

POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 14 OCTOBER 2019

PM: Right, kia ora and good afternoon, everyone. A quick rundown of the week ahead: later this evening I will join a literary awards ceremony at Premiere House that, I understand, will be livestreamed by Creative New Zealand from 6 o'clock tonight. Tomorrow I am in the House and speaking at the CTU conference in Wellington. I'm in the House again this Wednesday before heading to Hamilton on Thursday, where I'll be visiting my old university, attending a ground-breaking ceremony for a new facility before making a health announcement at Waikato Hospital later on that day. On Friday and Saturday I'm lucky enough to be visiting Nelson, including the Cawthron Aquaculture Park, the Arts Festival, and on Saturday the official opening of the Nelson airport.

Today, I can announce further steps to keep New Zealanders safe following the March 15 terror attacks. Obviously, you'll all be familiar with the work that we've already undertaken in this space: the gun buy-back obviously well under way. We now have more front-line police. We have 48 countries, three international organisations who've signed up to the Christchurch Call. But Cabinet has now approved an investment to double the investigative, forensic intelligence, and prevention work of the Department of Internal Affairs; \$17 million over four years will help us to step up our work here at home to keep New Zealanders safe from harmful content on digital channels. This will follow on from international progress made on the Christchurch Call.

We will set up a dedicated team to find, stop, and prosecute violent extremist content online. We're bolstering the Chief Censor's current work to assess and make fast decisions around harmful content. We'll strengthen our laws to ensure we can swiftly respond to violent extremist material—this is work we'll be doing in the longer term—and that also, looking at how online providers should be regulated as part of the media.

In New Zealand, in March, we saw the ease and speed with which an attack could be live-streamed. We saw yet again last week how those with hateful ideology have and will continue to use online platforms as a weapon. That was what the Christchurch Call aims to achieve across borders, and today's announcement means that here at home we will have a dedicated team focused on targeting and disrupting violent extremist content across our digital channels.

This will work in a similar way to how we target child sexual exploitation material, by working with online content hosts to find and remove harmful content. It's a proven technique and our work in this space is internationally renowned, as some of you will have heard from the head of the censorship unit earlier today. I know Minister Martin will be working alongside DIA and the sector to consider some longer-term work as well. But I am happy now to take questions.

Media: Is this done anywhere else in the world?

PM: Actually, it's a good question, Barry. As I've said, the model we use, I understand, is quite unique, but in terms of the way individual countries work alongside their chief censors, that would be a question for DIA. We are proactive. The issue we have at the moment, though, is that in the case of Christchurch or even the more recent case of Germany individuals are being taken away from the child exploitation work in order to work in this area. I do think we need to individually resource that team. This will enable us to have approximately 17 people who will be working, dedicated in this space, and make sure that we don't lose the work we do on child exploitation at any time we have a crisis in particular.

Media: Those 17 people, are they all investigators, because there's 13 investigators currently working in the child pornography space? So is this a much more beefed-up 17 investigators for extremism and terrorism online?

PM: Well, I know that the focus is both on preventative work, identifying and also undertaking investigations, and potentially prosecutions if required. The individual roles, I'll ask that perhaps after this we have the DIA team, who are sitting over to my left—will be able to give you a breakdown of their intention of how those individuals will be made up.

Media: What sort of practical difference will it make to the people who are actually actively seeking out the video?

PM: Well, two examples I can give you. One example is that we've recently had individuals who've identified, for instance, online games that could equally be deemed to be objectionable—some that have related to the Christchurch attack. We know that the censor, at the time that those were raised, was also dealing with the attack in Germany. This funding that we're announcing today will give additional support to the Chief Censor, so that they are able to deal with increasing demand on their resources. So it will mean that they can respond more quickly to complaints that are made by members of the public and make sure that we respond more quickly to what is often a very dynamic, quickly emerging issues that we need to address. So that's for the Chief Censor.

Online—this team will work to try and stop the quick progression of this material online, so issuing take-down notices, trying to prevent the proliferation of this material much more quickly. It is possible to try and reduce down the spread of this material if we respond quickly.

Media: But you won't be able to get it off the internet, will you?

PM: There are some platforms that simply may choose to ignore notices that come from New Zealand's jurisdiction because they may be international; their data may be held elsewhere. And that's where I think we do need to look at options like voluntary filters, and that's something we use already for child exploitation and we are now exploring for the issue of terrorist and violent extremist content.

Media: Who would need to be volunteering in order for that filter to work? If you're thinking about something like 4chan, is it 4chan's providers or—

PM: No, no. You'd be working with ISPs in order to make this work. And so that's the group that we'll need to be having those conversations with and that we intend to work alongside. You'll know the ISPs, earlier this year, off the back of March 15, made a decision themselves to stop access to some of those sites who were actively trying to spread this content. They have now asked the Government to give them a bit more clarity, and so creating a voluntary filter is one service we think we can deliver together.

Media: Prime Minister, are you annoyed that on the day that you're announcing this, one of your Cabinet Ministers—there's a photograph that's emerged of him using one of these banned weapons overseas?

PM: Well, obviously what I'm announcing today is extra resource for DIA to stop violent extremist content, the spread of graphic images that portray terrorist events or violent extremist events, and the spreading of some of that ideology that was part of the March 15 attack. If you're talking more generally about the buy-back and the ban in New Zealand, the most important thing to me is that that Minister wholeheartedly supports that ban, and he does.

Media: Does it undermine what you are trying to do, though, and make a mockery of what you're saying when you have Cabinet Ministers who go overseas and just wilfully use these weapons that you are trying to ban in New Zealand, or have banned in New Zealand?

PM: No, because it has not changed the outcome, which is that those weapons are banned.

Media: So you're not worried about it at all?

PM: Oh, look, it's not for me to individually monitor the activities of every Minister when they travel overseas. Would I have done it? Absolutely not, but the most important thing for me is that that Minister supports what this Government has done, and he does.

Media: Have you spoken to him about it?

PM: No, no, I have not. I only became aware of it probably about half an hour ago.

Media: Do you plan to speak to him about it?

PM: Oh, I'm sure when I see him next I'll raise it.

Media: What are you going to say?

PM: Well, ultimately, though, as I say, the most important thing is that Minister's support for the ban, and I have never questioned that. I have never seen any sign that he had any hesitation. In fact, I only recall wholehearted and vocal support for what we've done, and that hasn't changed.

Media: Did you manage to get from him during his shooting exploits whether he read—

PM: Whether or not he read the *Cabinet Manual*? I'm sure that I'll follow up on that at the same time as I talk to him about his other issue.

Media: Should he have posted the photos on Facebook?

PM: That's ultimately a matter for him. Given that he supports the ban, that's obviously a question for him as well.

Media: What are you going to say at the CTU conference tomorrow?

PM: Well, look, I'll be, no doubt, traversing some of the progress that we've made, give an update on the areas we have been working alongside both the trade unions but also the business community, on things like their pay agreements and also pay equity. But, really, it'll be a chance to reflect on some of the work we've already done over the last few years.

Media: Do you think it's fair criticism that you've been going slow on fair-pay agreements?

PM: Oh, we have been consultative, but our goal, of course, with legislation like this and a process like this is that the changes that we make we want them to be long-lasting, and that does mean building as much consensus as we can. But we've been keeping both Business NZ and the trade unions up to date with our progress in those areas.

Media: What should Andy Foster expect if he wants to try and renegotiate Let's Keep Wellington Moving with the Government?

PM: Yeah, I think you would have already heard, I believe, the Minister of Transport make some comments in this regard. Obviously, I imagine the new mayor—and I congratulate him on his new role—would likely wish to meet with his council, and also at a regional level as well. Ultimately, though, the plan around Get Wellington Moving has taken several years to produce and was supported, I believe, unanimously, including by the new mayor. But if he wishes to have a discussion with the Minister of Transport around the margins of that plan, then he is most welcome to do so. But changing wholeheartedly that plan, which, as I've said, the last council supported, and which took a number of years to develop, would be quite disruptive.

Media: Would changing wholeheartedly the plan include resequencing the tunnel versus the mass rapid transit?

PM: Oh, look, that's a discussion that I'd rather leave to the mayor to have with the Minister of Transport, and for, indeed, the mayor to discuss with his new council as well.

Media: And Justin Lester's loss on the Labour ticket—how does that feel as Labour leader?

PM: Justin ran as an Independent.

Media: Prime Minister, just on immigration, Winston Peters has said that the three immigration announcements over the last couple of weeks are a significant tightening up of immigration, and that's due to pressure from New Zealand First—

PM: Sorry, do you want to just give me the top of that, Jo—

Media: So the three immigration announcements over the last couple of weeks—RSE, the parental visa, and the Africa - Middle East component—Winston Peters has said that those three immigration announcements are a significant tightening up of immigration, and that that's due to pressure put on by New Zealand First at the Cabinet table. Is that an accurate account of what's happened?

PM: Oh, look, ultimately the decisions that we make, of course, as a Government do require consensus building, and so we do work with our confidence and supply and our coalition partner to develop our positions. What I would say is that these should be looked at across the spectrum of immigration decisions we've made. So you've seen a removal of the family link, which is something that was highly criticised as something that discriminated against those refugees coming from within Africa, for instance. We've seen an increase in the refugee quota under this Government, and you've seen work to try and remove the exploitation against migrant communities.

And so, yes there will be elements, obviously. We've reopened a parent category: that seems to have been lost in the debate—that this was a category that was previously closed; it's been reopened. But, yes, there's criteria attached to that. All of this is off the back of consensus building that I'd say reflects the make-up of this Government.

Media: Because you—I mean, you sort of celebrated that moratorium being lifted on that visa, yet Winston Peters has said that whilst, yes, it's come back in, it's much tougher, and that cap and the change from the income being attached to the child rather than the parent and the doubling of the amount is all due to the influence of New Zealand First.

PM: As I've just said, we require consensus for these policies, and so of course there will be input from other parties that make up our Government. I absolutely acknowledge that, but at the same time we've also seen the category reopened, after having been closed and no one being able to access New Zealand through that category since, if I recall correctly, 2016. So it is open. There has always been limitations to it; there's always been criteria. There's never been a scenario where simply by virtue of being the parent of someone who's successfully granted the ability to stay in New Zealand has been simply able to apply. It's always had tests attached to it. It happens to be that those tests have now changed.

Media: And so, just lastly, just in terms of that tightening, Winston Peters referred to that as being returned to a nationalist approach. That's somewhat at odds with what you talked about in the United Nations and a multilateral approach. Do you see New Zealand in terms of immigration and its settings moving back towards nationalism?

PM: I refer back to my first answer. When you look at our immigration policy in its totality, it is balanced. We've increased the refugee quota, we've removed that discriminatory family link. We're addressing issues of exploitation, particularly within our student market. I believe what we're striking—or working to strike within our immigration settings—are balance, where we're acting responsibly and playing our part in the global community, also making sure that we're able to respond to the skills needs that we have within New Zealand, and I believe that our immigration policy reflects all of those values.

Media: How much of an issue is gangs in New Zealand, particularly the increasing gang membership recently?

PM: Obviously, this is not a new issue, and I think it would be remiss for anyone to paint it as a new issue. Elements that have not helped—I would include within that, obviously, deportation policy of Australia has meant that we have had returning gang

members into New Zealand, often with little familial connection but perhaps with gang affiliation. So that certainly hasn't helped. But I would definitely not describe this as a new problem.

Media: Elton John came out and said that if he could be any woman in the world alive today, he'd choose you: "You are the one of the few politicians that I respect and love." That's an Elton quote—*[Interruption]*

PM: Why do you laugh?

Media: I was just wondering if you have a response to his praise of you?

PM: Oh, I was genuinely humbled and flattered and more than a little surprised, because you don't often hear someone of his standing and, you know, his role, wanting to be a politician. So there's very few that I ever hear putting their hand up for that. But I was very humbled by it.

Media: Will you be going to his concert at the Mission Estate next year?

PM: Yeah, I'm not currently booked, but I do—it's in February, isn't it? So I wouldn't rule it out—haven't made plans out that far yet, Barry.

Media: So can you feel the love tonight?

PM: Ha, ha! You will not be getting a bar from me if that's what you're looking for.

Media: Prime Minister, you said Justin Lester ran as an Independent. He has Labour branding on some of his campaign literature. Was that an error?

PM: No. Well, look, my reference there, you know, in terms of the way he branded himself in the campaign, you know, wasn't overt in that regard. But do I see that as a reflection? I don't. That's my response to that. I don't see it as a reflection. Unlike other countries, where you often see those really direct linkages between central government and local, our local campaigns are very local. I imagine that there'll be some reflection on what's happened in that contest and I'll listen out for that, but I don't see it as a reflection on anything centrally.

Media: How pleased are you that Mr Goff won in Auckland? You said you were going to vote for him.

PM: Oh, and I did vote for him, yes. Look, it's a continuation of a relationship, which is, no question, helpful.

Media: Justin Lester's campaigning work, though, was promoted at a Labour conference before the 2017 election as an example of what could be done at a national level. What signals in a negative sense does this send for next year for you guys, given the failures?

PM: Look, I think it would be premature to make any of those direct links and assumptions. I'm sure that there will be some reflection locally around the campaign and I'm certain that I'll hear some of that feedback, but at the moment I hear lots of chatter around issues around buses—very local issues, whether they were regional council or local. But I'll listen out for those, but I don't at the moment draw anything directly into, or read directly into, anything from a central government perspective as a reflection.

But taking a step back again, I look across the country—actually, you know, we see an increase in the number of female mayors. You know it certainly seems, on first blush, younger people coming into councils, certainly a bent of environmentalism across the country, it seems, on that first analysis. So I'll be interested to see the numbers, but it seems to me that actually there was quite a bit of change in these elections, and it will be interesting to see whether or not there's a theme to that, but at the moment the theme that seems to be coming through to me is a growing awareness of our impact, locally, centrally, on our environment.

Media: On President Trump's decisions to withdraw US troops from northern Syria, just how much does it undermine, I guess, global efforts to see an end to Islamic State?

PM: Well, obviously, any escalation of that conflict, I think, is worrying for the international community regardless. Obviously, as I've said before, New Zealand doesn't have troops on the ground. Obviously, our contribution has been humanitarian aid into Syria and that's because ultimately we have a number of vulnerable people. We have a number of camps that now there's disruption around two. From the international community's perspective I think de-escalation is what everyone's essentially seeking.

Media: Are you concerned that Islamic State fighters such as Mark Taylor could be released from captivity because of the situation in Syria?

PM: Ultimately, what we don't want is a lack of, at least, organisation around some of those camps. At the moment, there's obviously talk of them being quite a bit of significant disruption. We, of course, need to be prepared regardless around what might happen if we have any returning foreign fighters. At the moment though there's no suggestion that that's likely at this stage.

Media: The Trump administration's also imposed travel bans on some Chinese officials involved in alleged human rights abuses in Xinjiang. What consideration if any is New Zealand giving to a similar move?

PM: We, we like to think, have, of course, used our own voice when it comes to the situation that the Uyghur people find themselves in. Not only have we raised repeatedly the issue directly, I myself raised it with the president when I met with him and also Premier Li, of course, in April. Alongside that, we supported the UN human rights mechanisms, including the Human Rights Council, where this issue has been raised during the periodic review with China in November. And you'll also be aware that we co-signed, which was a significant move, a letter to the president of the Human Rights Council, and that was alongside, I believe, 20 plus others, raising very directly our concerns around the Uyghur people in China as well. We have used our diplomatic voice consistently and across many different forums to raise these issues.

Media: Why not take tangible action, though—something that has a practical impact on the Chinese Government?

PM: I do believe what we're doing has a practical impact. Of course, when New Zealand raises issues in this way, China is, of course, very attuned to the messages of the international community, and New Zealand has used its voice.

Media: What do you make of the situation in northern Syria right now?

PM: Look, as I've said, ultimately we, of course, were supportive of the work that was being done, of course, to contain ISIS, but ultimately decisions around troop deployments are still decisions for the United States.

Media: On fair pay agreements, could we expect to see legislation on that being passed prior to the election?

PM: We do want to continue with progress. The Minister will be making further announcements on the next steps shortly.

Media: Do you imagine New Zealand's deployments and Operation Inherent Resolve might change due to the developments in Syria?

PM: Not at this stage.

Media: Do you have any concerns around terrorism laws and revision of them if Mark Taylor were to come back—or someone such as him?

PM: Of course, we are constantly making sure that our legislative framework is fit for purpose, and that's something that we're constantly being mindful of.

Media: Are you ready for him?

PM: As I've said, we've got to make sure that we are fully prepared at all times for any occurrences, and I'm confident that we have taken the steps necessary.

Media: Just on Ngāpuhi, in terms of Sonny Tau's resignation, do you think that that will help or hinder the Crown in terms of their negotiations with Ngāpuhi?

PM: I think that's a good question to put to the Minister for Treaty negotiations. He's very keen, of course, that we continue—that we see some progress for ultimately the people of Ngāpuhi. They've been waiting some time. So that's something I think would be a valuable question to put to him. He is undertaking, I think, ongoing work to try and see progress there for what are at the moment different views on what the next step should be.

Media: The former Treaty negotiations Minister, Chris Finlayson, has been quite blunt about the fact that Sonny Tau was a problem in that negotiation. So from your perspective, what has your relationship been like with him?

PM: My relationship, actually, hasn't been the most important relationship in this, in seeking settlement. That most important relationship has been with Minister Little. Of course, my engagements have always been cordial.

Media: What's your observation on the low voter turnout this weekend in the local body elections?

PM: Yeah, I was just looking at some of the numbers, and at the moment it actually appears to be the cities that have brought the national turnout numbers down. So the national turnout numbers are 41.4 compared with 41.8 in 2016, but the average of turnout in each territorial council election actually increased slightly. So it was in the cities that we appear to have had issues, perhaps dragging down what otherwise would have been a slight lift, otherwise. So, look, my view is that we do need to make changes. It is unsustainable to simply rely on a straight postal voting system, particularly with the declining way in which people engage with their postal system. They don't check as regularly. They're less likely to know where to know return their voting papers. So I do think things need to change. Now, for me it's a matter of then asking the question: what does that look like? How can we do it securely? How can we maintain people's sense of security around the system?

Media: We can we likely see those changes made?

PM: Oh, those are conversations I'd like to have both with the Minister and also LGNZ. I know they'll have views. There are different options within, for instance, online—that might not be a straight online system, but just how you use online tools with your ballot papers. And then, of course, others raised the issue of whether or not we should have a voter day. Either way, we want those numbers to go up not down, and we've seen that marginal decrease, which no one wants to see.

Media: How do you feel about the GCSB's view on this? They don't like the idea of online voting very much.

PM: And that is something that needs to be overcome. I think, as I've said, I believe it's Estonia is probably one of the few that undertakes online voting. Their population base is, of course, you know, roughly a million people. They have good public confidence in the use of online services—good buy-in from their citizens—so a slightly different starting point than us. And so there is work to be done there, but that's one of the issues we have to satisfy. People have to have confidence in online voting for it to work.

Media: Will any of those changes be in place before the general election next year?

PM: There's no intent at this stage for the general election. We're obviously talking about whether or not there might be something we can do here for the local body election.

Media: Would you ever do it against the advice of the intelligence agencies—if they said don't do it, would you do it?

PM: Yeah, I think we'd need to be satisfied that their concerns had been mitigated, and that we could feel content that, actually, the protections were in place. And so, you know, perhaps there's room here for us to trial in certain circumstances. I'd like to see their

advice broken down, because, of course, some say that you could have a physical voting paper that's uploaded in the same way we do for overseas votes, currently, so there are some options in between. All right—thanks, everyone.

conclusion of press conference