it's a combination of things. It's a combination of making sure that we're actually focused on the things that are most important to New Zealanders at the moment. It's a focus on making sure that the things that we are doing are deliverable within the time frames that we are doing them. It's a focus on making sure that we can actually meet the immediate needs that we've got in front of us, and the cyclone and the recent natural disasters have actually put new pressures on us that we have to be able to meet.

**Media:** Which New Zealanders are you doing this for, because in terms of these changes, there's going to be a lot of young New Zealanders who will have to pick up either the debt or the exchanged emissions reductions. You're also removing, possibly, the right for them to vote. What about young New Zealanders?

**PM:** So look, as I've indicated, we're not changing our emissions reductions budgets; we are making some changes to how we'll go about achieving those budgets. In terms of the voting age, I'll be clear: I support a lower voting age—the age of 16. There isn't a parliamentary majority for that, so I don't intend to progress a bill that's doomed to fail, because ultimately that would be an expensive exercise to simply make a political statement, and I'm not willing to do that.

**Media:** When you say watch this space on those improved—meaning the Budget. Is that going to happen in the Budget, or are you going to bring it forward so that people can be sure of your commitment to meeting those targets—or what?

**PM:** Look, you'll see more announcements from us in the climate change space in due course. I'm not going to set particular dates and times for when that's going to happen, but there is more to come in that space, clearly.

**Media:** If inflation gets worse, will you just kick it down the road again?

**PM:** Sorry, what was that?

**Media:** If inflation gets worse and there's bigger pressures on cost of living, will you just kick climate change down the road again?

**PM:** Look, I kind of reject the overall assertion within your question that that's necessarily what we're doing. I don't think we're kicking the can down the road: I think what we're doing is making sure that what we're delivering is deliverable and is actually going to achieve what we're setting out to do.

**Media:** Low-income whānau with the social car leasing programme—hard to implement. Is that because the ministry did not know how to access those low-income communities to get this up and running?

**PM:** Clearly, the advice that we had was that it was proving to be difficult to implement and that it was unlikely to be implementable in the timetable that had been set out for it. I want to acknowledge that when it comes to upgrading our vehicle fleet, there are still some equity challenges ahead of us. The schemes that were set out as part of our way of dealing with some of those equity issues weren't necessarily going to hit the target, and that was the feedback that we were getting. So we'll go back to the drawing board and we'll look at other ways to achieve that.

**Media:** But whose fault was it that they weren't able to be implemented? It was difficult to implement—that's what you've said—but whose fault is that?

**PM:** Well, some of it was a difficult concept in order to be able to implement.

Jason.

**Media:** You've talked at length about this reprioritisation and how much money you're going to have from this reprioritisation. Do you have any details about what this money is going to be spent on, and, if not, when can we expect some clarity?

**PM:** Like I said, that will come in the Budget. So this money gets fed back through the Budget process and how that money gets spent will become very clear in the Budget, and that will include showing exactly how it relates to the different components of the Budget. And I don't want to pre-empt that, because I'm not going to announce the Budget today.

**Media:** But a lot of people are dealing with the impact of the cyclone now. Would it not be more prudent to at least tell people or give some sort of indication about how this money is going to be spent now, rather than waiting for a big, flashy announcement in the Budget?

**PM:** Well, no, we're not going to be announcing the Budget now, and we're still working through the overall implications of the cyclone and the recent weather event on the Government's Budget, and, as I indicated yesterday, it is likely to have a significant impact on the Budget and on the overall Budget priorities.

**Media:** Prime Minister, you said you were focused on the bread-and-butter issues. How much is a slab of bread and a slab of butter?

**PM:** A slab? Well, it depends on how you define a slab. If you go to Pak 'N Save in Upper Hutt to buy a loaf of Molenberg toast bread, you'd be paying around \$4, maybe \$4.50. If you're looking for a block of butter, it'd be around \$7. Can I give you others? Two litres of milk: you might be paying about \$4.50 for 2 litres of milk, depending on whether you're buying a branded version or a no-frills version. Any others?

**Media:** Clearly, you were expecting that question. And—

**PM:** I do my own supermarket shopping, and so I can tell you these things. Sorry, I will let you follow that question up.

**Media:** You [*Inaudible*] followed—it's another question from me. But you have now been in this job a wee while and you have previously not ruled out the super age. Can you now rule out increasing super?

**PM:** Look, it's not something that I have even turned my mind to at this point. The Government's position is what the Government's position is. If we were to change that, we would do that in the general election campaign. We certainly are not going to be doing that in the next few months.

Luke—up the back.

**Media:** Is this, particularly in the climate area—is this an acknowledgment that, really, some of these sort of flashier climate policies were pretty poorly designed and just not very good value for money in the first place?

**PM:** I think—there's a lot happening in the climate space, and one of the things that I'm very focused on is making sure that what we're doing is delivering the best bang for buck and is actually deliverable. I'm not going to say that they're necessarily poorly designed, but there's a lot that we're doing, and one of the things that I want to do is make sure that—you know, potentially there might be narrowing down the number of things that we do, and doing the things that we are going to do more thoroughly and better.

**Media:** When you've been out and about, have many people griped or sort of moaned to you about the reduction of the speed limits?

**PM:** It hasn't actually come up a huge amount, but I think it's more of a localised issue to some areas where it's been a particularly noisy topic.

**Media:** And with that in mind, will State Highway 35, as an example, around Te Tai Rāwhiti, where they have forestry—reducing the speed limits is one way, and that's great. But it's actually in the number of trucks on the road that's giving the headaches to those locals and

those communities. So are you going to do those things as well? Is it going to be an “and” and an “and”, or is the speed limit reduction just a one-stop shop?

**PM:** Well, I haven’t had the opportunity to go and look at State Highway 35 in person yet, but what I could say around that and in terms of what I know about State Highway 35 is I think one of the biggest issues there is that it sits beneath a very steep cliff face which is proving to be very unstable in extreme weather. So that means we have to look at how we can make that road more resilient.

We’ve dealt with this before. So the Kaikōura earthquake showed that there were parts of that road—again, along the coast—that were pretty unstable and pretty vulnerable, and a lot of work has been done to make them more resilient. We’re going to have to have similar conversations around State Highway 35.

**Media:** And also how do you expect Māori to respond or react to the question that you were asked yesterday on Q+A: “Is it a choice to send”—“Do you have a choice to send tamariki to kura kaupapa? Is it a choice to drink clean water?” How do you expect Māori to take that kind of question to you, Prime Minister?

**PM:** Well, ultimately, it’s probably more of a question for the questioner; I can only answer the questions that are put in front of me. I don’t necessarily think that that’s a legitimate comparison. Clearly, we want to have Māori to have the choice around education, you know, and whether they go to an English-driven, programmed school, or one that’s in Māori. They should have that choice.

**Media:** Māori leaders are actually saying that that was a race-based question—that what the reporter was asking you was “Is there a difference in co-governance?” Could a kaupapa versus drinking water—a choice to send children to kura kaupapa; no choice to drink water. He was making a race-based comparison—that is what the kōrero is around Te Ao Māori

**PM:** Well, that’s ultimately a matter for you to take up with the person who asked the question. I’m not going to provide a running commentary on the quality of all of your questions—that would be a dangerous thing for me to do.

Let’s come over the back here.

**Media:** Just on the speed limits, can you tell us where these areas are that are still going to get the reductions?

**PM:** So it’ll be the top 1 percent—so those roads where we’ve seen the biggest challenges. I want to be clear here that speed limit reductions are only one of the features of the overall work programme to improve the safety of our roads. We’ve significantly increased the funding for roading resilience and roading safety improvements, whether that’s widening roads, removing corners, putting in wire rope barriers or solid rope barriers—doing all of those things. Our work on those will continue, as well. What we’re talking about here is just narrowing down the speed limit work to the 1 percent of the most dangerous roads.

**Media:** Yeah, so can you tell us where those are?

**PM:** I’m sure the Minister of Transport will be able to give you some greater breakdown of that.

**Media:** Prime Minister, putting aside three waters, is that the bulk of your policy reset done now? Putting aside three waters, is this it—basically, done?

**PM:** Look, in terms of this process that we’ve gone through, yes. As I’ve indicated before, though, every Government, every year, should be doing regular reprioritisation as part of its annual budgeting process, and we’ll continue to do that.

**Media:** Can I pivot very quickly just for a moment to the collapse of the Silicon Valley Bank in the US. What risk is there, if any, to New Zealand?

**PM:** So the advice that we’ve got at the moment is that New Zealand banks are in a good financial position and that we haven’t got any immediate risks in that space. I mean,



obviously, that's within the mandate of the Reserve Bank to continue to make sure they're vigilantly monitoring that. The feedback that they're giving us is that we haven't got concerns in that space, but there's still always a need for us to continue to look at these areas. We've got the deposit takers legislation before Parliament at the moment, which is, again, just designed to make sure that while we don't have an immediate risk, we're thinking ahead to when future risks might emerge.

**Media:** Are our regulations strong enough, strict enough, to prevent something like that happening here?

**PM:** Look, as I've said, our banks at the moment—the feedback we've got is that they're in a good position to be able to weather the current economic storm, but we should always be looking to how we can continue to make sure that we're upholding the integrity of our financial institutions. The deposit takers legislation is one of the things that we've got in that space.

**Media:** So our bank profitability is probably a pretty good thing right now—yeah?

**PM:** What was that?

**Media:** So, you know, the decent profits of the banks is a good thing right now, then—yeah?

**PM:** Nice pivot, but I'm not going to endorse the levels of profit that the banks are making—if that's what you are asking me to do.

**Media:** Thousands of teachers and principals are walking off the job this week. Are you comfortable with the offers that are on the table at the moment, and do you think that it addresses teacher to student ratios enough?

**PM:** I've got a little bit of experience with teacher bargaining, and I've generally found that it doesn't work very well when you do it through the media, but what I would say on that is I'd encourage the teachers and the Ministry of Education to get back around the table. We did—the pay increases that teachers have already seen under this Government are sort of double what they received under the nine years of the previous Government, so it does show that we value teachers. It does show that we're willing to work with them to address the issues that they're grappling with. Not all of the issues that are on the table in terms of the public discussion are ones that get dealt with through collective bargaining. So things like class size, for example—that isn't actually part of the collective bargaining process. So my overall message to both parties is just to continue to—you know, get around the table and work through those issues. Not all of them will be addressed through this bargaining round.

**Media:** And it's March 15 on Wednesday. How will you be acknowledging that?

**PM:** Look, we've had some conversations with the community about how they want—you know, the community affected by March 15, about how they most want to see that event remembered, and there are a variety of views within that community around how they want to do that. We will acknowledge it, but we haven't completely locked down exactly how we're going to do that yet.

Yeah, Jason.

**Media:** Prime Minister, are you able to give us a little bit of a snapshot of your relationship with the Green Party right now? I mean, they campaigned very heavily for Make It 16, Chlöe Swarbrick is pushing through the alcohol amendments, the clean-car discount scheme, and you've basically just given them a very public middle finger, essentially. So what's your relationship with the Greens right now?

**PM:** Oh, I completely reject the assertion in your question.. But in terms of my relationship with the Greens, as I said, I met with James and Marama this morning. I have a very good working relationship with both of them, but we recognise we're coming into an election. There will be areas, and increasing numbers of areas, where we will agree to disagree. We're not the same party—we're different parties. We will be campaigning on

different issues. I'm absolutely confident that we'll continue to work together until the election, and that after the election, if we are in the position to continue to work together, that we will be able to do so.

**Media:** But what was their reaction when you broke this news to them?

**PM:** Oh look, we have we had a really positive conversation. As I've—I'm not going to get into a blow-by-blow account of that. They can share their own reactions to the announcement that I've made today, and I'm sure that they will, but what I can say is that our working relationship is in very good working order.

I'll come up the back to—

**Media:** Why did you go for climate policies, and in any of your reprioritisation discussions, did you look at big, expensive, ineffective policies like fees-free or KiwiBuild?

**PM:** Look, I wouldn't characterise fees-free as a big and ineffective policy in terms of cost of living—I mean, in terms of cost of living, in terms the financial pressure that a lot of young New Zealanders are facing, it's easing some of the financial pressure that they're facing. But, yes, in answer to the main thrust of your question—have we been, you know, spanning our net wide in terms of what we've been looking at—yes we have.

**Media:** Why didn't you scrap KiwiBuild?

**PM:** In terms of KiwiBuild, you'll already find that a lot of our focus in the housing area has already over the last five years refocused into other areas. There is still a role for KiwiBuild, but it will not be of the size and scale that was initially envisaged.

Ben.

**Media:** So has some of that money already been re-prioritised out of there, then?

**PM:** That money will still go to housing.

Ben.

**Media:** Just back on the Christchurch mosque attack, you've just said that you haven't completely locked down exactly how you're going to acknowledge it. It's 28 hours away—I mean, what do you mean?

**PM:** Yeah. Look, I'll be acknowledging it from Wellington—so, to be clear, I'm not going to be going to Christchurch for it on Wednesday. As you know, there are a range of ways in Wellington that we can acknowledge these sorts of events. We haven't completely—and it won't be at a large scale, because the community have indicated they don't want that. But we will just talk to them about how best they want it acknowledged.

**Media:** And just on another issue, the only other area that I can think of that you've flagged for your reprioritisation or big policy shift is three waters / co-governance. So when will you sort of explain what the—air quotes—"co-governance" agenda or what your Government's "co-governance" plan will be?

**PM:** Yeah. As I've indicated before, we are working through the three waters stuff as quickly as we can. It will be a matter of weeks rather than months, and then people will know what to expect from us on that.

**Media:** Prime Minister, where does the Christchurch Call work fit in your work programme at the moment—is it a priority for you?

**PM:** It remains one of our international priorities—so, in terms of our international relations programme, it certainly remains a priority for us. We've made some commitments around that. We definitely want to see those through. And, actually, in terms of New Zealand's leadership role globally, New Zealand is seen as having taken a really positive global leadership role there, and I want to make sure that we're seeing that through.

**Media:** Do you care about it as much as Jacinda Ardern did?

**PM:** Well, of course. As I've indicated in the weekend, we're different people, and, actually—you know, there's potential for Jacinda Ardern to continue to be involved in that work, and in due course we'll explore what that might look like.

**Media:** Are you offering Jacinda Ardern a job?

**PM:** I'm not doing that right now—no.

**Media:** Has she indicated she's interested in doing it?

**PM:** Look, as I've indicated, there may be an opportunity for her to continue to be involved in that work.

**Media:** You've done a lot of axing of things since you became Prime Minister. What does your Government and what do you stand for besides responding to the cost of living crisis? What do you want to do as the leader of the country?

**PM:** As I made it really clear—and I've set some of this out the very first day that I stood on the forecourt—I want to make sure that New Zealand is a country where people who go out there and strive and work hard are able to get ahead and feel like they're making progress, and I know that for a lot of families, they're not feeling that way at the moment. I want to make sure that we are enshrining the promise of social mobility—that, basically, you can work hard and you can improve your lot in life and you can create a better future for yourself and for your children. I want to make sure that we're actually living up to our clean, green credentials, because I think that is something that New Zealanders are proud of, and some of the work that we've been doing in this space has actually been running the ruler over the programmes that we've been doing and saying, "Are these actually going to deliver the sorts of gains, the sorts of changes, that New Zealanders are expecting of us?"

Jo.

**Media:** Just following on from that—I mean, that's a very well-meaning theme that you've just talked about there. But can you actually break down what, I guess, is left on the policy agenda that is a Chris Hipkins Government that isn't bread-and-butter stuff in terms of putting money in people's pockets—like, if people are going to look back and go, "What did Chris Hipkins do?" and say, "That was a progressive policy." or "That was something Labour and the Greens did.", what is it?

**PM:** Yeah, look, as I've said, most of the focus here in terms of the things that I've been announcing have been around reprioritisation. Reprioritisation opens up space for other things to happen. We haven't announced much of that yet, and you'll see more of that in the Budget.

**Media:** No, but also, presumably, the Budget is going to be pretty tight—which is already being indicated by the finance Minister a lot—because you're back in the situation where you've got cyclone recovery, there's obviously a cost of living crisis, and we hear a lot about bread and butter. So are you really going to have the bandwidth—to use your term—to actually be able to do a whole bunch of things that people will go, "Oh, that's Chris Hipkins doing a Chris Hipkins Government thing."?

**PM:** Well, of course, I'm aiming for us to have at least three more years after this where we can do a range of things, as well.

**Media:** So what kind of—what you're actually saying, though—

**PM:** I'm not going to give you the Budget right now.

**Media:** No, OK. So that—

**PM:** So, yeah—next question.

**Media:** Sorry, just on that answer—so what you're saying is that what you're doing between now and the election is doing what you can to get yourself back into Government. You're not actually going to announce things, because people might not like them; you're just

going to do bread-and-butter, cost of living crisis - related stuff, get yourself back in for another term, and then go, “Oh, well we might do something”—

**PM:** Well, we set out about 28 pages of things that we’re doing in my statement to Parliament at the beginning of the year. I appreciate many people don’t wade their way through that, but it is quite specific, and it sets out an awful lot of things that the Government’s going to be doing this year.

**Media:** Can you name one? I asked for examples.

**PM:** Like I said, there’s 28 pages of them.

Yeah.

**Media:** How can families get ahead if their houses are under water and you’re not going to do anything about climate change?

**PM:** I completely reject that.

**Media:** The Make It 16 campaign actually wanted the local government voting age to be lowered prior to anything in the Government anyway. Should that have not just been done in the first place?

**PM:** Look, I’m focused forward, and I’m outlining what the Government’s programme is from this point onwards.

**Media:** Just on the [*Inaudible*] alcohol reform, can you explain the risk, or the level of risk that you’ve been advised as far as, say, community sport, or people having to pay more with sponsorship going down?

**PM:** Well, that’s one of the things—that there isn’t a good, robust evidence base for what the potential flow-on consequences of this will be. One of the reasons that we’re allowing more time for that process is so that we can make informed decisions about that, bearing in mind, too, that many of these decisions are made by the Parliament, rather than by the Government. There’s a history of these being conscience votes in Parliament, so the more that we can do to provide all members of Parliament with a solid evidence base when they make those decisions, I think, the better. We are allowing an extra year. That extra year will allow that information to be collected, that analysis to be done, and then the Parliament can make more informed decisions.

**Media:** Does that mean that the reform’s been rushed, then?

**PM:** Look, as I’ve said, I think we need a bit more time. I think we need to do this carefully and in a considered way.

**Media:** You’ve kicked back the hate speech stuff, as well. What does Kiri Allan have left to do in her justice portfolio?

**PM:** Oh look, she’s going to be very busy in the justice portfolio. As—look, again, go back and have a look at the statement of Parliament, which I didn’t bring with me, but it lists out the priorities for there, and there are plenty of priorities in the justice portfolio—plenty of areas of work where we’ll continue to be progressing.

**Media:** When that Make It 16 decision was brought to Cabinet to draft legislation, did you oppose it then and say that it was doomed to fail and you didn’t want to waste your time?

**PM:** Well, as you know, Jenna, the Cabinet conversations are confidential; in fact, Cabinet collective responsibility applies, and continues to apply even when there’s a change of leadership.

**Media:** But have you had a change of heart, or did you raise opposition then?

**PM:** As I’ve indicated, Cabinet collective responsibility applied then and it applies now.

Yeah, Luke.

**Media:** But your responsibility continues throughout that. So you were a Cabinet Minister then, party to that discussion, and now you're the Prime Minister. Did you have a change of heart, or does your position remain the same?

**PM:** The same answer to the one I just gave.

Luke.

**Media:** Prime Minister, presumably in the wake of the Rob Campbell business, the chief executive of Te Pūkenga, Peter Winder, sent a note to all staff, including academics, saying, "As a Crown entity, Te Pūkenga and all of our people are public servants. That means we have obligations of confidentiality, neutrality, and separating our personal views from our professional roles." Is it appropriate to send a note out like that to a tertiary institution where—you know, like freedom of conscience and expression and all of that sort of thing—

**PM:** Look, the Government hasn't made changes to the provisions in Education and Training Act around academic freedom, which does afford academics a different position in terms of their ability to criticise the Government. It's one that I'll continue to always defend; I think it's important that they have the ability to do that. I haven't seen the particular communication and concern, but I will completely reiterate the Government's support for the role of academics as critic and conscience of society, and so much as I—you know, there's plenty of people that will offer an ongoing criticism of the Government. I'll invite them to continue to do that because I do think it's an important part of a functioning democracy.

**Media:** So they shouldn't regard themselves as public servants per se?

**PM:** Well, yes, they're public servants, but they have a special position, and that includes as a critic and conscience in society, and the freedom to be able to criticise Government.

All right, last question over there.

**PM:**

**Media:** Prime Minister, just on the High Court decision around the vaccine mandate and family caregivers—so that decision came out on Friday and was published today. Have you had time to look over that?

**PM:** I haven't had a chance to read it. As I've indicated over the weekend, vaccine mandates—decisions around vaccine—are some of the most difficult that we've grappled with over the last couple of years as part of our COVID-19 response, and I acknowledge that, overall, the courts have upheld the decisions that we've taken, but they have pointed out some areas where they disagreed or where they thought the process could have been better, and so on.

I want to take the time to review that decision—because I acknowledge the issues that have been raised in it. I want to take the time to review that decision before I give a detailed comment on it. I want to give the people who took that court case, you know, the justice of doing that, and then I'll make a comment on it. I absolutely intend to do that; I haven't had the opportunity to do that yet.

All right. Thanks, everybody.

**conclusion of press conference**