

ALL OF GOVERNMENT PRESS CONFERENCE: THURSDAY, 23 APRIL 2020

Sarah Stuart-Black: Kia ora koutou. My name is Sarah Stuart-Black, and I'm joined today by Police Commissioner Andy Coster. The commissioner will give you a police update, and then I'll provide you with an update about welfare and border matters, as well as the state of national emergency. Over to you, commissioner.

Andrew Coster: Thank you. Tēnā koutou katoa. Today, I have an update for you on enforcement figures, I have some statistics on crime trends over the period of the COVID-19 lockdown, and I wish to share with you the police plans for enforcement of the alert level 3 restrictions. I wish to congratulate New Zealanders on the way they've responded to this unique situation. The vast majority of New Zealanders have been law-abiding, they have played their part, and they have heeded the restrictions. So thank you to those who have done what was asked of you. The breaches recorded by us represent just a small minority of the population.

Since COVID-19 alert level 4, Police has recorded 4,452 breaches of CDEM or Health Act—423 of these were in the past 24 hours—477 prosecutions, 3,844 warnings, 131 youth referrals. We've conducted 2,989 reassurance checks at essential facilities from the period 20 to 22 April. Over the same period, 3,144 patrols were completed. We have recorded more than 55,000 reports from the public about breaches; 1,535 of those in the last 24 hours. As we move towards alert level 3, it's important to note that police will continue to enforce the level 4 restrictions until 11.59 p.m. on Monday night. The sacrifices we have all made have made a real difference, and we must not get complacent. Right now, we are still at alert level 4, and that means we all need to stay home and save lives. For the next five days, we all need to continue sticking to the rules. That means staying at home, only undertaking essential travel, and keeping it local.

Ahead of Anzac weekend, I want to remind everyone that the alert level 4 restrictions still stand. This is not a time for complacency. Over the long weekend, you need to continue to stay in your bubble and stay local. Don't travel to your bach; stay in your neighbourhood. Similar to what has happened over Easter, police will be highly visible in communities over Anzac weekend, and this will include operating road checkpoints, making sure people are safe and complying with the COVID-19 alert level 4 restrictions. Any travel over Anzac weekend should be for essential purposes only. If you are planning to travel to your beach or visit friends or family, you need to change your plans and stay home. Officers will be visible in our communities and on the roads, including around popular holiday spots and on the arterial roads to them, to make sure people are aware of the requirement that everyone in New Zealand needs to stay in their current place of residence while level 4 restrictions are in place. Everyone needs to play their part this Anzac weekend: stick to the rules and stay home within their bubble and keep themselves and their communities safe.

Under alert level 3, police will continue to be highly visible in our communities and on our roads to maintain public safety, security, and order. We'll continue to take an education-first approach and urge all New Zealanders to familiarise themselves with the updated restrictions ahead of the change, which, effectively, come into force on Tuesday. Police recognise there will be a period of adjustment, just as there was with alert level 4; however, where we need to take enforcement action, either through warnings or arrests, we will do so for any serious or persistent breaches. While alert level 3 is likely to see more traffic and activity on the roads, expect police to be visible and question whether travel is permitted under the new alert level.

Reassurance checks will continue to be an important part of our work, and we will have a particular focus on large gatherings. No matter what alert level we are in, Police's focus will remain on supporting New Zealanders and making sure they are safe, protected, and

informed. This afternoon, we have issued a release outlining our approach to COVID-19 checkpoints which have been introduced by some communities where they felt they were particularly at risk. We understand that some small and isolated communities feel they have a particular vulnerability to COVID-19. Police is committed to ensuring our communities are safe and feel safe, but we do not encourage community checkpoints. Where communities have determined to undertake checkpoints to prevent the spread of COVID-19, Police is working with those communities and other agencies to ensure checkpoints are safe and not preventing lawful use of the road. Working in partnership with the local authority, the local civil defence emergency manager, local iwi, community groups, and police, we will assess whether checkpoints will persist or if there are other solutions.

If COVID-19 checkpoints for vulnerable communities are to persist for the overall safety and wellbeing of a community, they will be operated by district police alongside community members. We will be conducting those in a safe manner, according to police operational guidelines and practices. We'll be guided by the relevant alert level status as set out in the Government's COVID-19 response. We will not restrict access for people moving through for legitimate purposes. We recognise that community efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19 are motivated in the interests of the wider community; however, police must protect people's fundamental right to freedom of movement around their region for legitimate purposes. We'll continue to work with those communities and local agencies in alert level 3 and 4 to understand their concerns and needs, and we do not envisage a need for COVID-19 checkpoints to operate at alert level 2.

Crime trends—over the course of the alert level 4 lockdown, we've seen a decrease in crime across areas such as road policing, theft, burglary, and assaults. In comparison to a similar period last year, front-line staff have seen a 57 percent decrease in road policing activity, a 42 percent fall in theft and burglary reports, and a 26 percent drop in assaults. This is likely due to a number of factors, such as highly visible police presence in communities across the country, lower traffic volumes, and the fact suspicious behaviour will stand out more with fewer people around.

For the first few days of the alert level 4 restrictions, there was a 24 percent rise in family harm - related events; however, the number has stabilised to similar levels to last year by now. This is an area where we have been focusing on prioritising, and we do urge anyone who seeks safety from a family harm situation to call 111. Over the last four weeks, calls for mental health or attempted suicide - related incidents have remained steady, with no significant spike or decline.

We have completed tens of thousands of high-visibility reassurance checks and patrols across country in combination with day-to-day police work. At this time, we are encouraging everyone to be vigilant as they carry out their essential activities and, if they see anything suspicious, to report it to police. Thank you.

Sarah Stuart-Black: We know that a significant number of New Zealanders are finding things emotionally or financially tough. In the past three weeks, there have been more than 1,700 calls to Need to Talk? mental health line, and approximately 17 percent of callers to the mental health lines are showing severe distress. People are worried about moving out of level 4 and anxious about new arrivals into the country affecting their communities.

Last Saturday, 18 April, nearly 5,300 calls were managed by the National Telehealth Service for remote medical consultations, compared to 798 on the same day last year. The Ministry of Social Development continues to process unprecedented levels of applications, calls, appointments, and online traffic. In the past month, just under half a million applications for wage and leave subsidies have been received. More than 400,000 of these have been approved, supporting 1.6 million people and paying more than \$10 billion.

Since alert level 4 restrictions began, civil defence emergency management groups have made more than 18,000 outreach telephone calls to vulnerable groups. As noted by the Prime Minister earlier, they've also worked with community groups, distributing tens of thousands of food parcels to those in need. Yesterday's \$30 million announcement by the

Government will give further civil defence emergency management groups and local authorities the flexibility to provide more help to those that need it. I'd personally like to recognise the efforts of mayors, civil defence emergency management group controllers and officials, welfare agencies, NGOs, volunteers, council staff, and everyone else who has had a hand in making these vital front-line support arrangements happen. It's been a real team effort.

Through E Tū Whānau, MSD have processed payments for 30 groups totalling over \$750,000. The groups have ranged from iwi organisations to small local groups who've reached out to isolated community members. Pasifika Futures' partner agencies report that they've provided over 7,497 families, which is over 40,000 individuals, with family support packages, which includes household items, food, and petrol vouchers. More than 40,000 New Zealanders over the age of 70 have been contacted as part of an MSD-coordinated community outreach targeting older people living alone. Ninety-five people over 100 years have been contacted, and around 6,000 have been contacted aged over 90, just to give you an idea of the quantum. More than 1,000 rough sleepers have been put up in motels and connected to social services, and the Government's temporary accommodation service has also helped over 400 people into temporary accommodation. Migrant workers in previously heavy tourism areas are a group that we're watching closely. Given that they're not entitled to Government benefits, they're receiving food, accommodation support, and other support from their local civil defence emergency management group.

As of 19 April, the National Crisis Management Centre has approved around 2,000 travel requests on compassionate grounds. The majority of the approvals were for repatriation around the country of people who had finished their period of mandatory isolation after arriving back into New Zealand. All travellers entering New Zealand since 10 April have been required to either go into managed isolation in a Government-provided facility—that is, a hotel—or, if they have COVID-19 symptoms, to go into a quarantine facility, which is a separate hotel. They must stay there for at least 14 days. This will prevent any further unmanaged COVID-19 infection coming into New Zealand. There are currently 2,307 people in managed isolation and 104 people in quarantine.

Since 26 March, 42,901 foreign nationals have departed New Zealand. Of those, 27,427 people departed on commercial flights and 15,474 departed on charter flights. A charter flight to France departed New Zealand on the evening of 21 April. Five chartered flights from New Zealand to the UK and one to Thailand have been approved for travel between 24 April and 2 May, which will cater for approximately 2,000 people leaving the country. There may be up to six repatriation flights into New Zealand between now and 30 April, carrying a combined total of approximately 1,200 people. Repatriation flights from 22 to 30 April are scheduled from Fiji; USA; Tonga; Bangladesh, via Singapore; Samoa; Rarotonga; India; with a flight from Thailand yet to be confirmed. More than 1,250 expressions of interest were received from New Zealanders in India seeking repatriation. The first flight is expected to leave New Delhi on 24 April, arriving at Christchurch on 27 April at 2300 hours, 11 o'clock at night.

In Auckland there are 11 managed isolation hotels, expanding to 12 by 25 April, and one quarantine hotel. There are also hotels on standby when and if needed for them in Christchurch and in Wellington. The majority of flights are landing in Auckland, though Christchurch will take passengers from 27 April and Wellington is preparing to take passengers should that be needed. The process that is being implemented in Auckland will be replicated if flights land in those other locations.

I'd like to finish by touching on the state of national emergency. On Tuesday, the Minister of Civil Defence extended the state of national emergency to support the COVID-19 response, for the fourth time. The initial declaration was made on 25 March, and the seven-day declaration can be extended as many times as necessary. It does not change the COVID-19 alert level. As we prepare to move to level 3 next Tuesday, it's important that we continue to have access to the powers that are activated through the state of national

emergency to provide the help to us to maintain that level of success that we have seen to date in making progress towards stopping COVID-19 spreading in our communities.

The powers activated by the state of national emergency enable critical work to be carried out during this time, including managing roads, traffic, public places, providing first aid, food, shelter, and accommodation. The use of these powers during COVID-19 has included authorising local councils to restrict vehicle access to roads or streets to support social distancing, directing freedom campers to relocate, requisitioning a carpark for COVID-19 testing, stopping people from lighting outdoor fires to reduce the risk of fire-related emergencies, and allowing necessary maintenance to happen at a waste-water treatment plant.

Finally, I'd like to say thank you to all 5 million of you. Everybody in New Zealand has made tremendous sacrifices to save lives and to stop the spread of COVID-19, and your sacrifice is paying off. While we're going down to level 3—and that will be a relief to many—the restrictions are still stringent, and for very good reason. We're not out of the woods by any measure, but, if you're struggling for whatever reason, there is help available, so please do reach out. Thank you, and we're now happy to take any questions.

Media: Commissioner Coster, do you think Kiwis are becoming more lax—400 warnings given out in the last 24 hours?

Andrew Coster: We need to bear in mind that our approach to enforcement does have a bit of a bearing on how many breaches are recorded. It's fair to say there has been more activity in recent days. However, there has been permission for people to move to go and set up ready for level 3 in terms of businesses. Overall, the compliance level has been good.

Media: Over Easter weekend, for example, we saw a really heavy police presence. Will we see that same level of presence over Anzac weekend or even more police out?

Andrew Coster: Police will be adopting a very similar deployment approach to what we did at Easter, which is focusing on holiday spots on arterial routes, to ensure that people are abiding by the level 4 controls that will still be in place.

Media: Is it plausible that people who have said, listen, they thought we were in level 3 now, or they're getting confused between the levels—is that a plausible excuse?

Andrew Coster: It's very clear the level 4 controls are still in place. Even under level 3, the limitations on personal movement remain fairly significant—movement for essential purposes, movement for recreation, greater access to businesses. But, fundamentally, we are still going to be operating with limits.

Media: What would be your message to people who, sort of, say "What's the difference of a couple of days, if I start acting like I'm in level 3 this weekend versus doing it on Tuesday?"

Andrew Coster: The difference is, obviously, firstly, level 4 controls are still in place, so the controls are the controls. Under level 3, there will be more businesses open. There will be some people going to work because they are unable to work remotely. There will be some people attending education. So that movement will be permitted. The definition of essential movement is broader, and people are able to continue exercising and so on, as they are allowed to now. I would really encourage people, if they're lacking clarity, to go to the COVID-19 website. It is very thorough. It covers the range of questions that might arise.

Sarah Stuart-Black: I'd just like to say, fundamentally, every day makes a difference here. So by everyone doing their bit in all the way, stepping through this level 4 set of restrictions where we want people to stay home—every step of the way makes that difference. We don't want to undermine the amazing sacrifices that people have made, and that's what will happen if people don't stick to the rules. So we really need for people to stay home, stay in your bubble for level 4, but also understanding, when we move to level 3, there's a lot of

restrictions still in place, for very good reason. We really want people to help us continue to move down through these levels, but it will take everybody doing their bit to make that work.

Media: There might be quite a number of grey areas in level 3 compared to level 4—you know, bubbles are bigger, as you say, more businesses open, more schools open. Do you think that will be more difficult to enforce, and will people try to, you know, push the envelope there a bit and say, “Oh, I’m just visiting my allowed second bubble [*Inaudible*]

Andrew Coster: We’ve needed a lot of common sense to be applied across all the levels, and, in terms of police’s enforcement, we will still start with education. The Prime Minister has referred to this being a high-trust model, and it is. This needs the vast majority of New Zealanders to do the right thing because it’s the right thing to do. Let’s not squander the amazing gains we’ve had so far by being really disciplined and everyone playing their part.

Media: Do you expect people to, like, shell out excuses a lot more easier, for example, and say, “Look, I’m just—what I’m doing is totally fine.”, and how will you check those, I suppose?

Andrew Coster: Police’s enforcement effort will be particularly focused on clear breaches of the guidelines—for example, gatherings in public places and movement that is clearly outside the realms of what’s normal. We will need the vast majority of people to abide by the restrictions because it’s the right thing to do.

Media: Commissioner, what is your advice for hunters heading into level 3, and what will happen if they push those new boundaries in place?

Andrew Coster: Advice for hunters?

Media: Hunters—yeah.

Andrew Coster: That announcement has just been made. I believe the terms of it are clear in terms of people remaining local. For hunting, it’s only on private property, and it will be pretty evident if people are straying outside of that.

Media: What happens if they do stray outside and push those new rules in place?

Andrew Coster: If people are clearly flouting the rules, then we will take enforcement action, as we have done today.

Media: We’ve had reports—anecdotally, I should say—of an increase in the number of emergency service call-outs to mental health, suicide, and self-harm incidents. Firstly, have you noticed that increase, and, secondly, are all Government agencies prepared for an influx in mental health incidents and escalated concerns about that in the days after level 4?

Andrew Coster: In terms of Police data on mental health or attempted suicide - related incidents, our demand has remained steady over the past four weeks. However, that doesn’t mean people aren’t struggling, and there’s evidence that people are reaching out to access services in order to get help. It’s very hard to predict what the coming weeks look like, and so we just remain very attuned to how that situation might change.

Media: So just to clarify, you have not seen an increase?

Andrew Coster: In Police data, we have not.

Media: Commissioner Coster, on checkpoints there appeared to be some varied versions of how they’re working. Iwi, for example, across the country say they’ve been very successful, it’s very positive, though in recent days there have been some complaints. What has been the feedback to you from your team and from your officers about how these are working? Are they working well, and are they cooperating well?

Andrew Coster: We’ve actively engaged with iwi and communities throughout this situation. A number of communities feeling a particular vulnerability early on in this crisis took it on themselves to establish checkpoints. We have not actively encouraged that. However, where communities have determined that that’s the vulnerability they feel, we’ve

worked with them to ensure that lawful use of the road may continue. In this period approaching the transition for level 3, we are re-engaging with all of those groups to ascertain whether those checkpoints are appropriate and need to continue. And, if they are going to continue, then we will make sure there's a police presence so that lawful movement may continue.

Media: But has the feedback to you from your officers and from your team been positive or negative as to how these have been operating? Have they been operating OK from your perspective?

Andrew Coster: We have looked into the incidents that have been referenced publicly, examples of potential problems, and inevitably we've found quite some discrepancies between what has been described and what actually occurred. Where there have been any problems of significant note, we have dealt with those very proactively.

Media: Commissioner, it's been reported that for the first two weeks of the lockdown there was a cafe operating at National Police Headquarters. So first of all, how could it be that for a fortnight the police were the only people in the country able to buy coffee, and, secondly, did you buy one?

Andrew Coster: The initial advice that we—sorry, the operator at the cafe is a contractor to Police as an essential service, and the initial advice from the agency responsible for that was that that was a permitted activity in terms of helping to maintain the essential service that's being conducted at Police National Headquarters. It is a closed provider of food and beverages. It does catering for Police and also for some other essential agencies. That service provider engaged more recently to double-check that they were allowed to operate, and that led to guidance that they should not operate the front-facing part of that, which was providing service to Police staff, and so they quickly moved to close down the front-facing operation, and, yes, I was a customer of the cafe along with other headquarters staff when the guidance was it was permitted. We have been told that that cafe may reopen as an essential service. However, we have asked all Police providers to adopt the controls that would be expected of any public-facing business, including contactless pick-up and that sort of thing, to ensure that we're not in any way seen to be outside of the rules that are applying to everybody else.

Media: Were those operators amongst the people who were warned or prosecuted? I'm guessing not.

Andrew Coster: They were operating at all times within the official advice they had received, so there was no breach in that sense.

Media: Director, you mentioned these, sort of, welfare checks that have been conducted for over-70s. How many welfare checks have been conducted for migrants on work visas? Do you have that number right now?

Sarah Stuart-Black: I don't have that detail, but what I understand is that there is outbound calling happening to migrant workers and international visitors to check whether or not their situation has changed and what support might be required by them. We're also working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade to connect to the embassies and consulates where that's appropriate as well.

Media: Has there been any consideration to issuing an emergency benefit for migrant workers?

Sarah Stuart-Black: So there's a range of support mechanisms that are available to all New Zealanders in terms of making sure—and visitors and migrant workers—to make sure that those basic needs are required. Benefits is a different thing. So part of the announcement that the Prime Minister talked to yesterday—sorry, that Minister Henare spoke to yesterday—was regarding additional support measures to make sure that those that might not be eligible for other types of support actually are provided with the financial support that they need when we're in this period of response.

Media: Director, what do you know about the private jet in Dunedin? Is that a repatriation flight?

Sarah Stuart-Black: I'm sorry—I don't have any information about that. I'll look into it.

Media: The prosecutions that we've seen, do you have a picture of the nature of those in terms of are they mostly fines that people are receiving and how many of them are people being jailed?

Andrew Coster: That's not so much for the Police. Once we have initiated a prosecution, then that goes into the courts system. So no; I'm not able to provide you with that information at this stage.

Media: In addition to that, do you have a breakdown of what charges there were?

Andrew Coster: We would be able to provide that. I don't have that with me, but we will be able to.

Media: On those migrant workers, are you able to make clear what help is practically available for them? Places like Queenstown are really, really struggling, calling it a refugee crisis, essentially.

Sarah Stuart-Black: So a range of support is provided, including being able to provide those household items for people who might need them, support around rent and those kind of costs, but also other, sort of, support that might be required that might be about connecting people to the right services. So there's a whole range of workers that might be in New Zealand with different visa requirements, different kind of restrictions on what they can do, and with a number of businesses that might've been directly impacted that are actually needing some advice along those lines as well. We can provide an update, certainly, on all of those different measures that are available, if that's a helpful thing, after this.

Media: Commissioner, regarding the checkpoints, if the checkpoints aren't taken down and you have to provide a police presence, how many officers do you think you are likely to have to allocate to those checkpoints to keep an eye on them?

Andrew Coster: It would only be a small presence that would be required for that purpose. We have considered the best way to approach the situation. We operate a prevention-first operating model in Police; that means we aim to take actions to resolve situations if at all possible. We're mindful that an enforcement action here could escalate things rather than be helpful. We have a lot of empathy for the vulnerability felt by these communities, and we're working through it with them.

Sarah Stuart-Black: One more question.

Media: As we move down the alert scale, do you anticipate—you know, eventually, obviously, the checkpoints will have to go. What level would you say that they should go, and—

Andrew Coster: We don't see any need for this kind of checkpoint operating at level 2, so we're anticipating a transitional period and then that they would come to an end.

Sarah Stuart-Black: Thank you. Thanks very much, everyone.

end of press conference