

POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 11 JUNE

PM: Kia ora and good afternoon, everyone. It's another busy week for the Government, but I wanted to advise you in advance that after today I will continue to work, but I will be basing myself in Auckland for the remainder of the week. The suggestion has been that my consistent travel may be tempting fate to a certain degree, so I will be travelling within vehicular distance from Auckland for the remainder of this week.

Tomorrow—just to give you a sense of the week ahead, tomorrow I will be announcing the appointment of the Prime Minister's new Chief Science Advisor. As will be well known, Sir Peter Gluckman is finishing up his appointment this month, after undertaking the role in a highly professional way and setting out, really, the framework for Chief Science Advisers going forward. But it will be a new chapter to announce our new one, and, as I say, I'll be doing that tomorrow.

On Wednesday, the Government will be announcing our final decision on the future of Waikeria Prison. And on Thursday, I intend to attend the Fieldays at Mystery Creek—all things being equal.

Today, you'll see that an announcement has been made around the Duke and Duchess of Sussex making their first official visit together to New Zealand in spring, around the time of the Invictus Games in Sydney. This will be Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's first major tour outside the United Kingdom, and we are thrilled to have the opportunity to welcome them here to New Zealand as part of that. Now, of course, Prince Harry's last trip was here in 2015, and this will be Ms Markle's second trip to New Zealand but, of course, her first in her new capacity. This visit is still in the planning stages, and we'll be providing further details regarding dates and itinerary closer to their arrival, but, certainly, I'm sure there'll be excitement around the country at the opportunity to show off all that New Zealand has to offer, both to the royal couple but to what I'm sure will be a rather large entourage as well.

I also want to advise you that Cabinet has today determined that our decision point on the future of our deployment in Afghanistan will be taken by September 30 this year. The previous Government agreed in 2016 to extend the New Zealand Defence Force contribution to the middle of this year. New Zealand, as you know, currently has 11 personnel deployed as trainers to the Afghan National Army Officer Academy. Our people have played in a very important part in supporting what is now a 17-year international effort. Now, we have had a presence in Afghanistan since 2001, with over 3,500 New Zealand personnel having served there over almost two decades.

Now, we've gone for a three-month extension rather than a one-year roll-over so that we are able to make a number of related decisions over deployments in the Middle East. So this will allow us a little extra time to consider further advice on Afghanistan in light of other deployment decisions, and you'll know that, of course, the decision around the deployment in Iraq is impending—it comes closer to the end of the year.

I also wanted to expand slightly on some of the decisions around Waikeria and justice reform generally. As I've indicated, Cabinet has today reached a decision on the future of Waikeria Prison, which we'll announce on Wednesday. I won't say more on that now, but I do want to note there is absolutely universal agreement across all Government parties that our justice system is not working. The American style approach of building mega-prisons and filling them with low-level criminals is not working. We are, as a Government, committed to making our country and our communities safer by reforming the criminal justice system, with a focus, in particular, on rehabilitation and stopping people from entering a life of crime.

Of course we need to make sure that the worst, most violent offenders are locked away and that prisons aren't used as training grounds for lower-level offenders to become hardened criminals, and you'll see through the work that Andrew Little is leading—which will engage the public through the justice summit that he will be undertaking in August—that we continue to have a focus on taking forward a reform package that takes into account every

element of our criminal justice system. It is a significant agenda, and I look forward to seeing that work progress, as do all members of this coalition Government.

[Interruption] Look, I'm happy to take questions. You sensed I was coming to a close, Tover. Go ahead.

Media How disappointing is it that Winston Peters reneged on his support of the repeal of the three strikes?

PM Oh, look, I wouldn't frame it that way. Cabinet had not made a final decision, and all of these issues are up for discussion and negotiation until the point that we finally settle. We are a coalition Government, and there will be different views. What's important is that as a coalition Government we absolutely agree that pursuing an American-style form of criminal justice system in New Zealand isn't working for us and we need to do things differently.

Media: It certainly looks fractious, doesn't it, because you say that, and then Andrew Little announced these things 10 days ago and now it's—

PM: He announced that he was bringing three strikes as part of a wider set of reforms to Cabinet. We hadn't finalised decision as a team. All of these things are subject to ongoing discussion, and what I'd highlight is three strikes was one small part of a much wider agenda that we as a Government have been discussing. We know that we can do much better at keeping our communities safer. We're determined to do that, and we will do it alongside the public.

Media: Are you happy that Andrew Little announced he was going to take a paper to Cabinet when he didn't have the sign-up of New Zealand First.

PM: It's always better to wait until Cabinet decisions are made.

Media: It sounds like you have made your mind up that Waikeria Prison isn't going to happen—

PM: We haven't announced that yet, but we have flagged that we'll be announcing what we'll be doing on Wednesday.

Media: But you've made your mind up about it happening?

PM: We've made a decision as Cabinet, and we'll be announcing it on Wednesday. I would advise against speculation before then.

Media: But it would—

PM: Look, what I've always said, and I'm happy to reiterate what I've said in this space before: as a Government we do not believe in building US-style mega-prisons. It's not the New Zealand way, it doesn't make us necessarily any safer; however, it is clear that Waikeria had some significant infrastructure issues that we've inherited. And so that's what we have to address on Wednesday.

Media: Did you express your disappointment to Andrew Little about him getting ahead of the Cabinet process?

PM: Oh, look, all of these things are a matter of discussion for each of us as members of the Government. As I say, three strikes makes up only a very small part of a much wider agenda, and we're continuing to pursue that agenda as a Government.

Media: Did you express your disappointment to the Minister for getting ahead of the process?

PM: Oh, look, as I say, none of these decisions are finalised until we have that discussion as Cabinet—and all our Ministers know that.

Media: Did Cabinet consider any assistance for Tolaga Bay?

PM: We did have a discussion around Tolaga Bay. You know, I've seen some of the aerial footage that has come through from our MPs and Ministers on the ground, and it's significant, particularly with another weather event coming its way. We discussed being

declared a medium-adverse event. I understand that now we have the request—formally has come through from local council there. That enables us to expedite that, and I've set out my expectation with the team that we move as quickly as we can. That will enable us to look at things through support through MSD—things like Taskforce Green—because, as I understand, particularly farmers need that assistance on the ground, and we're looking for ways that we can provide that as quickly as possible.

Media: Was there any discussion about what to do about the forestry—

PM: Yeah, there was, and that's a wider issue that Ministers are doing work on as we speak, and I think Minister Jones has made really clear, and rightly so, that at the moment the priority has to be making sure that we get the clean-up done, but we have to look at whether or not we're planting the right tree in the right place.

Media: There's a lot of attention on Singapore at the moment. What would you be hoping to see as the takeaway from that?

PM: I think probably New Zealand's hopes and aspirations won't be dissimilar to the rest of the globe. You know, we do need—and we'll benefit from seeing—long-term denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, but, no doubt, what particularly outside of North Korea will be looking at is tangible signs that that denuclearisation is happening.

Media: Why is it so important for New Zealand? Why should we care?

PM: Well, look, we should care about what's happening in North Korea because it's our region. But, actually, when it comes to nuclear weapons, so should the rest of the world. New Zealand is in a particular position, though, because not only is it our region, we've taken a strong and consistent view. We're not just opposed to the proliferation of nuclear weapons; we've consistently been opposed to their existence.

Media: Does President Trump deserve a lot of credit for us getting this far?

PM: Look, I've said before, it really will come down to where we land at the endpoint, and, of course, we all hope that we do see some tangible changes off the back of these talks. As difficult as that might be, I think we should continue to hold on to that aspiration. Look, for anyone, I am sure they would agree, regardless of who got us there, if we end up in a point where we have greater security, where we have non-proliferation and denuclearisation, we should celebrate whoever was at the table to bring that about.

Media: Is there a strange disconnect, though, when President Trump seems to be having fights with Canada but is potentially getting along with North Korea?

PM: Look, international politics is a fascinating place generally at the moment.

Media: Do you hold much confidence that we will get those things that we want to get out of the North Korea summit, given the fallout from G7?

PM: There's no doubt—and no doubt that we've actually been here before, so regardless of the international meeting that happened immediately before travel to Singapore, there has been other occurrences and expectations around us reaching the same point in the past. I don't think we should allow that to diminish our hope and optimism. We would all benefit from seeing tangible outcomes from these talks and we should all hope for them.

Media: Is there any opportunity for New Zealand to be part of the offering trade inducements or opportunities for New Zealand in trade with North Korea?

PM: That's not something that's been formally raised, so it's still incumbent on us to enforce those existing arrangements that are already in place. But, you know, as members of the international community, if that were an outcome that were to be discussed, then, of course, we would want to hear from the international community what those expectations were, but at this point it hasn't been raised.

Media: Can you clarify when you expect the decision on the Iraq deployment to be made? Is that before Afghanistan?

PM: After. My recollection of the date, Audrey, is November, from memory.

Media: But that's when—

PM: The mandate ends, and, therefore, the expectation will be a decision would be made sometime before that.

Media: Well before that, I would've thought.

PM: Well, of course, the mandate for Afghanistan came up at the end of June and we'd still be in a position to be able to extend that for September in order to make a more regionalised decision.

Media: [*Inaudible*] it would also extend to the Afghanistan—sorry, the Iraqi mandate, similarly?

PM: Look, that hasn't come up, to date. At this point we've got the ability to make that decision within the exiting time framed. What is particularly relevant for Iraq, of course, is we don't have currently a settled political environment. We're still awaiting the outcome of the election. There are a number of things to factor in, but at this stage Cabinet has not discussed the need to extend that mandate, for decision-making purposes.

Media: If you were to look at extending the Iraq mission, would you pull back on what was described as that mission creep, particularly by the Green Party, that was introduced last year?

PM: Look, I don't want to discuss too many hypotheticals. At the moment, though, we are very focused on making sure that we operate within the mandates of each deployment.

Media: What's the latest with New Zealand getting a tariff exemption from the US for steel and aluminium?

PM: No updates.

Media: Just back on Iraq, Prime Minister, obviously there's no settled Government yet but have you had any indication from what's going on in that country after the election about the Iraqis might want?

PM: Oh, look, at this stage I think their focus would be on their domestic elections and election outcomes. Obviously, a lot of discussion going on at the moment around the nature of actually the election itself, so that's, I think, where their minds and probably the minds of the international community are.

Media: Why do you need extra time to make that decision? What are you weighing up?

PM: Look, as I say, these are decisions that are in quite close proximity to each other—the Afghanistan and the Iraq deployment. Of course, we're always considering where we have our people deployed generally. It's particularly, I think, important within that regional context to have a bit of a think around the future of our deployments within a region and the political environment that exists. As I say, we're only extending out till September just to give ourselves a little bit more time to consider that regional environment.

Media: Did you agree with the Greens last year when they said they had the mission creep in Iraq?

PM: Look, there's been some discussion over the mandate around training from what I've seen around that particular deployment. It seems to have stayed relatively intact, but there have been bits around the edges where people have contested whether there has been or not. I think what's important is that for us as Government, we deal with each decision as it comes to us and reflect on the mandate that was originally given. I can't reflect on decisions made by other Governments in that regard.

Media: Ten days ago, Andrew Little also signalled a few other things in the justice area: shorter sentences to be served on home detention—that was expected to go to Cabinet today as well. So has that all been scrapped?

PM: As the Minister himself has said, his preference is that we consider all of these issues not in a piecemeal way but together. He always had an ambition that the justice summit would be the place where, actually, the public and experts in the field were all able to input into. We are talking about a significant piece of work around rehabilitation, around preventing crime happening in the first place and justice reforms. It makes sense that they're considered at one time.

Media: But all of those things—for the time being, all of those things have been derailed.

PM: Minister Little—no. No, that's not how I would frame it at all. As I said at the very beginning, we are a Government that remains very committed to justice reform to make our communities safer and to make our system more effective. The Minister has made the decision today that he would like all of those issues considered by the public and by that group of experts together at one time, and that makes good sense. So, no; I would not describe it in that way.

Media: There is going to be a perception, though, isn't there, that the Government can't agree and can't get things done.

PM: That perception would be absolutely wrong, because, as I've highlighted again today, we are a Government that is committed to moving away to a US-style justice system to making sure we have an effective system that keeps our communities safe and that focuses on crime prevention, and we're still committed to that.

Media: If he didn't want the piecemeal approach, then why was he mooting taking these small things to Cabinet ahead of—

PM: Actually, we'd always had some discussion about them still being progressed as a whole, as part of the summit that's happening in August.

Media: So why was he doing it early if he didn't want a piecemeal approach to it?

PM: And, again, that's really an issue of semantics, because, as I say, it was the Minister's decision that he decided to keep it all together. It's something that's decided by and discussed by the summit.

Media: So it wasn't Winston Peter's decision at all.

PM: No—no, no. Around the way that he wanted to progress his wider package of reforms was absolutely a decision for Minister Little, but he's been very open about the fact that New Zealand First has raised some concerns around three strikes. And, look, I do want to highlight that within a coalition Government there are always going to be issues that you might take different positions on. The fact that probably over an eight month period we've had possibly two that have been canvassed openly in the public I think speaks to the strength of this coalition Government, more than anything else.

Media: What do you define as our second one?

PM: Oh, we had a very open discussion about 90 days, for instance. Beyond that we have made significant decisions as a coalition Government. Daily, we make decisions where there might be different perspectives and we come to a position of consensus. Again, I'm proud that as a coalition Government that is the way that we operate.

Media: You said there's been two that have been discussed—

PM: Oh, just off the top of my head, that's the one—those are two examples I would give.

Media: But how many behind the scenes then? How many have been trying come up with—

PM: This is my exact point. Every day we continue to have discussions. That's what coalition Government's do. And, over an eight month period, when you think about the scale and significance of the issues that we have collaboratively worked on, I think that speaks to the strength of this coalition Government.

Media: Where do the public go to see Government policy as it stands now? I mean, this is an election policy which has been dropped or delayed, and is it just the fact that—

PM: Coalition agreement, confidence and supply agreement, and the Speech from the Throne, and, of course, the things that we are able to produce as part of our Budget also forms part of our policy programme. Beyond that, as with any Government, every piece of policy that comes forward is a decision that we make collectively as a Cabinet, and that's what we pursue.

Media: So given now there's, essentially, a delay before some of these justice reforms are made—

PM: It's not a delay.

Media: Well, if something's going to be taken to Cabinet today, it now won't happen till next year—

PM: No, but they were all going to be pursued as part of the justice summit work anyway.

Media: So nothing was going to happen? So it was going to go to Cabinet and then just wait till later anyway?

PM: Yes.

Media: So Andrew Little did jump the gun. Would you expect to see any Ministers, you know—

PM: Oh, as I say, look, it's always much tidier to wait until Cabinet, but the Minister's actually made a decision that he wants all of this work to be pursued as a whole anyway.

Media: Did Andrew Little offer you an apology?

PM: There was no need.

Media: To reduce the prison population by 30 percent, obviously you're going to have to make much bigger and more controversial changes to laws. How confident are you that you're going to get the support?

PM: As I say, this Government has reaffirmed its commitment to criminal justice reform.

Media: Have there been any discussions yet around—

PM: And that's not just around, of course, what happens in that endpoint of our criminal justice system; that's also about the work that we do around rehabilitation and prevention as well, and there's a huge amount of focus for us on that.

Media: Has there been any discussion yet on specific things like bail or sentencing laws and whether New Zealand First would support changes—

PM: Yeah, as I say, we've had general discussions, and all of those, we also hope, will come through in the justice summit and the advisory work that we're doing.

Media: You said there'd only been two issues that the Government—

PM: Oh, look, again, off the top of my head—

Media: But what about waka jumping?

PM: Oh, that one's still—that's still something that's being processed through the House.

Media: So there are not different views on that one?

PM: Again, the ones we've openly canvassed—there's no secrets there. And as a coalition Government I would expect that.

Media: And what about oil and gas?

PM: Consensus, and another great example of the strength of this coalition Government, thank you for raising it.

Media: Do Ministers have your permission in the future to make these unilateral decisions to release certain things—

PM: As I say, no decision is final until it's gone to Cabinet.

Media: Have you spoken to Kelvin Davis about his performance at select committee?

PM: No. Oh, he did offer an apology to me, of course, though, for some of his language in the aftermath of that.

Media: So do you have concerns about his performance at select committee?

PM: Oh, look, I expect our Ministers to speak openly on the portfolios that they have. There shouldn't be an expectation on Ministers at an estimates hearing to speak beyond their portfolio remit, and it does strike me that some of the questions they were asked went beyond that remit.

Media: Can you assure New Zealanders there are robust enough arrangements when you head off to take maternity leave for this six-week transition—confident everything's in place?

PM: Absolutely.

Media: Are you feeling excited?

PM: Um, yes, of course—the impending arrival of a new addition to your family is an exciting time. I have to admit, though, of course, things like travel does add a little air of tension, because it means that you're not just managing the arrival; you are managing logistics in case things happen before you're ready. So I think it probably makes a little bit more sense for me to be grounded in one place from now on.

Media: [*Inaudible*] that Mr Peters would consult you in a significant national or security— at what level would it have to be to bring you back in, I suppose, to any decision-making or—

PM: Oh, these—yeah, I mean, we've set out in writing some of that already: issues of national interest and significant political interest. I mean, these things are often intuitive. We already know the things that we engage on and I would expect there just to be a continuation of that, as Minister Peters would as well. So, really, it will just be what we continue to do on a day-to-day basis now, continuing over that six-week period.

Media: You've said over the weekend if there was a Minister in Cabinet, if there was a disciplinary issue, that would expect to become involved? Can you just discuss—

PM: Yes. Now, that's more specific to the fact that if there is particularly a Labour Minister—I am still the leader of the Labour Party. Minister Peters is not taking over as acting leader of the Labour Party, so that's something that I would expect myself or Kelvin Davis to be involved in, yes.

Media: Prime Minister, just following on from Stacy's question before, has there been a directive to Ministers today setting out that they are not to talk about announcements before they go through Cabinet?

PM: It's always a given.

Media: But has there been a specific directive today?

PM: There's always a given that we wouldn't do that. It's something that really doesn't really need requirement to be repeating. But, of course—

Media: But has—

PM: It's an absolute given.

Media: How's it going for picking out a baby name?

PM: Terribly. Do you have any suggestions?

Media: Winston.

PM: You're not the first to suggest that. No, but, actually, you know, first-time mum—I'm not sure that I would necessarily identify them very accurately as well. All right, last question; James.

Media: Prime Minister, what are your expectations about privacy when the baby does arrive? Do you have any expectations on what is and isn't acceptable with the privacy of the baby?

PM: Yeah, I mean, I certainly understand the curiosity that will exist. I do, and so I'm keen to make sure that given all of the well-wishes that we've had and all of the kindness that New Zealanders have shown, making sure that we at least put out a response to that by sharing the good news. So we're trying to find ways that we can do that whilst also balancing the fact that we hope to have a little bit of quiet time together as a family too. So that's the balance to be struck.

Media: But outside that media planning, though, that you're working—I mean, what is and isn't appropriate of people who want to take photos of the baby? That'll be—

PM: By the media?

Media: No, regular people—members of the public.

PM: Let's just say that I hope we don't find ourselves in a situation where New Zealand media follows Australian media. All right, thanks, everyone.

conclusion of press conference