

POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 20 MAY 2019

PM: All right, good afternoon everyone. I'll quickly cover off the week ahead. On Tuesday, the Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Amendment Bill will be read in the House for the first time. This is a really important piece of legislation for our time, and I'm proud of the practical consensus we built to get this bill to the House. But I am keen to keep working on building that consensus out further still. On Tuesday, I will also speak to the Grey Power AGM in Kilbirnie, following the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Seniors' pre-Budget announcement there today.

I'll be in the House Wednesday, and will meet with the Prime Minister of Vanuatu. I'm travelling to Christchurch on Thursday, and I'm in Auckland on Friday to speak on the well-being Budget.

Yesterday, I joined many of my ministerial colleagues as we made a major well-being Budget announcement to break the cycle of family and sexual violence. As many of you will have already seen, our numbers tell a devastating story. One million New Zealanders are affected by family and sexual violence every year. Three hundred thousand of them are children. Only one phone operator operates in some of our crisis centres. There are eight Government agencies needing to come together to bid for change, including Attorney-General, corrections, courts, health, justice, Oranga Tamariki, police, and social development. And, as of yesterday, \$320 million will be invested to prevent family and sexual violence and to ensure consistent and effective responses in every community.

It is a new and collaborative and necessary approach that we're taking to tackle one of our country's most disturbing, most shameful long-term challenges—that of family and sexual violence. As the chief executive of Women's Refuge, Dr Ang Jury said of the Budget package: "This is the first proper investment that we've ever seen into this problem in New Zealand."

Our well-being Budget, to be delivered on 30 May, is about not just the strength of the economy but the health of our people, our communities, and our environment. We don't believe any one of these things can flourish in isolation. We will be delivering this Budget amid a slowing but still growing global economy, and this is based on the latest report from the meetings of the IMF and the World Bank. There are ways to set up our economy for this challenge—things like running surpluses; strengthening our trade in international relationships, such as the enhanced partnership I signed in Singapore last week; reforming skills and trade training to address labour shortages and productivity gaps; sustaining our environment by moving to a low-carbon economy; and keeping debt low.

Finance Minister will speak about some of these issues in a pre-Budget speech on Thursday. I will follow this on Friday when I'm hosted by Business New Zealand, with more of a focus on how we're helping New Zealanders to achieve their own version of well-being. And while the world may be watching, scrutinising us as an early example of the well-being approach in action, as the OECD reminded me last week, I want to make clear that this well-being Budget is one that is focused on New Zealand and planning into the future.

It finally means prioritising spending on areas that will make the biggest difference in the long term. It means taking mental health seriously, breaking the cycle on child poverty and domestic violence, and investing in crucial national infrastructure like building new hospitals and schools. We're proud to be getting on with the job of starting to fix the long-term challenges facing New Zealand.

Today I'm also announcing the appointment of Helene Quilter as the new deputy State Services Commissioner to replace Debbie Power, who's taken up the role as the Minister of Social Development's chief executive. Helene Quilter is currently the Secretary of Defence and Chief Executive of the Ministry of Defence. Over the last five years, she has developed and implemented the organisation's reform of investment management and asset

performance, and chaired the defence capability management and capability reform boards. The deputy State Services Commissioner is appointed by the Governor-General on my recommendation under the State Sector Act 1988. It's one of the most senior and influential roles in the Public Service, and it's great to see such a well-respected person in the role.

Look, I'm happy to take questions.

Media: Prime Minister, how confident are you that the Pike River re-entry will go ahead tomorrow?

PM: Look, you will have seen reporting coming out of the agency around planned re-entry. On the request of the families, we've really left it to the agency to announce and then manage the point at which they remove that final piece of concrete which symbolises re-entry into the drift. So that's something we've left them to manage. At families' request, it won't be a public event, but one where families will certainly be kept informed and close to that moment.

Media: Will you be travelling back down?

PM: No, no, I won't. But it was actually something I discussed with families at the time that I last visited. It seems appropriate to me that at that point of re-entry, keeping in mind there will be quite a bit of time as work is done to safely, actually, continue the entry into the drift, but that symbolic re-entry—I think it's appropriate we leave that with the families.

Media: What changed from the previous planned event, given that at that time media were going to be welcomed, etc.?

PM: Yeah, and obviously they were. And at that time all those present were briefed on the reason why at that particular moment in time the drilling for re-entry had stopped, to ensure that the lines going into the drift were robust and that the levels of oxygen were at the appropriate place. The decision at that point was made that, actually, in the future this should now be just an opportunity to leave it with families, keeping in mind it is really a symbolic moment. Re-entry into the drift is going to take a number of weeks and months. The progressive piece of work has—as they move beyond, of course, the barrier created by the concrete that will be removed, as I understand it, in the coming days.

Media: What assurances can they give that tomorrow morning they will be able to go in? Are there things that could change between now and then?

PM: And, again, this is one of the reasons—this is an issue that's been managed with the agency communicating directly with families. They've been kept in the loop around when they expect re-entry will occur, and I think the families have been really understanding that, of course, this is an environment where a number of factors have to be managed. And their No. 1 priority has always been safety, so they understand that the agency will finish the drilling at the point where it is safest to do so, and they've been really flexible about that.

Media: Is the Government concerned, though, about raising expectations, given it's such an emotive issue for the families?

PM: The families, the last time we met, absolutely understood, probably given their knowledge of mining and of Pike River, that there are a number of factors that the agency had to manage, and in that case it was the oxygen levels. They found the fault that contributed to that issue and now the agency is talking directly with families about when they expect to re-entry, and that's something that we're leaving to them.

Media: Just on the sexual violence announcement made yesterday, what money from the \$323 million is being allocated to Women's Refuge?

PM: I haven't got a specific breakdown for Women's Refuge specifically, but we estimate that roughly \$193 million will be provided directly to community and providers—so over 60 percent of the package.

Media: The CEO told us that she's disappointed not to be receiving any money. Is that the case or—

PM: Again, I just also quoted Ang Jury around her support for the investment that was announced yesterday, keeping in mind that the last Budget also put investment into frontline services, and this Budget does as well.

Media: Prime Minister, the Pike River re-entry, I'm sure you'd agree, is a matter of public interest. Why should the media not be there?

PM: Well, public interest, I absolutely accept that, which is why the agency, as I understand, will be providing photos and footage of the re-entry at the time that it's occurred. Again, that seems totally appropriate to me, but one of the decisions that they have made is to make the final entry at this point something that is a more intimate affair for family members.

Media: Were your coalition partners kept in the loop on this decision?

PM: I believe so. I believe that at the time of the last event there was some discussion over whether or not another formal event would take place. And at that time, certainly the view of the families seemed to be that in the future it would make sense to keep it at that point as something that they were officially represented at, but wouldn't necessarily be the same kind of open event that we'd had previously.

Media: Will there be a Government Minister there?

PM: No.

Media: Given that the fact that given it was so public last time and their hopes were dashed because of the oxygen levels—that that might have contributed to this decision?

PM: Certainly, that's a question, really, for the family members, but certainly that wasn't the impression that I was left with at the time. Everyone absolutely understood that there are a number of variable factors involved with re-entry and they absolutely understood that it needed to be a safe re-entry. So I found the families to be incredibly accommodating of the circumstances. But I think the public would understand why going forward we'd leave them now to have their moment and their time at the point that that official breach of the concrete is made.

Media: Whose decision was it to leave it as a private affair?

PM: Really, it seemed to me to be something that just emerged after the last event, the discussion over whether or not another event would occur, and, again, whether or not it would be something that you would have wider attendance, outside of families, and it just seemed to make sense to all involved—and, certainly, the feedback from families suggested—that an intimate event seemed appropriate from here.

Media: From technical briefings that you've had or your understanding of it, how likely is it that it will actually go ahead tomorrow—that there won't be another variable that prevents a re-entry?

PM: Well, actually, the message I gave to the agency is, I left with simply that they understood that safety was the No.1 priority. I was given an update on the progress of the particular issue that occurred a few weeks ago, but, ultimately, my view is that it was for them to manage the exact point at which they completed the re-entry.

Media: Are they more confident than last time?

PM: Again, I've been given updates, really, second-hand rather than directly from the agency itself.

Media: Is the deportation of Kiwis from Australia still corrosive to trans-Tasman relations and, with the re-election of the Morrison Government, have you given up hope of a policy change?

PM: My job is to represent New Zealand's views and interests and in that regard, my position and New Zealand's position has not changed. That doesn't stop us from having, of course, a productive relationship, and we will continue to do so but I will also continue to advocate around the issue of deportation.

Media: Did you raise the issue with Scott Morrison yesterday?

PM: In that brief conversation, no, I didn't. That was a call to acknowledge and congratulate him on his success at the election. We had a very brief conversation around the issue of the Christchurch Call; we hadn't had a chance to discuss that. But other than that, it was not a wide-ranging discussion.

Media: Will you still keep pressing the refugee resettlement offer?

PM: That's been something that, of course, the last iteration of the Government, and, indeed, the current, now, leadership are aware of our position, and that, equally, has not changed.

Media: Mr Peters said this morning that the Government was considering changes to the New Zealand Superannuation Scheme, whereby people that have been in the country for 10 years, he wants to move that up to something closer to 20. He said that the Labour Party was in the process of considering that. Could you just give us an update as to where the Government is with that scheme?

PM: No Cabinet decisions have been made.

Media: Is it something that's going to be happening before the 2020 election?

PM: Again, you'll know that I don't speculate on Cabinet decisions unless they have indeed been made. You'll be familiar, though, that New Zealand First has long held a policy in this area, and it's absolutely within any party leader's rights to reiterate that. But I note that the Deputy Prime Minister also acknowledged that no decisions had been made

Media: As Labour Party leader, can you make any comment on the Labour Party position on this issue?

PM: Again, at the moment, though, my issue is whether or not we're able to build consensus, because, regardless of party position, as you know, that doesn't mean that we generate that outcome.

Media: Prime Minister, what's the latest on the gun laws? You were talking about early May; is there any update—?

PM: Actually, it was much more likely, I think, actually—I thought that we'd talked about June, but, look, regardless, the work is ongoing. I know police are doing the policy work. Again, we haven't had decisions made by Cabinet on that yet but we are still—the expectation is that we move through that policy development process as swiftly as we can, but we will still give a full process to the public to engage in any potential further changes.

Media: [*Inaudible*]

PM: Not right now but work is happening in earnest, absolutely, from the police's side. This is a more expansive area of work to do, so it's not unsurprising that it's taking just a little bit longer.

Media: When you were talking to Scott Morrison about the Christchurch Call, did he give an indication that Australia would be signing up to it?

PM: Australia is supportive and endorses the call, yeah.

Media: Are they signing up—

PM: I believe they did on the day itself, Barry. They've already endorsed the call. Of course, the election precluded them from being able to attend the meeting, but they've been consistently supportive.

Media: Is Cabinet considering changing rules around KiwiSaver so that people who are over 65 and contribute to KiwiSaver, so that their employers also have to make contributions? Is that something that's being considered?

PM: Again, when we make any decisions related to retirement or savings, they will be announced. I'm not going to speculate on any other policy work that is being done or has been done.

Media: Prime Minister, can you clarify; are you certain that Women's Refuge will definitely be receiving some of that \$320 million?

PM: That is aside for service providers. I don't have a breakdown, though, of additional funding for individual services.

Media: [*Inaudible*]

PM: Again, as I pointed out, 60 percent of that package is for service providers, and I note that the chief executive of the refuge has been supportive of the package.

Media: Prime Minister do you have a time line yet for the Government's response to the mental health inquiry?

PM: Before the Budget.

Media: On the Debbie Francis inquiry, have you read it and what's your understanding of the picture that it paints of the Parliament?

PM: Yeah. Look, I have seen a draft but obviously not going to comment until it's officially released by the Speaker.

Media: Do you think we'll see sweeping changes off the back of that inquiry?

PM: Again, I'm really happy to answer questions tomorrow, but given I was given that in confidence, I want to be really cautious about any statements that I make until it's released.

Media: You've been in Parliament for a long time. Have you seen egregious examples of bullying or a problematic culture?

PM: You have too.

Media: Did the Australian Government inform you when it resettled two Rwandan men last year suspected of killing eight tourists in Uganda, including two Kiwis?

PM: We were not made aware prior to the relocation, but I understand that officials were informed in March, but we would not expect to be told about another country's resettlement before they undertook it.

Media: Do you understand why families of the Kiwi victims are so upset about the lack of consultation?

PM: Yes, but, equally, matters of resettlement, particularly this case, still ultimately is a decision between Australia and the United States.

Media: Why hasn't the Autonomous Sanctions Bill gone to a first reading yet?

PM: Yeah, look, it hasn't been a priority for us as a Government. I think it would be unfair, though, to imply that we don't have the ability to put in place sanctions. Of course we can, for UN-mandated sanctions, and we are also able to take action in other ways—refusal of entry visas, expulsion of diplomats, the suspension of aid and cooperation. So we do have a range of tools, and, again, for me the most important is that ability to make sure that we can implement UN-mandated sanctions. As you well know, our foreign policy position is to prefer a multilateral approach than a unilateral approach.

Media: There was a business statement from the Government in late November 2017 which had it set down for a first reading the following week. That never happened. Do you have any idea why?

PM: Oh, look, as I say, amongst all of the things that we've been working on, that just hasn't fallen to the top of our agenda. We have a range of tools available to us which I think we use absolutely appropriately. Look, I said—look, I see that the Opposition have said that it's one of their priorities, and they're absolutely within their rights, but I have not yet come across a situation where I feel that we've been unable to take a stand or a position on an issue and have needed this legislation in order to do so.

Media: The Leader of the House did put it on the business paper—that would suggest that it was going to be a priority.

PM: Look, I can't give you an explanation around the business statement of November last year, or the year before.

Media: Do you think that a US-NZ FTA should be a priority for the Government?

PM: We've stated that our trade priorities—yes, it's continuing to grow our trading relationship with China but also building greater diversity into our trading relationships through, for instance, the EU FTA, through the completion of the RCEP agreement; hopefully, through the Pacific alliance agreement as well, although that one's been rockier. With any potential US FTA, it'll be clear to everyone that the US has taken a very particular view on trade under the current administration. New Zealand will continue to advocate for its—you know, for its interests, but, certainly, trade hasn't been a particular priority for the current administration.

Media: Do you have any message for the families of people who have taken their own lives in the time it's taken for the Government to respond to the mental health inquiry?

PM: Ah, Lucy, you will know that a response to a report—ultimately, that is only one part of what this Government needs to do. We need to change the way we deliver services, and that is what we've said is a priority for our Budget. Yes, I know people are awaiting the individual response, individual recommendations, but the most meaningful difference that we can make will ultimately be in the way we do things differently, and I think that's what families are waiting for.

Media: Has Simon Bridges or anybody from the National Party given you any sort of indication if they plan to support the zero carbon bill through the first reading of the House tomorrow?

PM: Look, I couldn't give you a comprehensive response there because I'm not the only one involved in conversations, but it's fair to say that we're still very much hopeful that we're able to build consensus around the zero carbon bill. I wouldn't be surprised if those conversations would potentially be ongoing. It obviously has to go through a select committee process yet.

Media: You said at the start of this that you wanted to widen the support for that bill. What's the process for doing that?

PM: Oh, of course for me it would be, ultimately, I think, beneficial for New Zealand, particularly in terms of certainty if we're able to build cross-party support. We were able to do that with the child poverty legislation. Keep in mind that, actually, it was an iterative process and we undertook negotiations all the way through, the bill going through the House, including the select committee process. In fact, there wasn't too much negotiation before the bill came into the House. So the offer is still very genuine, but I'll let that run its course.

Media: This morning Winston Peters said that Cabinet was considering changes to KiwiSaver so that, as I said before, employers of over-65s have to contribute to KiwiSaver. Was he wrong? Is Cabinet not considering that?

PM: Again, as I've said on the issue around eligibility, I'll make statements around potential changes to policy when they've been made and decided on by Cabinet. I won't speculate beforehand.

Media: Are you disappointed, then, that the Deputy Prime Minister does seem to be speculating beforehand?

PM: No, look, again, as I say, a party leader, particularly around an issue of eligibility—New Zealand First has long had a policy on that.

Media: What lessons are you taking from the surprise loss of the Labor Party in the Australian election, particularly around some voters' opposition to more aggressive climate change policies?

PM: Look, I'm an observer like everyone else. I don't think it's for me to be an authority on what happened in the Australian election. I'm just simply not close enough to it, and even if I were, you wouldn't hear me pontificating on that. It's not my job. There will be enough of that, I'm sure, within those who commentate on these things within Australia. And, look, as someone interested in politics, I'm sure I'll observe that. But I've heard a number of factors raised around what happened in Australia.

Media: What are your observations as purely an observer?

PM: Look, I think probably the most interesting observation just was simply how this wasn't something that was predicted.

Media: The Francis review, kind of more broadly speaking, do we have a cultural problem here at Parliament?

PM: Yes.

Media: Can you elaborate?

PM: Well, you've all worked here for a very long time as well. I've worked here in several different guises and I absolutely think that this is a workplace where we need to make improvements. Of course, there's always often a lot of talk around the environment that's created here, by virtue of the long hours and the pressure, but I don't think it's fair for any of us to make excuses. We need to treat one another with dignity and respect.

Media: So is it time change?

PM: Again, I'll leave some of the commentary around that to someone who's spent a lot of time looking into the system much more deeply, much more closely. So that's something I'll leave to the Francis report.

Media: Government departments in general, around, you know, the culture of bullying—do you have an opinion on that?

PM: Look, that's something that, again, I think we need to deal with the evidence and information we have put before us. We've certainly had a few examples in recent times where issues have been raised, where we've, as a Government, have an expectation that they be taken seriously. And that's, I think, the expectation we need to set. You know, Government and Government departments—we need to be role models. We need to be exemplary employers, and where that's not the case, then we need to do something about it. Last question?

Media: If there's room in New Zealand's political landscape for a conservative values-based Christian party?

PM: Look, I've seen some of that discussion, and ultimately my view is that, you know, ideas way back from within the National Party are an issue for the National Party. All right.

Media: It might not be just a National Party issue, though.

PM: At the moment, when it's being discussed by a member of the National Party, it seems still to be a matter for them. All right. Thanks, everyone.

conclusion of press conference