

POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 13 MAY 2019

Acting PM (Rt Hon Winston Peters): Good afternoon. This will be, sadly, a very brief press conference because of logistics and other events happening later on today. Today, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern is in Paris for talks with country leaders and tech companies on the Christchurch call. They plan to help end terrorist and extreme content being posted and shared on social media.

Tonight I'm hosting UN Secretary-General Guterres in Auckland, and we'll be leaving shortly after the post-Cabinet press conference, as I said. Tomorrow, we head to Fiji with the UN Secretary-General to attend the Pacific leaders meeting in Suva, 14 - 16 May, on behalf of the Prime Minister. So during this time Kelvin Davis will be Acting Prime Minister. Upon my return on Thursday, I will resume Acting Prime Minister duties until Prime Minister Ardern arrives back, Air New Zealand, on Saturday morning.

Can I just say I'd like to take this chance to acknowledge the passing of Sir Hec Busby, who died at the weekend. He was an esteemed kaumatua of Tai Tokerau, a master carver and waka builder, a navigator with a curious mind, a story for every occasion, and now a legacy that will not be forgotten. Our thoughts are with Sir Hec's whānau at this time.

This morning, I had the pleasure to see, alongside the Minister of Defence, the arrival of our new state-of-the-art dive and hydrographic vessel due to be formally launched on 7 June. It's an important vessel purchased by this Government that gives substance to our Pacific reset. The new ship will vastly improve our ability to assist both ourselves and our Pacific neighbours in times of need and boost New Zealand's maritime presence in the South-west Pacific. I do encourage you all to go down to Wellington's Queens Wharf and see what a project delivered on time, on budget looks like.

Now, I'd also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mike Williams and the Howard League on their results in the first eight months of their driving offenders programme. This is a programme funded by the Provincial Growth Fund, aimed at young people on probation for driving offences, and you will recall, in the Māori world, when it comes to offences, more than one out of two starts their first offence with a driving offence, namely not having a licence. Eight months in, they've helped 1,111 offenders pass their driving licence tests, 68.86 percent of which are Māori. The flow-on effects of a programme like this are huge. For ex-offenders seeking entry-level jobs, a driver's licence is not just a requirement; it's an essential visa to gaining employment. With programmes like this, regions will have safer roads with fewer unlicensed drivers, a supply of work-ready people, and higher levels of employment. Programmes like this leave, and have the potential to create, real social and economic benefits in the local community.

Now, in a speech just 18 months ago, it was outlined from here the reasons why this coalition Government was being formed. Announcements like the one made yesterday are a firm reminder of the fundamental direction of this Government: to turn the tide of irresponsible capitalism and manage the economy in a way that benefits all New Zealanders. And yesterday the Prime Minister and housing Minister unveiled measures that will help the largest number of chronic homeless people ever. These measures will, in the immediate term, turn around the lives of more than 1,000 long-term homeless people by not only helping them into homes but also connecting them with health and social services that can tackle the prevalent and complex problems many long-term homeless have.

Today, Cabinet signed off on the residential tenancies healthy homes standards that will lift the living conditions of over 600,000 New Zealanders, or New Zealand families, who live in rented homes. This is a further delivery on our priority towards New Zealanders having a warm and dry home to improve the well-being of our citizens and their families. The Healthy Homes Guarantee Act passed in December means standards approved by Cabinet today

for heating, insulation, ventilation, moisture, and drainage, and draught-stopping will be set to make rental homes warmer and drier.

In setting these standards we took into consideration almost 800 submissions reflecting the views of landlords and of tenants. Our job was to find the balance between people having warm, dry homes whilst not imposing unrealistic expectations and costs on landlords. We also considered the rights of tenants to enjoy the benefits of these changes as soon as possible and the reality for landlords to have the time and the resources needed to comply. These measures are aimed at attacking the long-term challenges in New Zealand's housing market. They are a considered response to a desperate need and will require multiple parties to play their part. Any questions?

Media: What's your concern with Tip Top being sold? Why are you concerned that it's a European company?

Acting PM: Well, it was offshore-owned. It was bought back by Fonterra in 2001, and you may well say that the circumstances of Fonterra's management—under which some people got paid multi-million dollars for salaries—has led to now an added value company, an operation like that, going now on to offshore-ownership. How are we ever going to make it if, unlike other countries that see the need to take their primary-based products into serious added value for their own countries wealth and employment—how are we going to make it if we don't understand that message?

Media: Is that the view of the entire Government or just New Zealand First?

Acting PM: It's the view of every rational, sane person who looks at the kind of economy we are. And all over the world I see what economies do. Even economies without resources acquire base resources determined to added value. So it's a sad day, brought about by circumstances which may not be in the total control of Fonterra's current management. But there had to be, surely, some reflection when you see that event happening alongside Westland.

Media: Will this change your view on whether the Dairy Industry Restructuring Act will agree to Fonterra's requests to, say, not have to take all milk or not have to supply its competitors?

Acting PM: My view or the Government's view?

Media: Your view.

Acting PM: Well, I can speak on behalf of myself, and I have long campaigned for—as you well know—decades to try and get some sound nationalistic understanding of how we might progress. Will it have a bearing on our view? Yes, it will. That's just—you asked for my personal view.

Media: How concerning is it that 77 percent of crimes went unreported last year?

Acting PM: Well, if it went unreported, how can you exactly, with accuracy, know it was 70 percent?

Media: There's a report out today saying that.

Acting PM: No, I'm asking you a very, very significant question. I know what the media wrote, but, if it's unreported, how do you know that 70 percent is a fact?

Media: Do you have a different fact?

Acting PM: I'm still waiting for an answer but maybe somebody else has got one.

Media: Sorry, Mr Peters, it's the new *Crime and Victims Survey* put out by the Ministry of Justice using new Statistics New Zealand methodology, where they code and find out whether they believe a crime has been committed based on what people say in face-to-face surveys.

Acting PM: Well, yes, but I did read it, and I saw there's a category for people that hadn't reported a crime because they didn't know a crime had happened. Now, round about then you're getting a bit academic, very bureaucratic, and maybe not suburb and village - based in terms of what you're reporting. Now, I'm not challenging whether that's remotely accurate or otherwise. I just want to know whether you think it's accurate, as reporters.

Media: Do you think it's accurate, as Acting Prime Minister?

Acting PM: Well, I'd like to have a touch more substance behind that sort of research than what I'm reading. In the same way as I pick up the *New Zealand Herald* in the last few days and I'm seeing all sorts of figures on immigration without any exactitude as to what it all means. And I kind of think, here we are, in May 2019 where we need far better research than that.

Media: You're questioning that figure then? You're questioning that report that—

Acting PM: Which report?

Media: The report that we're talking about, the 70 percent—

Acting PM: No, I'm just asking you journalists—clever as you are—a simple question as to whether you believe it or not.

Media: You do, obviously.

Acting PM: You do?

Media: It's from the Ministry of Justice. It's not up to us to establish the veracity of the research.

Acting PM: Well, I've been reading the figures from the ministry of immigration for years too, and I know they're not accurate.

Media: Do you think if 77 percent of crime went unreported last year it's a poor reflection on police in the sense that the public maybe don't have faith in—

Acting PM: Well, say it was 40 percent—say it was 30 percent or 40 percent. It's still massively unsatisfactory, and it does impute the conclusion that maybe they thought it was a waste of time reporting it. So that's why we need 1,800 more front-line policemen and women, which we're bringing you as fast as we possibly can, with 445 back-up staff.

Media: Would you consider urgently introducing roadside drug-testing?

Acting PM: The Government is seriously considering that now, and we always have. If you're going to have drunken-driving tests, then you should have drug-affected testing of drivers as well. But what we've got to make sure we've got first is the scientific utilities all over the country to ensure that when we go for the test, it is scientifically accurate. We haven't, I can tell you, got those utilities now, and, before some in the Opposition start making the fool of themselves that they did last week, perhaps they could explain to us how, over the nine years prior to that, they put no money into that at all and underscored their neglect by having insufficient front-line policemen and women out on the roads.

Media: When's your discussion document coming out, Mr Peters?

Acting PM: On?

Media: On the Cabinet-approved discussion document that will go out for public consultation on the issue of roadside saliva testing for drugs?

Acting PM: Very, very soon.

Media: When you say "Very, very soon.", what does that mean?

Acting PM: Soon.

Media: In a day? In a week?

Acting PM: No, not in a day, in a week, because it requires one or two other requirements, including us being able to foresee the capacity of having the scientific utilities that are critical for us to make a judgment, which are far more complex than just alcoholic—drunken driving.

Media: What do you say to the families of the crash victims at Waverley, where seven people died because a couple got behind the wheel and they had been smoking synthetics—like, how long should they wait?

Acting PM: Well, look, that is just a disastrous circumstance, and it was tragic in its reporting and the reaction of the surviving partner, as well. We're not going to make politics out of that. We're going to do our utmost to try and eradicate the future potential of that happening over and over again by getting the men and women out there to do the job and by getting the scientific utilities we need to do the job, and we will do that, which is a matter of enormous priority for us. We'll announce it, and it will be soon.

Media: Do you think that a random roadside drug-testing regime needs to be in place before we go to a referendum on legalising cannabis?

Acting PM: Well, what's the connection?

Media: Clearly, if you're going to legalise cannabis, you're going to need some kind of regime in place where you can test for that—whether drivers are impaired.

Acting PM: Do you mean: if there is the potential for there to be a Yes vote, it heightens the need for both the law, the men and women, and the scientific equipment to do the job, the answer is, profoundly, yes.

Media: Would you like to see random roadside drug-testing in place before we go to a referendum?

Acting PM: Now, excuse me. Please don't try and put words in my mouth. I'm disagreeing with you about that. If that was likely to happen, then getting what we're going to do now in the field is critically important. But there may be a further reason yet to be decided in a referendum why it'd become even more important.

Media: What is your main focus at this meeting in Suva this week?

Acting PM: My main focus is to represent the Prime Minister—number one—to ensure that some of the issues about which we speak, which will be on matters like climate change and other issues like that, have a clear message from the New Zealand Government. But the part of our December or late 2017 announcement on the Pacific reset mentioned, in particular, climate change, to which we have increased the budget by \$100 million, currently, with respect to that issue. So it's to back up the Government's stance—the stance the Prime Minister would've made—and to have bilaterals with other leaders over there, but that's yet to be determined.

Media: As Foreign Minister, what's your view on America's decision on Friday to almost double tariffs on Chinese imports? It seems to be an escalation of the trade war. How do you think it might affect New Zealand and how should we prepare for it or react to it?

Acting PM: First of all, that is a matter for the domestic market of the United States to decide upon, and I can't comment in that respect. But, on the larger picture, it just makes—for those of us that believe in multilateralism and free trade—it makes our life more difficult.

Media: You mentioned the Howard League driver licensing regime funded through the PGF and how successful it's been. Do you have any other example of projects that have been funded through the PGF that have been successful yet?

Acting PM: I've got scores of projects that have been successful yet. It little behoves you to have that cynicism from an urban background, whilst out in the countryside

and provincial New Zealand, there are seriously exciting programmes starting. I'll give you one: it's a mussel farm in Ōpōtiki, neglected and forgotten all these years but which is on its way now—and it's probably 1/25 percent into the project—but it will be the biggest mussel farm in the world. That'll be hundreds of jobs and a significant driver for the economy in Ōpōtiki, but we'll add to that other added value projects as well.

So this idea that somehow all the jobs appear on day one when you make the investment demonstrates—not in your case, of course—how many parliamentarians have had no business background whatsoever. Now, we do not intend to put up with that sort of cynicism and urban grind against the export wealth - creating people of this country any longer.

Media: Do you believe in a—or do you support, sorry, a gun register?

Acting PM: I know that that is a matter that will be seriously considered by Cabinet, and we have to wait and see what its full ramifications are.

Media: Minister Nash told Stuff that he will be taking that to Cabinet and pushing for it with his colleagues—is that something you personally think would be helpful?

Acting PM: Well, taking it to Cabinet is always helpful. I don't want to [*Inaudible*] what Cabinet might think.

Media: Shane Jones, this morning, said he's partaken in “unnecessarily loud” advocacy for the Provincial Growth Fund at times. Would you tend to agree with that?

Acting PM: He had what?

Media: He had partaken in “unnecessarily loud” advocacy for the fund at times.

Acting PM: No. I wouldn't agree with that.

Media: He hasn't been given a dressing down—told to peg down the rhetoric?

Acting PM: Excuse me, if you know what the grind is out in the provinces of this country, in the places like Hokianga and Kawerau, Murupara, and all over New Zealand, if you saw the dilapidated villages and towns and hamlets that used to be part of our wealthy past, then you'd be rather loud about it—and I hope he keeps on being loud about it. Just because he's got a rather better understanding of the English language than some of you, there's no reason why he should be criticised. One more question, because I've got to get going.

Media: On overseas investment, you've giving us your personal view of Tip Top. Do you have a personal view on Eugenie Sage blocking the Oceana sale in Waihī mine that David Clark supported?

Acting PM: That matter's up to you to say. I can't answer.

Media: There hasn't been an appeal yet?

Acting PM: To the best of my knowledge, I do believe there is an appeal under way, and I should not contaminate that appeal by giving—even standing in for the Prime Minister—my view.

Media It's a civil case.

Acting PM Doesn't make any difference. I'm sure you know that.

Media: Can I just ask about the healthy homes announcement that you've made: did Cabinet sign off all of the draft proposals? What does that announcement look like?

Acting PM: The standards? Yes, they did. Sorry, but I've got to get going. Thank you very much.

conclusion of press conference