

POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 7 MAY 2018

PM: Good afternoon, everyone and welcome also to the beginning of Sign Language Week. My name is Jacinda, and now you officially know my Sign name. Did I get that correct? I can only assume, of course, that is a reference to a facial feature of some description of mine. But I wear with honour and pride that I've been given that name. And you can see from the presence both of the Minister for Disability Issues but also Alan Wendt, who is here with me today, that we're not just acknowledging the beginning of Sign Language Week; we are actually supporting it from here into the future, particularly as an official language in New Zealand. We will have Sign interpreters as a permanent fixture at our post-Cabinet press conferences from here on.

I want to acknowledge the initial approach that we had from Deaf Action around making this happen, and also the support from the likes of co-leader Marama Davidson for seeing this addition to our post-Cab press conferences, but also the advocacy of the likes Deaf Aotearoa, who also do a huge amount of work around Sign Language Week and advocacy around Sign Language generally. So I know it's something that the Minister is really pleased we are instituting here today.

Look, I'll quickly run through the week ahead. We'll move to an announcement that also involves the Minister of Social Development. She's here with two hats today, and then we'll move into questions.

This morning I did have the pleasure of meeting the former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and I'll forewarn you—I'm unlikely to go into the detail of the conversation as is the case with conversations that I have generally at this level. I can tell you, though, that we had a good discussion, which included some domestic policy here in New Zealand that Ms Clinton had an interest in—the Future of Work, for instance; geopolitical, environment; and also being a mum in the political frame. We also exchanged gifts, and Hillary passed on to me a gift she was told every New Zealand child needed to have, and which I can tell you I did not have already, and that was a buzzy bee. So she's obviously been very well informed during her time here. I gave her two children's books, which I thought she may wish to read to her grandchildren, by authors Lynley Dodd and Margaret Mahy, which included *A Summery Saturday Morning* and *Hairy Maclary from Donaldson's Dairy*—because I know you want that level of detail!

I want to acknowledge as well that the Minister of Defence has today part in a repatriation process that is incredibly important to family members and also service personnel. Last month, we announced the repatriation of New Zealand service personnel buried, and dependants, in Malaysia, Singapore, Fiji, American Samoa, the United Kingdom, and the Republic of Korea after 1 January 1955. The first of these repatriations is happening right now, as we speak. A Royal New Zealand Air Force C-130 Hercules is returning the remains of RNZAF Flight Lieutenant George Beban and Leading Aircraftman Ralph Scott from Fiji, and Royal New Zealand Navy Engineering Mechanic First Class Russell Moore from America Samoa. They are being received by a traditional Māori welcome before their remains are handed over to their loved ones. Minister for Veterans Affairs Ron Mark is representing the Government at the ceremony in Ōhākea.

Just by way of background, prior to 1955 it was Government policy to inter our fallen personnel overseas. This changed, and between 1955 and 1971 personnel could be brought home at the cost of their family. Now, of course, as you'd expect, many families could not afford to bring their loved ones home, and that caused a huge amount of heartache. In 1971 the Government began picking up the bill, but it was not backdated to 1955, when the policy changed. The Government has agreed to fund repatriation and make a contribution of \$1,000 for the memorial for those who are interred in a public or private ceremony.

The total cost of repatriations was originally expected to be \$10 million, but is now estimated to cost no more than \$7 million, and it will include in the future repatriations, 29 of which from Malaysia, one service person from Singapore, two from the United Kingdom, and two from the Republic of Korea.

The remainder of the week—tonight I'll be launching this year's Smokefree Rockquest. It's the 30th anniversary of this event, something I participated in before and am excited to join again.

This week, there'll be a number of pre-Budget announcements. On Tuesday, the foreign affairs Minister will be making a pre-Budget announcement in the area of trade, foreign affairs, and aid. On Wednesday, I'll be speaking at a Salvation Army breakfast and making a pre-Budget announcement there that's relevant to child well-being. That evening, I'm attending the Arts Foundation Icon awards. On Thursday, I'll be chairing the Local Government Forum at Premier House, before attending an event in Auckland later that day. On Friday, I'll be attending the launch of the New Zealand forestry service in Rotorua with the forestry and regional economic Minister, Shane Jones. I'll also be at the annual Voyager media awards that night in Auckland. On Saturday, the conservation Minister, Eugenie Sage, will be making an announcement, and on Sunday I'll be attending the second of two education summits in Auckland and making a pre-Budget announcement. I'll also be speaking at the Northcote by-election, at Birkenhead Primary School.

Look, I do want to just finish up my introductory comments by acknowledging that it is also Privacy Week. It's also Open Government Week this week as well, but I want to talk about Privacy Week very briefly, and the work that the Minister intends to do in this space. We have to acknowledge that there is some distrust amongst the public around the use of data by Government. It's particularly the case when it comes to social services, and that's why the Minister for Social Development has announced she is seeking New Zealanders' view on both social well-being and how to best protect and use people's personal information. And I'll hand over to her to give a bit of an explanation behind that.

Hon Carmel Sepuloni: Kia ora. Yes, so I've been tasked with going out and consulting on our data protection youth policy, and that'll be undertaken by the social investment agency. At the same time, there will be consultation that takes place around investing in social well-being. So what does that mean? The new narrative that we formed stands apart from the Government's previous social investment approach and differentiates us as a Government and the direction that we want to take.

We couldn't disentangle the two because, undoubtedly, when we go out and consult about data, then the questions would be asked by NGOs and by service users about what we're doing in the social investment space as well. So we're using this as an opportunity to consult on both. It's an appropriate time to announce it, given that it is Privacy Week. There is general distrust with respect to how the Government uses information, and it's important that we regain that trust, that we have a shared understanding with NGOs and services users about how we use their personal information, how we share information, so that we can continually look at improving services, and how we can assure New Zealanders that their private information is protected. So that is going to be the task at hand.

There'll be 28 locations where the consultation will take place. Tomorrow, the letters go out, inviting people to participate. It will include NGOs. It will include iwi. It will include iwi organisations. It will include service users, so a very broad range of invites has been extended and I think the last I saw there was a list of over 1,500 groups that were going to be invited to participate.

PM: Any questions on that particular piece of work, for the Minister?

Media: How long is the consultation going to take?

Hon Carmel Sepuloni: From May to August.

Media: Can you just clarify we're talking about the policy that ended up being a bit of a privacy disaster under the last Government, but is this an indication that you're not actually doing away with that? You know, are you going back—are we talking about the same policy here or are you going back to the drawing board—

Hon Carmel Sepuloni: Our Government's not going to be undertaking a data-for-funding regime like the previous Government did. But it was a failure and it caused a lot of distrust publicly, and so it's important that we have a discussion with the public, with the NGOs, with all of those affected, on how we use information. There's no avoiding using information. We need to use information. Data's really important. For us as a Government, though, it's not just data that sits in a, you know, database, it's also about client experience, it's about human interactions, and so it's extending it beyond just analytical information that you might get through some sort of database.

Media: So your view is, in effect, that that data-for-funding model, as you called it, that that will be wound back?

Hon Carmel Sepuloni: We are not undertaking a data-for-funding model. We want to work with NGOs to discuss and find out how we better share information, so that we can support the work that NGOs are undertaking.

Media: So there are no threats from Government that any funding will be cut from NGOs if they do not hand over data?

Hon Carmel Sepuloni: That is definitely not going to happen.

Media: Are you saying the social investment policy was a disaster?

Hon Carmel Sepuloni: Well, the issue with social investment policy was that, generally, people didn't understand it. There was no consultation on it. It was driven by a concern with fiscal liability, and this Government's focused on well-being, and so a redefining of what the previous Government had as social investment, with our focus being on investing for social well-being.

Media: Why do you need to do this on the data of privacy when Diane Robertson and the Data Futures Partnership was already more or less doing the same thing?

Hon Carmel Sepuloni: This goes a little bit further than what the data future policy did, and so it's important that we undertake that work, and, in fact there will be work that is happening across Government on this. I know the Minister Clare Curran is engaged in some work, of course Minister Shaw—and so we're having discussions about how we discuss data, how we use data, and how we build trust around data more effectively.

Media: And this will be a Government-led consultation; it won't be an independent consultation with another advisory board?

Hon Carmel Sepuloni: This is Government. This is Government-led. There has been a reference group. It was set up under the previous Government, changed slightly under us, so we got more external participants in on that reference group, including disability sector represented, Māori – Pacific represented, and they've been informing us on how we undertake this process effectively.

Media: Is using named data to inform policy completely off the table now?

Hon Carmel Sepuloni: We're not going down the same track as the previous Government with individual client-level data. That was a failure.

Media: So do you have a mistrust of predictive analytics?

Hon Carmel Sepuloni: Pardon?

Media: Predictive analytics—you know, trying to sort of foresee or predict where people might need social service delivery.

Hon Carmel Sepuloni: It definitely should not be their sole guide on determining the decisions that a Government makes, and there will be work undertaken to make sure that that type of modelling is used safely and that there's transparency in using it.

Media: What if NGOs just say, point-blank, no data sharing at all?

Hon Carmel Sepuloni: The feedback that I've got from NGOs is that they're interested in using data so that that can inform their service and so that they can make sure that they're as effective as possible. It just needs to be making sure that we've got a shared understanding of how we use that information and that they're part of that conversation, rather than Government trying to impose on the NGO sector, you know, unfair rules on data required for funding.

Media: Isn't one of the reasons for the individual client data sharing to identify if, say, one child was interacting with a whole bunch of different services, that maybe that child really needs help, and the interaction between those—I mean—

Hon Carmel Sepuloni: I mean, I just want to reflect on what the Privacy Commissioner's—his advice at the time was that, actually, we risked people who were vulnerable not accessing the support that they needed because of their fear that their information may be used in some sort of punitive way, and that doesn't make for very effective social services.

PM: And there are other ways that with consent that we can coordinate services: Whānau Ora uses that model, the children's teams we're anticipating would use that model. So there are other ways to do that without putting at risk people accessing services.

Media: On the flip side, though, by blunting the data-driven approach a little bit, do you risk not being able to utilise the advantage of social investment, which is actually being able to find out who is in the greatest need and target services at them?

Hon Carmel Sepuloni: I don't think it's blunting the data approach, at all. I think it's extending it. So we're going beyond using data, for instance, from the IDI and taking seriously the information that we can get from client experiences, NGO interactions, and real human stories on the ground, and I think that those interactions were ignored by the previous Government's approach

Media: At a broader level, do you have a view on whether it should be opt-out or opt-in as the model when it comes to sharing of personal data?

Hon Carmel Sepuloni: We're not going down the track with an individual client level data model, so I don't think there's a question of opting in or opting out.

PM: Do you mean if someone wants to give all of their personal information to the Government?

Hon Carmel Sepuloni: OK.

PM: All right. I take it that's all for the Minister. OK, great. More general questions.

Media: On the spousal deductions as far as pensioners go, some Kiwi pensioners have had their pensions significantly reduced because their spouses are receiving an overseas pension. Do you think that's fair?

PM: That is something that the Minister's actually been doing some work on. Look, this is not a new issue. Even back when I was the Opposition spokesperson for social development this came up time and time again, and it would surprise New Zealanders, I think, to know that people in receipt of an overseas pension may have their spouses having their New Zealand pension deducted as a result. There is a piece of work that the Minister's undertaking around some of these issues, and that's one of the things that she's looking at, but, as I say, this is not new.

Media: Is there a time line around that work?

PM: There are some much wider ramifications. The spouse issue is just one of many, and some of them are complicated. So I want to leave the Minister the space to do that work properly. But it's certainly on our radar and has been for some time.

Media: Prime Minister, the people-smuggling vessel that was intercepted in Malaysia over the weekend, do you think that vessel was capable of reaching New Zealand?

PM: Look, regardless of whether it had that capacity or not, the point is that taking a preventative approach to stop it ever leaving a port is the optimal approach, because regardless of the capacity of any given vessel, that is a treacherous piece of water. It risks people's lives, and the people who are undertaking that venture need to be held to account before they possibly lose the lives of those on board.

Media: Was it capable of reaching New Zealand?

PM: Oh, look, again, as I say, regardless, the treacherous water in front of it, I don't know whether or not the engine specifications, whether they were equipped properly. It's hard for me to make that judgment. Regardless of its capacity, the goal had to be to make sure it never left that port, and I thank the Malaysian officials for the work that they've done to stop that.

Media: The Australian Government said that New Zealand is being marketed to people-smugglers as a destination. What do you think of that?

PM: That is not new. There has been chatter around New Zealand, as there is chatter around Australia, for some time. It is not new. The fact that we have been used as a destination in some cases, that may not have been the final destination that the smugglers themselves had in mind, but either way this is something that has happened before. The primary goal has to be partnering with those abroad as we are part of the Bali process to try and make sure that we stop people before they even depart.

Media: But saying we're a gateway destination—giving people visas so they can get easy access to Australia.

PM: Again, as I say, the idea of New Zealand being used by people-smugglers has been happening for a number of years. This is not new. Our focus has to be on continuing to do all that we can to work with our partners to stop anyone departing, because that risks people's lives, and as, also, I've said, in some cases the destination may not be New Zealand, in some cases. It's all a marketing exercise by repugnant people who are risking people's lives.

Media: If it's not new, do you think that the reason that Peter Dutton has done this is to launch another grenade at you for bringing up Nauru and Manus Island so much in—

PM: Oh, look, as I say, some of these issues pre-date even discussion around Manus or Nauru.

Media: Has there been any increase in chatter?

PM: Not that I've had reported to me in recent times. As I've said in the past, these things ebb and flow, and nothing that I've seen is out of character, and I would say that still remains the case.

Media: John Key said these vessels could reach New Zealand, were capable of reaching New Zealand, under the last Government. They were called scaremongering. Labour said that it was the Prime Minister's ghost ships. Do you think that they're ghost ships still or do you think that they're capable of—

PM: And yet, even under a Labour Government we were working proactively on ensuring that New Zealand was not used as a marketing tool to risk people's lives. That has not changed. We need to make sure that we work with our partners and continue to be a part of a process that ensures that we prevent people from even leaving a port, because this is treacherous water and lives could be lost.

Media: What do you think should happen to these people-smuggling boats if and when they do leave port?

PM: Ah. Well, of course, it's not up to me what happens to the boat. Some of these are happening outside of New Zealand's waters. If it were me, I would destroy the boats.

Media: At what point?

PM: As soon as someone's convicted.

Media: But what do you do when they're in the water travelling from Malaysia—

PM: Again, that's a situation that actually comes down to the point at which someone's picked up, and it ultimately relies on the international waters that someone's in at the time.

Media: Yeah, no, I'm just asking for your opinion. What should happen when these people are on the boat trying to make it to Australia—

PM: Again, those are domestic decisions for those individual waters that they happen to be in at the time.

Media: [*Inaudible*]

PM: Sorry?

Media: Have you had any advice that these vessels are capable of reaching New Zealand at all?

PM: I don't discuss the content of security briefings. What I would say is that we have to be vigilant enough to be prepared, regardless of the capacity of the boats. And, as I've said, that's something that successive New Zealand Governments have been mindful of because it's a treacherous piece of water, because people's lives are at stake, and because the actions of these people-smugglers is repugnant.

Media: Before your meeting with Hillary Clinton today, did you consider what, if any, diplomatic implications it could have with the Trump administration?

PM: Ah, no. Look, when it comes to the visits of those who are not guests of Government, I make sure that they are treated appropriately, in the same way that we did when Barack Obama visited New Zealand. It wasn't a formal meeting. There was, therefore, no media. It was a private meeting, and, in my view, doesn't change the importance of our relationship with the United States and whoever's the administrator at the time.

Media: Did you get any MFAT advice on that meeting?

PM: MFAT advice—you mean written advice in some form? I mean, MFAT were aware that I was having the meeting.

Media: [*Inaudible*]

PM: Sorry, sorry, one at a time?

Media: Did the United States briefing come up during your conversation?

PM: Oh, look, that was not the focus of our conversation.

Media: Would you have had a private meeting with Hillary Clinton were you not the Prime Minister?

PM: I doubt I would've been asked, but if she had offered, I certainly would have taken it. Again, you know, our relationship, as I've said, with the United States stands on its own, regardless of who is the President at the time. It is a strong and important relationship that transcends who happens to be in Government at the time.

Media: [*Inaudible*]

PM: Would I meet?

Media: Donald Trump if he visited after his time was up?

PM: If he requested to meet with me.

Media: Just a follow-up on the asylum boat—the Sri Lankan refugees who worked with these asylum seekers said that the boat was coming to New Zealand because it was less strict on boat arrivals than Australia. Why do you think that is the case?

PM: Our laws around people-smugglers are strict. They carry a heavy penalty, and those individuals would be pursued if they ever were to be in New Zealand waters. But, as I say, our primary focus has to be prevention, because that's what also prevents lives from being lost. It is a treacherous piece of water, and we need to make sure that we remain vigilant to ensure that those lives aren't lost.

Media: Your predecessor introduced legislation that allowed the detention of mass arrivals. At the time, Labour called it scare-mongering and, again, the ghost ships call. Do you think that legislation is warranted, or you don't think these vessels are capable of reaching New Zealand?

PM: Again, as I say, the Labour Government before that certainly was in office at the time that we were doing preventative work, so that has always been the focus of successive Government.

Media: Prime Minister, we heard today from Peter Dutton that New Zealand is marketed as the same country, essentially, as Australia. So New Zealand is put at risk because any refugees who come to New Zealand could go straight back across the ditch, because of the special relationship between Australia and New Zealand. If it meant that New Zealand was not at risk of boat arrivals, would you support legislation—

PM: Look, I'll make the general statement. I think regardless of New Zealand's policy and regardless of Australia's policy, people who are unscrupulous people with no integrity will promote either destination for their financial benefit, without necessarily those victims involved having any sense of the reality in either country. So those are individuals who are being manipulated regardless of the domestic policy of either country.

Media: So what do you make about the suggestion that Australia could ban refugees from coming from New Zealand to Australia? What do you make of that?

PM: Oh, look, ultimately my focus will always be ensuring that we don't have these boats leave the port in the first place, because that's how we save lives and that's how we resolve any of those issues down the track.

Media: Just specifically on that piece of legislation, though, PM, that the Australian Government—

PM: That's a matter for the Australian Government.

Media: If you did catch one of these boats, though, in New Zealand territorial waters, how would you treat the—

PM: We have international obligations, and that basically guides New Zealand's policy in the way that is managed.

Media: Yeah, so what would you do if a boat came to New Zealand's waters?

PM: Again, we have international obligations if they're in our search and rescue zone.

Media: And what are—

PM: The focus for us—of course, if a search and rescue was called, you have to undertake one, but what matters for us is actually preventing anyone being put at risk in the first instance, because it is a treacherous, dangerous, lethal piece of water.

Media: But what would you do with the refugees?

PM: Ah, again, and that's a process that we again have international obligations around. That's when you have to undertake a screening process, but anyone who is involved in people-smuggling, we already have legislation to deal with.

Media: Can you just clarify whether or not you think these vessels are capable of reaching New Zealand: yes or no?

PM: Again, a moot point. If a boat that is not capable of reaching New Zealand, or if one is, either way they must be stopped. Because even the most capable boat still risks people's lives, and it's in our interest, and, of course, those who are at risk to have that boat stopped before it even leaves a port, and that has to be our focus.

Media: Just more on Nick's question: does New Zealand have any laws about what happens if asylum seekers on boats, if they came into your waters?

PM: There are conventions, as I say, around search and rescue if someone comes into New Zealand waters, and that's the same for other countries too; no different.

Media: Prime Minister, are there too many cows in New Zealand?

PM: There's too much pollution in New Zealand, and that's why we have to have the conversation around water quality and water pollution. We are not talking about a cap on cows; we are talking about restricting the amount of pollution we have in our waterways, and I think New Zealanders would agree with that approach.

Media: Aren't they one and the same, when we know how much cows are polluting the waterways?

PM: Yeah, well, it depends whether or not you're talking about an area where there's a debate over intensification, whether there's a debate around a change in land use. Those are often the points at which we already have pollution, those conversations arise. But, look, what there is no doubt is that the Minister is doing a large amount of work with the likes of the Land and Water Forum but also representatives within the dairy industry to try and work through these issues, because they are complex.

Media: Do you agree with the idea of allowing Fonterra to not take milk from areas where they're doing big conversions? That was one of the Productivity Commission's recommendations.

PM: Ah, I mean that relates to our DIRA legislation, which obviously the Minister of Agriculture is going through at the moment. That hasn't always been, I think, the sole rationale from Fonterra's perspective. It's been more the geographic isolation of some of those farms rather than whether they see it as polluting the environment. But, either way, that's a debate for the DIRA legislation, rather than just the MPS.

Media: What's the timetable on the DIRA legislation; when might we expect to see it?

PM: Oh, my recollection is soon, but let me—I want to go and check that before I set you off on the wrong path.

Media: So the latest revelations about the safety of buildings at Middlemore—are you concerned about that?

PM: Oh, look, I want to ensure that all of our buildings, our hospital infrastructure, is, of course, safe. That's the whole point that people visit there is to ensure that they are well. To date, I've had reassurances that people's safety has not been put at risk by those buildings, but that's something that, of course, I would be interested in any report that suggests otherwise.

Media: Do you think, maybe, that Aucklanders are being a bit blasé because it has to do with earthquakes, and there's not many earthquakes in Auckland?

PM: Oh, there's no doubt that of course we have to be mindful of natural disasters—volcanic and ash-loading tends to be on top of Aucklanders' minds perhaps more so, but

that doesn't mean that we don't have earthquake standards that we have to comply with, too.

Media: Are you concerned about destruction to services or potential temporary closure of the maternity ward there?

PM: We're always mindful of disruption to services. That's something that we ask DHBs to make sure that they're very mindful of monitoring and dealing with directly.

Media: Will you step in at all to ensure that any remedial work happens?

PM: I think you'll have seen that already—the Minister's taking a particular interest in those DHBs where we have seen issues arise. We're working very hard to support the DHB and its new members to work through some of the issues that they're facing.

Media: Can we just go back to DIRA. In your talks with Fonterra about the Act, the new one, is the question of nutrient limits on the table as well, as a quid pro quo?

PM: I wouldn't be able to answer that to you directly. I've not been at the table on those specific conversations around DIRA but obviously the main focus for nutrient limits and other related issues more naturally sits within the MPS conversation.

Media: Quite a useful lever to have with Fonterra.

PM: I will suggest that to the Minister. If you want to have a direct conversation about his negotiations, I really recommend having a conversation. All right. We'll wrap up. Jenna, last question.

Media: Just on the decision to have a Sign Language interpreter here, have you taken into consideration having an official presence for our other official languages at post-Cabinet?

PM: Yeah, I mean, things like captioning and also Te Reo—that's obviously something I remain very open to, and within Parliament we've tried to make gains on, but I'd be very, very open to how we could make that work. Absolutely.

Media: Do you think Te Reo should be compulsory in schools?

PM: Universally available needs to be the first step because at the moment we just don't have enough teachers.

Media: The Greens are saying that's not enough.

PM: Well, at the moment I'd say the number of students who are able to access Te Reo is inadequate. You know, even if they choose to, it's not an option available often in some areas, so that has to be a goal—making sure that we have more teachers available. All right, everyone.

Media: The Greens say that compulsory—

PM: Last question, then.

Media: The Greens say that compulsory Te Reo in schools is still a priority for them. Are you ruling that in or out?

PM: And, of course, our initial focus, as I've said, is universal availability, and we've put time lines around that, and I know that's something—

Media: So that's a no—

PM: And I know that's something the Green Party supports. All right. Thanks, everyone.

conclusion of press conference