

POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 17 JULY 2023
HANSARD TRANSCRIPT

PM: Good afternoon, everybody. It's good to be back. Over the past few weeks, my focus has been on growing our economy and supporting our economic recovery. Last week, I was in Europe to sign our new free-trade agreement with the European Union, which potentially adds \$1.8 billion per annum to our international trade with Europe. Yesterday, I attended the signing ceremony in Auckland for the UK to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership—the CPTPP. These expansions of trade opportunities sit alongside the gold-standard UK free-trade agreement, which we were able to bring into force when I visited the UK earlier in the year, and my trade mission to China. I've been taking a lead on trade because it's such a core part of the Government's economic growth and recovery plan.

Yesterday, I also met with the Football Ferns to wish them all the best for this week's opening of the FIFA World Cup. The world cup will be one of the most watched sports tournaments in the world this year, and it's a huge opportunity for tourism and for our wider New Zealand economy. It's also a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience a tournament of this scale in this country, so I encourage New Zealanders to really get behind it. Tickets are just \$20 for adults and \$10 for children. It would be great to see a full house for as many games as possible. I'm looking forward to cheering on the Ferns at the sold-out opening match at Eden Park on Thursday.

Today, I'm announcing the first part of a new law and order package that seeks to break the cycle of offending, that backs police to fight crime, and increases the accountability of offenders. Prevention, protection, and accountability—that is our focus. I acknowledge that youth crime is an increasing concern in many parts of New Zealand. Kiwis have had a gutsful of people acting as if the rules don't apply to them, and I have had a gutsful of that as well. The system needs a shake-up. So today, I'm setting out the next set of changes that will make offenders more accountable, that will back our police with greater powers, and that will work to break the cycle of offending.

We'll continue our focus on prevention by tackling the underlying social issues, like poverty, unemployment, and family violence, whilst we're also investing in programmes that work to break the cycle of offending. We'll back our police to respond faster and give them more tools to better protect our communities. And there will be a sharper focus on consequences and greater accountability for offenders by tightening up gaps in the current law, and we will be reforming parts of the system as well.

The first of the changes that I'm announcing today is a crackdown on people who commission or reward children and young people to offend. We're told that ram raids are done for notoriety on social media and for the news, or for petty theft, but we also do know that there are some where adults, particularly adults associated with organised crime, are involved. Using a child to commit a crime is cowardly, exploitative, and it destroys lives, so the consequences for that should be serious. Therefore, the Government is creating a new offence that will attract a prison term of up to 10 years, targeting those who commission or reward young people's offending.

Secondly, posting offending behaviour online will become an aggravating factor in sentencing. It's becoming increasingly common for offenders to post videos of their criminal behaviour online to show to their friends and their followers. This social media amendment that we're introducing will apply to adults and young people and provide the courts with an additional consideration when sentencing, sending a strong signal that this sort of behaviour is unacceptable.

Thirdly, recognising the huge harm that this offending causes for victims, we're introducing greater accountability back to the people and communities affected by the crime. For offending children and young people from the age of 10, courts will be given the ability to

require—not to request, as it does now—offenders to undertake community activity such as cleaning graffiti and picking up rubbish. The court will be able to require that an offender attend an educational, recreational, or activity programme.

PM: That's really important because we want to get these young people re-engaged in something positive, we want to get them back on track, and we want to build on the work that we're doing to improve things like school attendance.

There will also be greater accountability for victims. Victims will be entitled to attend care and protection family group conferences for the first time, in relation to children over 10 with offending behaviours. It will force those young offenders to confront the victims whose lives they are harming. None of this is about locking children up and perpetuating the cycle of crime; it's about accountability and consequences to help break the cycle of offending.

Fourth, we're backing the police to pursue criminal offending through the courts by boosting the prosecution service with an additional \$26 million to help clear the case backlog in the District Court. The funding will allow police to add up to 78 full-time equivalent staff to work on police prosecutions.

We've been working on many of these proposals for some time, and there are more to come. They're about creating consequences as well as opportunities for a life outside of crime, especially for young people. Building boot camps or youth jails for young offenders—as the National Party and the ACT Party are proposing—only serves to turn our young offenders into hardened criminals when they come back into the community. That type of policy does not break the cycle. We know that because they've tried it before and it failed when they tried it the first time.

In contrast, we'll continue the careful and intensive work that we are doing to prevent young people from undertaking crime in the first place. We'll also continue to work on policies and legislation against the gangs that are proven to work and that are working. Since we introduced new powers for police to combat gang activity, for example, we're seeing good results—most recently, in Ōpōtiki last month, where 26 vehicles were searched, four guns were seized, and nine arrests were made. Forty-thousand charges have been laid against gang members as part of police's Operation Cobalt, a programme funded by this Government.

We'll continue to be strongly guided by the evidence. We'll continue to focus on turning around the lives of young offenders. The gangs need to hear the message loud and clear that they cannot act with impunity. The balance has shifted; there are consequences for their actions. The New Zealand community has had enough of this type of offending; so have I. Happy to open for questions.

Media: Are enough people being prosecuted for retail crime?

PM: Ultimately, the decisions about whether or not someone's prosecuted are made by the police. One of the challenges in the youth offending space is that there are some gaps in the law there, which we're looking to address, and some of the things that I've just mentioned help to close some of those gaps that have meant that young offenders aren't facing the consequences for their actions in the way that they should do. Police are very proactive—I haven't got the statistics exactly with me, but I can certainly get them to you. Police have been very proactive in that ram-raiding space, for example—retail crime ram-raiding space—at identifying offenders as much as they can. They go through the video footage, they identify them, they are going through that process of identifying them and arresting them and so on. But there are still gaps in the system in terms of what happens next.

Media: But you'll know the numbers of how many reports of retail crime there are and how many prosecutions there are. Are enough people being prosecuted for retail crime?

PM: Well, there's certainly an ability for the police to increase that with the extra police prosecutors that we're funding.

Media: Have you fallen behind in your response to ram raids?

PM: If I go back to when I became Minister of Police around this time last year, we launched a programme of work then which was about preventing young people from falling into a pattern of repeat offending around things like ram raids. That's had good outcomes, but clearly ram raids are still happening. So in terms of the young people targeted by those intensive intervention programmes, we've seen a much lower rate of reoffending. But the level of offending is still far too high, so this builds on the work that we put in place last year. I'm not going to rest until we actually see this problem tackled. We've been working on it; we haven't fully tackled it yet. So we're going to keep working on it, because it's not acceptable.

Media: [*Inaudible*] pervading factor in posting videos online. Did you rip that from [*Inaudible*]?

PM: No, we've been working on that for some time before they announced it. It's a coincidence, maybe.

Media: There's only a handful of sitting days left in the year and you've got a number of other law and order announcements coming as well. Are you going to pass this in three readings and the select committee process before—or could you just walk us through the legislative agenda that you have in terms of this legislation?

PM: Obviously there's quite a lot of drafting that's going to need to be done, so when the bill hits the House will depend on how long it takes our law drafters to actually get the bill to a state where we can bring it before the House—if we can do that before the election I would certainly like to do that. I think it won't pass through all of its stages before the election so it will have to carry forward until after the election as well.

Media: So we've got a potential period where the Parliament's shutting down for the campaign, maybe coalition building afterwards, and then you still might have to introduce it and then have a number of readings. I mean are you dragging your heels a little bit on what is a quite sensitive and intense issue?

PM: No, I mean, ultimately, we'll look to introduce it into the House as soon as it's been drafted. If we can do that before the election then that will mean that the legislative process can start, bearing in mind that the legislative process, particularly in the areas of law and order, it is important that we have a select committee process as much as possible. If we can get that under way before Parliament dissolves for the election then people can be doing their submission and so on during that period where Parliament's not sitting, which means that that time can still be put to good use.

Media: Can you explain how the new offence will work? I mean, how do you prove that someone has used someone else to commit a crime?

PM: So obviously the evidence base will need to be there in order for police to be able to charge somebody against that. So it adds an extra tool in the police's tool kit.

Media: How does it differ from the existing incitement offence?

PM: So this one adds consequences particularly for targeting young people. So it does build on some existing provisions that are in the law at the moment.

Media: What evidence do you have with respect to this organised crime element?

PM: It's very difficult to prove a link to organised crime. Clearly, some of the young people doing the offending are selling the things that they are stealing. So those who are going and doing smash-and-grabs at jewellery shops, for example—that merchandise ends up on the black market. So this gives the police an additional tool in their tool kit where they can demonstrate that there are adults involved in the chain to then prosecute those adults.

Media: Yes, but I suppose it's the evidence, though, because you've prided yourself as your police Minister has on being evidence-based here, so there doesn't seem to be a lot of evidence on this point here saying that there is an organised crime element.

PM: It's another tool in the tool kit. It means that, yes, police will still have to assemble an evidence base as they do for any criminal offending.

Media: Sorry, just back to what [*Inaudible*] was asking, have you not drafted the legislation?

PM: No, we've only made the policy decisions—the final policy decisions have just been made.

Media: What have you been doing?

PM: So typically policy decisions get made, legislation gets drafted, and then a bill gets introduced into the House.

Media: You're saying [*Inaudible*] quite some time, so when did you start that work?

PM: So, in terms of the particular question—Jenna's question—which was the social media stuff, we'd started working on that before I went to China, so I think it was about five weeks ago. Some of the other bits we'd been working on for longer, so some of the stuff around family group conference and so on, that's had a longer gestation period.

Media: On the social media element, you make the point around these sorts of crimes being impulsive and unplanned, and evidence does show that the threat of punishment never actually factors into those kinds of offending—how is this actually going to make a difference?

PM: One of the things that we're trying to do here is make sure that when we do get young people engaged in the system, that we are more effective in the interventions that we're putting in place. So if we take, for example, the work around family group conferences, it's about saying "OK, once a young person has committed an offence, how do we make sure that what we're doing is effective?" So getting the victims involved in a family group conference, for example, means that that young offender has to confront the consequences of their offending much earlier. Also, some of the changes we are making around that, by bringing some elements of the youth justice system into that process, means that there will be more tools available that aren't currently available until kids hit 14. One of the comments that I've heard quite a bit from police around the country is that they get frustrated by those kids in that 10 to 14 age bracket, where they feel like their hands are a bit tied behind their back until those kids hit the age of 14 and then they can do more things. Some of the changes that we're making here will unlock the ability for police to do more, and for the system to do more, to prevent those kids from going on to a pattern of reoffending.

Media: Specifically on threatening harsher punishments, what evidence do you have? Do you have numbers in the sense that this will make a difference and will reduce the number of crimes?

PM: Those things are always very difficult to model. It's only one of the factors that comes into consideration here. We do want to send a signal, though, that filming has consequences. A lot of the young people involved in this offending don't feel like there are any consequences for them at the moment, and my message for them very clearly is there are consequences and there will be more consequences.

Media: You say that you've had a gutsful; the community's had a gutsful. Well, the community's had a gutsful for a long time and you yourself just before cited that that you've been doing ram-raid work to try to solve that problem since a year ago when you were the police Minister. Why does it take until three months out from an election, when you don't even have the legislative runway anymore to get it across the line, for these sorts of policies to be announced?

PM: The Government doesn't stop governing just because it's three months before an election. This has been a work that has been in train for some time, and it is a progressive programme of work. So we announced some changes middle of last year, we announced more changes end of last year, and we're announcing more changes now. We're going to keep working on this until we see this issue has been tackled.

Media: But are you only fed up now? Have you not been fed up since—

PM: No, I've been fed up all the way through. It's been unacceptable all of the way through, but I've absolutely been hearing from New Zealanders the level of concern that they have about that. As Minister of Police and as Prime Minister, I have spoken to some of the victims of this offending. I have spoken to small business owners who live in their businesses who are afraid to basically be at home or go to work because of the consequences of this offending. I totally get that. It's unacceptable. They are entitled to feel safe in their homes, in their businesses, and in their communities.

Media: Can I also just follow up from Craig's question earlier as well, in terms of how you identify those adults who might have played a role in kids. That seems particularly resource-intensive for police, because you need a pretty firm line of evidence in order to be able to prosecute. What are you going to do to give police—I mean, yes, it's a new tool in the toolkit, but it's also incredibly resource-intensive to actually do it.

PM: We've put 1,800 extra police on the beat. We're putting extra funding into the police prosecutions. We're giving police extra tools, in terms of the legislative sense, but we're also giving them extra resources to use those tools as well.

Media: Do you think they'll be used much, though, considering how difficult it is to actually get a connection between—if you've got a gang and you've got any number of people who may have sent off youth to do whatever it is that they've done, it's going to take a lot to get a clear enough line to prosecute on that, isn't it?

PM: One of the big challenges police always have in these cases is assembling sufficient evidence for a prosperous, successful prosecution. It's one of the things police grapple with all of the time. This gives them an additional tool. It doesn't guarantee them success, but it gives them an extra tool and I've got confidence in the police that where they can assemble evidence, they will take an appropriate prosecution.

Media: But do you think it will be fairly rarely used, though?

PM: That'll ultimately be a matter for the police. Luke?

Media: Last November you told the House that there was—

PM: You don't look like Luke, but OK.

Media: —little evidence that this kind of crime was being orchestrated by gangs. What's changed between last November and now?

PM: Sorry?

Media: Last November you told the House that there was little evidence that ram-raids were being orchestrated by gangs. What's changed between then and now?

PM: This isn't just gangs; so this is any adults who are using young people—to commission or to reward—for criminal offending.

Media: You said in your press release it's organised crime—that's gangs. Is there a gang connection?

PM: It's not just organised crime; it's adults as well. So, yes, we're concerned about the potential for organised crime to benefit from young people's offending. But, actually, any adults who are inspiring, rewarding, encouraging young offending should be held accountable for their actions as well.

Media: Prime Minister, are you confident in the current police leadership that it can carry out the Government's wishes and get on top of crime?

PM: I think the police are working very hard to get on top of this issue. It has blown up significantly in the last 18 months to two years. We weren't dealing with this two years ago. This is something new that has come up. Yes, there have always been ram raids, but the scale of it certainly has exploded over the last two years, and police have been working hard

to get on top of that. I do have confidence in them to get on top of it, but we do have to recognise that the size and scale of the problem is much bigger than it was two years ago.

Media: So you have confidence in commissioner Coster and the senior leadership team that they have what it takes to get it done?

PM: Yes.

Media: What proportion of people who are posting criminal behaviour online are the people who have committed the offence?

PM: I haven't got numbers on that, so ultimately this will provide another tool that will probably provide more insight into that.

Media: I suppose the question is, how effective do you think that would be? Because one could easily assume that the people who are posting that stuff might not be the ones committing the offence and won't be brought in front of the court at all.

PM: What it would want to do is stop these young people doing this offending for the purposes of notoriety. Again, you'll keep hearing me use this phrase: it's another tool in the toolkit, in that regard.

Media: So it's less about limiting those videos actually coming on to social media and more focused on those who are deliberately using it for notoriety for themselves?

PM: Well, certainly we'll reach out to the social media companies as well to look at whether there's more that they can do to stop the cycle of videos being shared where lawbreaking is taking place within them. Having said that, you know, there are limits to what we can do, and there are probably limits to what they can do as well. But we'll certainly want to make sure that there are consequences for people who do it.

Media: Did you just pick that up on the fly? Are you really going to contact the social media companies to tell them to—

PM: We've had several conversations about that. I mean, ultimately, social media companies shouldn't be rewarding young people to circulate video clips where they are breaking the law. *[Interruption]* I haven't done anything about that yet.

Media: So can we have some details on that—so when did that commitment get made?

PM: We talked about it today when we were talking about this package of initiatives.

Media: And so how do you plan to do that when—

PM: We'll follow up on it.

Media: Canada's New Democratic Party used the slogan "In it for you" in its 2019 campaign. Did you copy it?

PM: No.

Media: Well, the NDP had its worst result since 2004 when it used that campaign. Are you worried that it's a sign of things to come?

PM: No, not at all.

Media: Prime Minister, are you pleased with your response to ruling out a wealth tax and ruling out a capital gains tax?

PM: Yes.

Media: You didn't rule out a \$10,000 tax-free zone. Is that something that's on the cards?

PM: Sorry, what was that?

Media: You didn't rule out a \$10,000 tax-free zone, which you did look at. Is that still on the cards?

PM: I certainly think that a tax-free zone would be a more equitable way of changing the tax system compared to bracket adjustments, but we're not proposing to do that at the moment. As I've indicated, I don't think now is the time for significant tax reductions or significant new taxes. We clearly are in an economic environment where stability in the tax system is important. I've also indicated that we'll set out more detail on our tax position in the next week or so, and so watch this space.

Media: Can I ask for a more fulsome response—what's been the reaction, particularly from party members, on ruling out the capital gains tax and wealth tax?

PM: As with all things, you know, there'll be a variety of views either way. There's a lot of Labour Party members not keen on campaigning on tax, and then there are a few people who feel quite strongly about it, so I wouldn't sort of weigh it either way.

Media: Is this a pivot point, because until now you've sort of been known for ruling out things more than proposing things—do you hope this might be a pivot point now when you can start to become known for actually, you know, policies you implement?

PM: Well, we're getting into the campaign period. Obviously, I've been Prime Minister for about six months. By nature of the challenges that I've faced in that time, a lot of it has been responding to events and reorganising the existing Government work programme. As we get into the election campaign, I'll have more of an opportunity to set out the sorts of things that I would like to do as Prime Minister and that I would like to achieve as Prime Minister. And that means that we will be rolling out a lot more policy over the next few weeks—there's 88 days, I think, to go before the election, so you will hear a lot more about the sorts of things that we do want to do.

Media: Given, though, that this policy you announced today is, effectively, a campaign policy because you won't be able to implement it till after the election, the campaign plays the game, right?

PM: The campaign really kicks off when Parliament finishes for the end of the parliamentary term, which is still seven weeks away. But I acknowledge that people are taking a bit more interest in the election campaign now.

Media: Just on tax—just back on the tax stuff—a senior Beehive staffer who recently left the building wrote in the weekend that he anticipates there will be a rush of resignations as a result of the decision made by you to rule out completely under your leadership a wealth and capital gains tax. Has anyone had any conversations with you who feels strongly enough that they are considering whether they want to contest the election?

PM: No.

Media: Do you anticipate that that may be a response?

PM: No.

Media: What assurances did you get from Kiri Allan when you met with her on Friday?

PM: We had a good conversation, as I indicated, on Friday, about the overall situation. Kiri gave me some assurances that she feels well—you know, she's in a good space to come back to work, and certainly the conversations I've had with her over the last week or so, the last few days, give me confidence in that. And we had a conversation about the allegations that were put to her while I was away overseas while I was in China, and she's issued an apology. She's indicated that if anyone did find her behaviour too combative, then she's issued an apology for that and she's offered to meet with anybody individually who felt that way. So as far as I'm concerned, in the absence of formal complaints, that's about as far as I can go with that matter.

Media: You regard the matter as closed?

PM: Like I said, in the absence of formal complaints, I think that's a satisfactory resolution.

Media: Those changes to the Family Court around empowering it to require those community activities to be done instead of just requesting them, do you know whether those requests have just not been followed—is that the reason why you've made that change?

PM: Ultimately, it's a voluntary compliance activity, and so this particular group of young people, they are quite difficult to get to do the sorts of things that we might ask them to do. So by allowing an enforcement, then actually we're more likely to see them—well, we will see them complying with that.

Media: The Green Party has announced their Hoki Whenua Mai policy. It's not a bottom line but a priority. Will you be prioritising that as well when you form a Government with the Green Party after October?

PM: The Treaty settlement process is a full and final settlement process, and I've no intention of reopening that.

Media: So you don't think there's any more work to do to return stolen land to tangata whenua, beyond Treaty settlements?

PM: Well, the Treaty settlement process is not finished yet, and so there are obviously still discussions with those iwi who have not completed their Treaty settlements. We don't intend to reopen Treaty settlements that have been closed, where the settlement has been reached. They were full and final settlements.

Media: But it's not the Treaty settlements, though. It's also perpetual land leases and Public Works Act lands as well. So it's not just around the Treaty. Would you be open to looking at those, particularly around perpetual leases, which has come up in the last 12 months?

PM: As I've indicated, the Treaty settlement process is a full and final process, and so I don't intend to add to that. That would also be inequitable for those iwi who have already reached the conclusion of that process.

Media: The National Party has announced a policy today that would allow young people to access their KiwiSaver in order to pay for a rental bond. What do you make of that idea?

PM: It's just another example of the National Party raiding KiwiSaver all of the time. Ultimately, the main message that young New Zealanders can take from that is that they'll have to wait longer to retire and they'll have less savings when they retire.

Media: We did hear from a lot of students—well, not a lot of students; we did speak to some people who thought it could be a good idea because they can be quite cash-strapped, working part-time jobs. What else can be done for those people who are needing to move into a flat or a house but don't have enough to scrape together for the seemingly sky-rocketing rents and bonds?

PM: A lot of those young New Zealanders wouldn't necessarily have enough in their KiwiSaver account in order to cover the cost of a bond, either. It depends on how much work they've been doing, but since the National Party removed the KiwiSaver kick-start, for example, there isn't as much money in the KiwiSaver accounts of young people in the first place.

Media: And back on your announcement today, you said that the balance had shifted on gangs. What do you mean by that?

PM: I mean that the gangs that have felt like they've been able to get away with things clearly can't. There have been 40,000 police prosecutions of gangs, or arrests, I should say—of charges. Get the terminology right—40,000 charges pressed by police against gang members in the last 18 months or so, and I expect that there will be more.

Media: So does you mean that you think that you have the balance wrong?

PM: What was that?

Media: Does you mean that you did have the balance wrong?

PM: It means that, clearly, we are going to be very actively pursuing—or we will certainly be supporting police to very actively pursue the gangs.

Media: And you weren't before?

PM: Well, we have been—as I said, over the last 18 months, 40,000 charges.

Media: Do you expect the first time that you will speak to Michael Wood again will be when he shows up to caucus tomorrow—if he shows up to caucus tomorrow?

PM: I'm expecting him to be at caucus, and if I have an opportunity to chat with him, yep.

Media: Has he indicated to you any change from whether he intends to run again for selection?

PM: No.

Media: When is the COVID isolation period next up for review?

PM: I'll have to come back to you. I think it's before the end of the month. That's from memory, so I'll come back to you.

Media: Is it time to ditch it?

PM: I think when we made the decision last time, certainly we were starting to, I think, reach the end of that process. But let me check when it's coming up and I'll let you know.

Media: The Government's expressed interest in expanding the circuit-breaker programme in Kotahi te Whakaaro. Is that something that you're looking at?

PM: Watch this space.

Media: Righto. And Football Ferns tickets, any concerns from you there at the number of tickets that have been sold or haven't been sold?

PM: The Football Ferns games are looking pretty good—either sold out or getting close to sold out. Some of the really high-profile games, I think, games involving the US are doing very, very well—either sold out or nearing sell-out. Some of the smaller events—certainly still plenty of tickets available, so still plenty of opportunities for Kiwis to get along and be part of the Football World Cup and we'd encourage them to take up those opportunities.

Media: Why don't you think people buy tickets?

PM: I don't think that's a fair characterisation; I think the ticket sales have been, you know, pretty steady and pretty strong, and we've seen an increase in sales in the last few weeks. Not every game is going to necessarily attract a sell-out crowd; that's the same with any of these kind of major events. But, you know, I think Kiwis are excited about the tournament, and I think they're looking forward to it.

Media: What is your position on the *Turuki! Turuki!* report, and do you intend to implement any of their recommendations?

PM: Sorry, which report are you referring to?

Media: *Turuki! Turuki!*—Safe and Effective Justice report by Chester Borrowes?

PM: Ah yes, I mean, look I haven't—I'm happy to go back and have another look at it. It's not something that I've looked at in the last few months.

Media: It's not something that you think would be helpful in your law and order focus this week?

PM: I'm sure it underpins a lot of the advice that we are getting.

Media: Can I just ask, so on the announcement today, the “focus on justice”; why was the justice Minister not with you in announcing the policies today?

PM: I generally do post-Cabinet press conference by myself.

Media: The Solomon Islands Prime Minister has given a press conference where he says that “traditional donors”—like Australia and New Zealand, presumably—“have withdrawn budget support and delayed assistance.” Has that happened?

PM: Not to my knowledge. I’ll have to go back and get the numbers in terms of, you know, support that we provide in the Solomons. I don’t have them off the top of my head.

Media: The Greens and Te Paati Māori are still saying that the wealth tax remains very much central to what they want. Is your message to them that if you’re in a position to form a Government after the election, that you and Labour would just walk from talks if that’s what it came down to?

PM: If they can get the majority in Parliament to pass that without the support of the Labour Party, good on them.

Media: You’ve referenced in your speech this morning and the foreign policy one you did in the LCC the other week, the national strategy—and I believe there’s a defence arm of it and a few other arms to it—which are coming out soon. Can you just give a little bit more than what you have in those two speeches around what they are, who’s actually done the work, when they’re looking to come out, and, you know, what sort of—what’s the purpose of them?

PM: So there’s a variety of different documents. The foreign policy strategic assessment by MFAT—I think that’s actually now been released. There’s some further work around defence and the overall defence strategy, and that does include looking at areas where we’d be looking to invest in the future, in terms of defence’s capability. There’s some big decisions that we’re going to face as a country around defence capability over the next decade or so. We’ve already faced some of that as a Government, in terms of the significant investments that we’ve made in the short period of time that we’ve been in Government, relative to the life of the Defence Force. And, you know, there are some more big ones coming up, so it’ll start to canvass a little bit more about where we see the role of the Defence Force, in terms of the capabilities that we think that they’re going to need to have. The National Security Strategy will set out a bit more about some of the threats and some of the risks that we think the national security system needs to be able to manage and how we view those and how we might prioritise the resource that gets allocated to doing that work. That’s an area where I think New Zealand has to really lift its game, and so we have to really kind of step up the focus on what we’ve been doing in that space before. You know, new threats that weren’t as big a threat previously are becoming more and more so: cybersecurity, for example—a much bigger threat now than it was before. So the overall national security documentation will set out a bit more about how we prioritise that and how we see that.

Media: That report that came out last week that Chris Seed put out—the navigating something-something. That was a pretty grim read. I mean, have you read that report, and were you pretty alarmed by what was in it?

PM: I guess I get to see probably more of these documents more regularly, so it wasn’t hugely a surprise to me, but it does highlight the fact that we are living in a more uncertain world, a more contested world, a world where there is more conflict now than there has been for many of us in our lifetimes. That is the reality of the world we live in. I just returned from the NATO summit in Lithuania. I can tell you that, right the way across Europe, tensions are high. It is a very dangerous environment at the moment, and for those who are living close to or, you know, in the proximity of war, they’re really feeling that at the moment. And we’re a bit insulated from that here, you know, down in the South Pacific, but, actually, the risk is real, and the world is a riskier and less-secure place now.

Media: Have you seen the Chinese Ambassador to New Zealand’s comments last week about you having gone to NATO and New Zealand “[opening] the door to the devil”? What do you make of that?

PM: No, I haven’t seen those particular comments. I saw him this morning, but I haven’t seen—

Media: He didn't mention you opening the door to the devil?

PM: He didn't mention that to me, no.

Media: Any response to that, though? I mean, that's a pretty out-there comment. I mean, would you describe the relationship in that way at all?

PM: Look, I don't want to comment on the comment without having actually seen it, but I don't think it's a fair characterisation of our relationship with NATO. The partners in NATO are, in many cases, very traditional security partners for New Zealand. They're countries that we've got a long association with who we've worked with on these matters for a long period of time.

Media: On the Green Party policy, would you allow the Waitangi Tribunal to make recommendations about private land?

PM: I don't propose any change there.

Media: Prime Minister, "a less safe world; a more contested world"—is that also a more expensive world that's going to require New Zealand to invest more into things like defence force? Is that yet another thing that's going to be asked of the Government?

PM: New Zealand's defence force spending, if you look at it over time, is quite lumpy in the sense that we go through these periods where there's quite a lot of investment required, particularly in our hardware. So we've just had that with the air force. So if you look at the replacement for the Orions and the replacement for the Hercules, we've just been through a big spike in expenditure on the air force because of that. Because it's not just about replacing the planes, it's then everything that goes with that—the refuelling, the facilities that go with that. We've got some similar challenges coming up with our naval capacity, for example. So some of our ships are reaching the point where, in the next decade, we'll need to make decisions about their replacement. And then in the land forces, similar kind of things happened. So we had the investment in the labs all those years ago; we've now got the investment in Bushmasters and so on. It's not an arbitrary number; it's based on what kind of capability do we need and when do we need to invest in it. So I think the reality for a country like New Zealand is it always is going to be a bit of a lumpy profile. You know, it's not like we're going to have a static percentage of GDP figure, for example, because it will fluctuate from year to year.

Media: And you see this going through a period—going through a lump, rather than we're systemically spending more on military in the next decade or two?

PM: I mean, one of the things that you'll see when the defence documentation is released is that there are strategic assessments to be made about what kind of capability do we need; what are the expectations that we have of our defence force; what are the emerging issues and threats that we're going to be asking them to respond to. They're responding now to more natural disasters, more events in the Pacific, and we expect that that's likely to be increasing. So what kind of capability do we need in order to be able to adequately resource them for that; what kind of role will they play in significant international events. So you'll see a bit more of the flavour of that reflected in the documents that are to come.

Media: Does the Crown yet have any response to the Waitangi Tribunal's report, the Te Raki inquiry report, which suggested that the Crown hand back all Crown-owned lands to Te Raki Māori in the northern regions?

PM: I haven't got that one so I'm not sure where the response is it, but happy to look it up.

Media: You did say at Waitangi this year that you would go and read it?

PM: Yes, but—

Media: I asked you about it at Waitangi.

PM: Oh, did you? That's a very good memory that you have.

Media: Are you planning to read it?

PM: I can't remember whether I looked at it at the time, but I certainly haven't got it off the top of my head, so happy to go back and have another look at it. All right. Thanks, everybody.

conclusion of press conference