

POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 8 JUNE

PM: Kia ora koutou katoa, ngā mihi nui ki a koutou. Good afternoon. Today is day 26 of alert level 2, and day 17 without any new cases of COVID-19 in the country. Today is also day 75 of being in a COVID alert level of any kind. Our team of 5 million has both sacrificed and achieved a huge amount, in just under 11 weeks, as the world reckoned with—continues to reckon with—a virus that went from obscurity at the start of the year to a global pandemic that will linger, with second waves a constant reality. As it spread rapidly around the world, we all saw people losing their loved ones and their livelihoods at a rate that was never acceptable to us.

So here in New Zealand, we went hard and early with a single plan that had a dual purpose: to protect lives and to protect livelihoods. Self-isolation for all returning travellers came into place first, 17 days after our first case. We closed our borders to everyone, but New Zealanders, 20 days after our first case. Our first economic package, including the critically important wage subsidy scheme, was in place 19 days after the first case; most other countries took more than 40.

And then, New Zealanders did something remarkable in our fight to beat COVID-19. We united in unprecedented ways to crush the virus. Our lockdown was in place 26 days after our first case, when we had just over 200 cases. Google tracking showed that, during our lockdown, New Zealanders massively reduced their movements by 91 percent to retail and recreation—better than Australia, the UK, the United States, and nearly every other place we have compared ourselves to.

Had we not acted, 11 days into our lockdown we were projected to have 4,000 cases; we had 1,000, and one of lowest rates per-capita in the world. That was what the sacrifice of our team of 5 million was for: to keep one another safe, and to keep one another well—and, as much as we could, we have. We acknowledge those, however, that we have lost during the course of our battle against COVID-19—but we have worked together as well as we could to look after as many New Zealanders as possible.

Our goal was to come out the other side as quickly and as safely as we could do; a place where our borders continue to be our first line of defence, but where all current rules and restrictions on businesses and services are, essentially, lifted; where all the rules for hospitality—such as single service, separated tables and people being seated—all end; where there is no requirement for physical distancing in work places and public places; where all gatherings of any size can occur; where life feels as normal as it can in the time of a global pandemic. And, today, 75 days later, we are ready.

Today, there are no active cases in New Zealand. We have tested almost 40,000 people for COVID-19 in the past 17 days, and none have tested positive. We have had no one in hospital for COVID-19 for 12 days. It's been 40 days since the last case of community transmission, 22 days since that person finished their self-isolation. And so, today, I can announce that Cabinet has agreed we will now move to level 1 to get our economy fully open again, and we will start almost immediately. We move down to COVID-19 alert level 1 from midnight tonight.

With over 100,000 new cases being reported each day, the challenge of COVID remains around the globe, and so it remains here. We are not immune to what is happening in the rest of the world. But, unlike the rest of the world, not only have we protected New Zealanders' health, we now have a head start on our economic recovery. That's because at level 1 we become, if not the most open, one of the most open economies in the world. Oxford University publishes a Government response stringency index, ranking countries from 0 to 100 in terms of their level of restrictions. Before today's move to level 1, New Zealand was at 33.3 while Australia, for example, was at 62.5. We were already nearly twice as open as they were.

The Reserve Bank's analysis shows the economy under level 1 is expected to be operating just 3.8 percent below normal levels; that's an improvement from the estimated 8.8 percent below normal levels under level 2, 19 percent below normal levels under level 3, and 37 percent under level 4. And it was encouraging to see economists recognise that activity under level 2 was also stronger than expected. Westpac, last week, said the economic recovery was tracking faster than expected, and that activity like heavy and light traffic movement and electricity use is back to or above pre-COVID levels. Zespri, too, has reported that, despite the global challenge of COVID, its exports are well ahead of last year—5.7 million more trays shipped this season so far than last season, along with its highest sales yet in Europe as demand for healthy produce grows.

At level 1, we expect the continuation of recovery. After all, at level 1, we can hold public events without limitations; private events, such as weddings, functions, and funerals, without limitations; retail is back without limitations; hospitality is back without limitations; public transport and travel across the country is fully opened. This freedom from restrictions relies so heavily on the ongoing role that our border controls will play in keeping the virus out.

But we must remain mindful of the global situation, the harsh reality that the virus will be in our world for some time to come. We are confident we have eliminated transmission of the virus in New Zealand for now, but elimination is not a point in time; it is a sustained effort. We almost certainly will see cases here again, and I do want to say that again—we will almost certainly see cases here again. And that is not a sign that we have failed; it is a reality of this virus. But if, and when, that occurs, we have to make sure—and we are—that we are prepared.

That's the reason our borders remain our first line of defence, as we aim not to import the virus. Borders remain closed, indeed, at 15 of our 17 comparable countries, as well. Our managed isolation and quarantine at the border will continue, and it will be as important as ever, as we know this is a potential pathway. And that is key, because we want to not just move to level 1, we want to stay there.

And so there is a key ask that I have of all of you today, and of businesses. We're asking that businesses and services where the public visit or enter to provide people the opportunity to maintain their own diaries of where they have been. So our all-of-Government team will continue working with sector groups, businesses, hospitality firms, churches, schools, and others, to encourage them to display QR codes via posters at the entrance of premises—as most of you will have seen at businesses you were out and about at over the weekend—so that everyone can maintain their diaries via the New Zealand COVID Tracer app. Manual sign in is no longer required, but we do ask that you put up a QR poster at your door of your premise, if you're a business, so people can scan it and just keep a record for themselves. Ongoing improvements will be made to ensure these QR posters are as accessible as possible for businesses.

We have also worked with the events sector on a voluntary code to ensure attendees' details are captured at these bigger events where we know the virus can spread more easily across larger groups. The reason for that is simple: if we get one or two cases in the future, which will remain possible for some time to come due to the global situation and nature of the virus, we need to shut down those cases fast. The last thing, as I say, we want to do is move back up the alert level system again. So this is a key new behaviour we're asking all New Zealanders to adopt at level 1. You can do and go wherever you like, we just ask you keep a record of where you have been by scanning in or just by noting down your movements for yourself.

I have one more thing to ask. At level 2, agencies have been managing the return of employees to work, with around 50 percent of people back at their places of work last week. Now, at level 1, you can, unless you feel unwell, go back to your place of work. There has been some fantastic adaptation over the past couple of months with flexible working, and this is progress that has helped people with care arrangement, it has also helped people to avoid congestion. And those are things we should not lose, but we can balance that with

also ensuring that we have thriving CBDs. For our part, we've asked the State Services Commission to issue new workplace guidance to make it clear that every public sector worker should return to their usual place of work, taking into account flexible work policies. We've got to level 1, now let's make our next goal supporting our recovery right across the economy.

I know that having such a firm sight on success for so long has sometimes made the road we've taken seem longer and the steps we've taken seem more laboured. At every step, there have been those who have pushed us to do something different, to go faster or further, but our collective results, I think, speak for themselves. That caution and hard work got us down the mountain safely when the descent is always the most perilous part. Moving to level 1 now is the dividend for everyone's hard work for now, but we need our team of 5 million for the next phase, and that is to get New Zealand moving again—as we move from the collective call to action to unite against COVID-19, to unite for recovery. I encourage you to buy, play, and experience New Zealand - made, to get our country moving again. Consider it an extra form of support—to visit our country, to buy our local products, and to support our local businesses.

For my part, this week is about the Government's recovery efforts and focus on jobs, and you'll be seeing that in my agenda. Tomorrow, I'll be in the Bay of Plenty visiting a kiwifruit and avocado pack-house to discuss how we can further assist the sector to attract workers, noting horticulture has already picked up some 2,000 workers who have lost their jobs due to COVID. I'll also check in with our Mana in Mahi scheme that gives employers the equivalent of the unemployment benefit to hire those who might be reliant on it, and an electrical business installing solar panels and heat pumps in Tauranga. On Wednesday, I'll be in Kaikōura for a tourism announcement. On Thursday, I'm in Auckland, making a health infrastructure announcement, and, on Friday, following our \$30 billion investment to protect jobs and restart the economy due to COVID, I will speak at a Visionweek summit, where I'll share further details of how the Government is working with business on New Zealand's economic recovery and rebuild from COVID-19.

While we're in a safer, stronger position, there's still no easy path back to pre-COVID life, but the determination and focus we've had on our health response will now be vested in our economic rebuild. And so while the job is not done, there is no denying this is a milestone, so can I finish with a very simple: thank you, New Zealand.

Dr Bloomfield, I now would like to hand over to you and give you the opportunity to say a few words.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Thank you, Prime Minister. Kia ora koutou katoa. Just three things I'd like to say. First of all, it's obviously very satisfying that not only do we have no new cases, and haven't had any for 17 days, but we also have no active cases in New Zealand—and, no, we haven't been saving that up; we found out about that yesterday afternoon. As you know, the cut-off for our cases is at 9 o'clock each day. It's a coincidence, but, I think, a nice and timely coincidence.

The second point I want to make is that—and like the Prime Minister, I want to thank people who have worked so hard to achieve what we've achieved over the last few months. And many of those people are in the Public Service, many of them are in the private sector, and many of them have been those essential workers that, in particular, made many sacrifices while we were in lockdown to help keep the rest of us safe. But, actually, the reason we are where we are today, and maybe have done better than we might've hoped, is because New Zealanders acted together in our collective interests, and we will need to continue to do that.

And my final point is the inevitable question is: could we have come down through the alert levels faster? I would just simply say we have come down faster and sooner and in a stronger position than any other country. Yes, we have been cautious, but we have not been overcautious, and that cautiousness has been part of our success. Thank you, Prime Minister.

PM: Thank you. Ready to take questions.

Media: Prime Minister, why have you broken with tradition and not given people 48 hours, and how much of a part did New Zealand First have to play in that decision?

PM: To answer your second question, nothing to do with it. The simple reason is that for most of the alert levels, you'll recall that we've had to put in enforcement provisions—so make sure that the orders are ready so that we can legally enforce any requirements that we're setting around things like mass gathering. At alert level 1, the restrictions simply remain at our borders, so there was no reason to have to leave a time frame to bring in those provisions. So that means we could move quickly, and so we've done that.

Media: Even on Friday, the finance Minister was saying, "Look, we have traditionally done 48 hours." Has the thinking on that changed since—

PM: No, no. And that has always been the case. And so what none of us—and you will have heard me say the same things. What none of us wanted to pre-empt was simply that Cabinet may have chosen, or there may have been some element of the decision making that may still have had an enforcement feature to it. And so if that were to have been the case, we would have needed 48 hours. As it happens, there are none, so we've moved as quickly as we could. We know that will ease the pressure on, particularly, hospitality; particularly, the transport sector. Now we'll be able to safely fill those planes, fill those buses, and cafes can get a few more tables into their spaces as well.

Media: [*Inaudible*] the discussion about borders with now the, obviously, the last remaining thing in place? Any more idea about timetables, or is that as long as it has to be?

PM: Yeah. And, look, what I would re-emphasise is that our border is critical. The reason that New Zealanders, as of tomorrow, will be able to move around with freedom that very few other countries in the world have is because we are maintaining those restrictions at the border, so they will continue to be critical. And that means applying a really critical analysis if, and when, we come to a position where we believe another country is in a similar position to us, and therefore we can safely travel between. We haven't put an arbitrary time line on it, because that simply comes down to a judgment that does rely on daily data, and it's simply the case that, at the moment, those decisions, we are just not ready to make yet.

Media: What was your immediate reaction when you heard there were no active cases of COVID-19 remaining in New Zealand?

PM: I did a little dance. Ha, ha!

Media: Can you show us?

PM: Definitely not. I showed Neve; she was caught a little by surprise, but she joined in, having absolutely no idea why I was dancing around the lounge, but enjoying it none the less.

Media: And what about yourself, Dr Bloomfield?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, I'm not quite as good a dancer as the Prime Minister.

PM: You have no evidence to base that on.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, my children, I'm sure, would opine on that. I've been described by one commentator this week as intense, but I did allow myself a broad smile.

Media: And just moving back to the borders, the fact that we've moved to having no COVID, does that make it harder, and do we want that from other countries—does that make the threshold even higher for them to prove that they're not going to bring it in here?

PM: Oh, and, look, this will be two-way decision making, of course, with anyone with whom we're opening our borders up with; keeping in mind, of course, there are Pacific Island nations asking or seeking the same open movement. What both sides need to make sure is that we're confident that we're not risking each other's status. So that will be critical

for New Zealand, given our current position, but, equally, it will be critical for others. Most people are focusing on Australia, of course, and I think we do need to keep in mind that they had roughly, from memory, half a dozen cases, I believe, yesterday, or at least over the weekend. They have had community transmission. We will need to move cautiously here. No one wants to jeopardise the gains New Zealand has made, and so we will be very, very careful when we make those decisions.

Media: Would it perhaps make more sense, then, to move to the Pacific where countries like Rarotonga, they've been calling for it; they don't have any cases. Would it make more sense to form a bubble with someone like that?

PM: We'll just make sure that when we work up a framework for making those decisions, we are keeping in mind that our Pacific neighbours within the Realm—so Niue, the Cook Islands, and Tokelau, some of which are calling for that travel. So we do need to make sure that whatever framework we set up will work across a range of different countries. But the focus has initially been on the trans-Tasman bubble.

Media: How hard are we going to fight for the elimination strategy? It's more extreme than just about any other country in the world. What are the—

PM: Do you mean the eradication or elimination?

Media: Elimination. Is there a chance we could go back to level 4, just to try and keep it down to nought?

PM: I'll give Dr Bloomfield that question.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Thanks, Prime Minister. So the elimination strategy, again, it's not a point in time. What I would say is at this point, we're confident—very confident—we have eliminated community transmission in New Zealand. That's a fantastic position to be in. But to maintain that, we need to continue our very strong border measures for the time being, and, of course, make sure we've got capacity and capability to test for and identify cases and contact trace, and so on and so forth.

I was asked last week "Is there a plan B?", and my response was "I haven't seen a better plan as yet."—and that is, I haven't seen a better plan for the health and healthcare system, and also for the economy, if you look at other countries. I think if you do the rounds around the world, for the countries that have gone into lockdown, we have come out faster than other countries have been able to. Many are still in lockdown and/or are easing lockdown measures, with still high numbers of active cases in their community.

Media: Can businesses, though, really be sure that we're never going to go back to level 4, because how could they plan—

PM: Yeah, and so in response to that, I would say for all those who have questioned whether we've moved too slowly, we've done so precisely for the reason that we've wanted to move with more certainty to lessen the likelihood as much as we could that we would end up going backwards. So it's my strong view that we've done that. That does not mean we will not have cases in the future, but I do think it improves our chances of if, and when, we do, to make sure that we are able to manage those tightly with all of the processes that we have set up—be it contact tracing, rigorous testing, with our quarantine, and isolation. So that's what's that all designed to do, is to try and prevent that escalation again.

Media: Is that threshold—is it still around the 200 cases, the last time [*Inaudible*]?

PM: Look, again, I think using cases is a bit of an arbitrary measure when, actually, again, as we've talked about all the way through, what you know of those cases is incredibly important. If you had 30 cases but they are all in quarantine and all came in from outside and we've held them all at our border, then that's a very different scenario than if you have 30 that have come up through community-based testing.

Media: The WHO has changed its position on masks. Dr Bloomfield, you've always said you were monitoring advice overseas. Will you implement what the WHO is advising here, or do we not need it?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, I think, two things about the WHO advice. I'm not sure it's changed its position in terms of its reading of the evidence, which remains the same as ours. The balance of benefits and risks is very close, and it depends on the setting. What their advice was was that where you have got ongoing community transmission, masks can play a role in terms of general public use. That is clearly not the situation in New Zealand, but we will, obviously, keep a very close eye on whether mask use could play a role as we move into the future and if we get more cases and, potentially, further community transmission. So at this point in time, though, our advice stands: we don't recommend or require masks.

Media: The Children's Commissioner released a really raw and upsetting report today into the experiences of Māori mothers dealing with Oranga Tamariki. Can I ask what your response to that report was, if you've had time to read it? And, secondly, there's a second report coming, and that will actually have recommendations, and so the question is: will you commit to implementing those recommendations without actually seeing the report?

PM: Well, look, what I'd say first of all—of course, any situation where a child is removed from a family is devastating, and we are actually all in the position of being completely of the same view that that's a situation no one wants in this country, but we, equally, have very high abuse rates in New Zealand, and so we, equally, are all united in wanting to change that for our children and for Aotearoa. What I would point to is that, actually, since July 2019, we have finally been funding ways of doing things differently, and there hasn't been a huge amount of time to allow that new way of working to be given a bit of a chance and to allow that new focus of working really closely, as well, in partnership with iwi—we have a number of examples of where that's been happening—to give that the chance to work as well. So we'd all agree change is required, and I'm seeing the signs of that, but, equally, I still see the devastating stories as well.

Media: The commissioner has said that every New Zealander should read the report. Will you commit to reading the report, and do you suggest the same?

PM: Look, as I say, I have had the report. I've gone through some of the summary elements of the report. I haven't had the chance to go cover-to-cover. Obviously, the Minister has, and I've spoken with her about the report as well, and so we have been keenly focused on supporting, resourcing, and working alongside Māori to change some of the outcomes that we are seeing, and we have seen—you know, more than 80 percent now of Māori children are placed with Māori caregivers or are being looked after by their own whānau now. That's making a huge difference. We have seen the fewest entries into care, in 2019, since 2004, and we have been working really closely, as I say, with iwi and with Whānau Ora to change up the way that OT is operating in many circumstances. But it is going to take us some time, but I think you can see the commitment is there.

Media: Prime Minister, when will the Government stop paying for people going into quarantine at the border?

PM: Yeah. So this is something that we've been working with the all-of-Government group around. I expect to receive some advice in the coming weeks on this, and decisions thereafter.

Media: Do you know how much funding has gone into it so far?

PM: I can't give you a number off the top of my head. Obviously, maintaining the strict requirements that we have and ensuring that we have the border agencies there present. Monitoring that people are fulfilling their expectations does come at some expense, but, obviously, COVID in New Zealand comes at an even greater expense.

Media: Given the importance of the border, would you look at perhaps making more long-term investments in the security of that border, perhaps building dedicated facilities instead of using hotels?

PM: Yeah, and keeping in mind that we actually have also—have had, at least—a struggling hotel sector while our borders have remained closed, so I think that's something to keep in mind as well. Originally, you'll recall that we used campervans but this, actually, was a way that we could make sure that we're providing adequate facilities but also monitoring and ensuring that people were behaving as they needed to be in a large group. Bear in mind, when we used the campervans it was a small number; now we're quarantining thousands.

Media: What do you make of the reports that the security at some of those hotels is not quite watertight? We've heard of people walking through a crowd of *Avatar* film makers.

PM: Yes, you're using the QT as an example. I might throw to Dr Bloomfield because, of course, the Ministry of Health and others have been involved in that quarantine situation.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: I think the QT situation is a first, in that it was a private group that has come and funded that arrangement. We're learning about that, and I think the thing that I'm most interested in, and I've have asked my team to look at, is whether there are any of the non-*Avatar* people using that facility who may have been at any risk. It doesn't appear so, but the key thing is if anyone feels they have been at risk, they should seek advice either through Healthline about getting a test if they think that's worth it.

Media: Have you actively contact traced those people at the hotel that time?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: No, we haven't actively contact traced, because it had nothing to show us, yet, that anyone was put at risk; so saying, it's a different arrangement from the very managed isolation facilities we have in Auckland and soon starting up in Wellington and Christchurch as well, and so we've learnt and will be ensuring that the arrangements for any future privately organised arrangements like that are strong.

PM: Keeping in mind, the Ministry of Health did assess them and are present. So, obviously, they're involved, but these are ones where they're paying for them themselves.

Media: What is our testing regime going to look like at level 1?

PM: Yes. So the border plays a very strong role in our testing regime for reasons that you can imagine, but perhaps I'll throw to the director-general. It's something that the Minister of Health is going to report to us on an ongoing basis around, as well.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Yes, so to build on what the Prime Minister said, at the border, we are starting, this week, testing of everybody coming across the border who is arriving whether they are symptomatic or not. They'll be tested twice during that 14-day period. We will also be doing surveillance testing of anyone working at or around the border. So regular surveillance testing there, so these are a couple of the measures we're putting in place to strengthen the border, and, likewise, our community-based testing will continue with very much a focus on anyone with relevant symptoms to ensure that we are still detecting if there is any potential COVID-19 over these coming weeks. So they'll be the focus.

Media: Will it be more GP-based rather than like those pop-ups that we've seen with all the cars lined up?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: It will be a mix, so, as it's been a mix to date, some designated practices. We will still see some CBACs, we'll see some mobile clinic testing, and we will see GP testing as well.

Media: Prime Minister, have you ever signed off on a foreign embassy being accessed by New Zealand authorities, including SIS? Are you aware of it having happened in recent times? And should foreign embassies expect to build inviolable—that they shouldn't be accessed without their knowledge while in New Zealand?

PM: Yeah. So a couple of things broadly, keeping in mind the role of Minister Little verses the role of myself—so that may be questions that you wish to place before him. As a general statement, though, what I would say is the world in many, many ways is very different than it was in the 1980s, keeping in mind that the New Zealand SIS does have to maintain strict legal frameworks that are set out in legislation passed in 2017, and that they are also audited. They have strict oversight as well by the inspector-general of security intelligence. So those are functions and checks and balances that exist in our system, so even though we don't have a tendency to comment on individual cases—and I don't want to do that on those past and present—we do have a very different framework than we've had in the past, as well.

Media: Would that legal framework prevent that happening again, or would it just mean that it—again, it wouldn't be reported, in a way that many other activities aren't reported, despite the transparent—

PM: Again, that does not stop them having a strict legal framework that they must operate within, and it does not change the fact that they do have oversight by the inspector-general, as well.

Media: So you're saying that any activities—

PM: An independent inspector-general.

Media: So you're saying that any activities that might be outside the law would be reported?

PM: Functions and roles of the NZ SIS have, of course, the provision of an independent inspector-general sitting over the top of them.

Media: If the SIS did raid foreign embassies in New Zealand during the 1980s, what would be an appropriate response now?

PM: Again, I think the most important point I can make is that the 1980s was a different era and, of course, that we have strict legal frameworks that our New Zealand SIS operate within now.

Media: And there are reports that Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia, are living in New Zealand under new identities. What truth is there to that?

PM: Yeah, so I think—you know, one thing I do want to be careful here of is not creating a precedent where I am commenting on individual cases or individuals, indeed, but I think what I can say is don't believe every piece of speculation that you read.

Media: What would be in it for New Zealand to provide a safe haven for them, in particular?

PM: Again, there's probably no need for me to get into a hypothetical, but, as I've said, you shouldn't necessarily believe everything you read.

Media: Prime Minister, the level 2 regulations, including that sort of warrantless entry power for police that caused a lot of consternation a few weeks ago—are they still going to be in force under level 1?

PM: No—no. And so as we made really clear at the time, those were provisions to enable us to enforce the restrictions that existed. And at level 2, we did have restrictions on mass gatherings. We did need the ability to enforce those if issues were raised. My understanding is that they were used on one occasion. But now we don't have such restrictions, and so they will not be used.

Media: Will you elaborate on that one occasion [*Inaudible*] here?

PM: I don't know any more detail other than that it was in the South Island.

Media: Do you see any merit in a public—national public health agency that's being talked up, might be a bit early to comment on that, but, obviously, you know, there's varying

levels of help and care that there can be for public health crises—do you see a role for something like that?

PM: Yeah. You know, when it comes to public health—and this is something I've spoken about many, many times—it has, over a successive number of years, not been valued as it should, and New Zealand, I think, is now more aware than ever of the work and the existence and the importance of our public health units. But they do much, much more than just what they've been doing through COVID-19. They are the ones that we turn to when we have measles outbreaks, when we're trying to deal with issues like rheumatic fever, when we are trying to prevent some of the inequalities we see in healthcare in New Zealand. They should be well supported and that should be well coordinated. And so you've heard already some of the changes we'd be willing to make, and I think it's a journey we'll keep going on.

Media: Is there something in particular that you, personally, are looking forward to doing at level 1?

PM: Well, actually, to be honest, many of the things that perhaps I missed really changed at level 2. Level 2 was, I think, probably for many New Zealanders, the most dramatic jump in going back to normality, and you can see that in some of the numbers that we've had coming out around Kiwis' behaviour in terms of those economic measures that we might use.

And so, for level 1, I think probably the thing that I'm most pleased about is knowing that our artists, our creatives, the ones who earn an income and a living out of being able to share their art with gatherings of people—that's something that we'll be able to bring back. And that also means a big difference for our faith communities, for people planning weddings, for those who have been delaying large funerals.

Media: And, Dr Bloomfield, with the relaxation of social distancing, do you have any advice around hongi?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: I don't have advice around hongi. I've said before, I think that's a decision for individual iwi to decide on, and I think it relates to hongi and also other, you know, other cultural practices, including our own, of often giving a hug or a kiss or an air kiss, as it were. So I think people just need to be a little bit thoughtful about that, but I think we'll leave it to iwi to decide around hongi.

Media: One of Māoridom's biggest festivals is the Matatini, where we share our traditional culture through dance. Last week, you spoke about talking with some of those music festivals—are you speaking with Matatini on their festival?

PM: Yeah, actually, I had a Zoom meeting some weeks ago, which included representatives from Matatini, who acknowledged the support that the Government had put in to really support them through this period, because, of course, there's been issues with sponsorship and making sure that we can continue on the regional work in the lead-up to Matatini at Eden Park in the future. So, hopefully with that support, we'll see Matatini as strong as ever, because I think it's just a festival that it is just going from strength to strength.

Media: Prime Minister, you've got one more Cabinet meeting before the caretaker convention kicks in three months out from the election, I was wondering if you could share your interpretation of that convention and whether you plan to make significant sort of political announcements sort of heading into that three-month period, or how stringently you're going to respect that convention, essentially.

PM: Yeah, well, of course I expect to hold up the guidance of the *Cabinet Manual* as any Government. I think probably the area where it's very clear-cut is making sure that we change our behaviour around significant appointments, for instance. So if there's anything that's really pressing, then you would look to share that and discuss that with the Opposition. Otherwise, I think it's something that we're well versed in—obviously, significant spending decisions are made, by and large, through Budget mechanisms, and now we

have the job of just continuing on an agenda that means we're supporting New Zealanders in our recovery.

Media: Just on the trans-Tasman bubble, when do you expect to be able to announce some kind of date around that—when are you looking at?

PM: Ultimately I don't want New Zealand businesses, in particular, or even Kiwis who might be wanting to travel across the ditch, to be given a false start; I'd rather share time lines when we have much more certainty, and at the moment, we just don't. We do need to act cautiously. New Zealand is currently ahead of Australia in terms of our progress. They are making progress state by state, but it's not universal. So we will keep up those conversations with Australia, we will keep preparing, but I do not have a date to share at this time.

Media: Prime Minister, how long can our economy cope with the sorts of travel restrictions—level 1 restrictions?

PM: Yeah, well, I think it's quite a difficult question to answer, keeping in mind we are still trying to work through mechanisms to bring home those who would be ordinarily resident here, to work through areas where parts of the economy might be held back and hundreds of jobs might be lost because of particular individuals with skill-sets that we cannot access in New Zealand cannot come in. And, of course, we've got to work through how we restart safely things like export education. So at this stage, I'd say it's too soon to put numbers around that when there are a number of issues we need to keep working through, but we are doing that in earnest.

Media: And you said earlier that New Zealanders should buy local—why then did KiwiRail spend a third of a billion dollars on work by Chinese and South African - owned companies to electrify the Papakura to Pukekohe line?

PM: Two things I'd say on that. I'll be sharing the same expectation with SOEs that I'm sharing with everyone—that, of course, within the bounds of our trade rules and expectations, we do want to see everyone doing what they can and doing their bit to support New Zealand's recovery. At the same time, we should acknowledge that any successful bid in that area, though, is obviously going to be looking to New Zealand labour, given the situation we have at our border at present.

Media: Given the wage subsidy is being extended, do you have an estimate on how many employees currently will no longer be *[Inaudible]* when it's extended *[Inaudible]*?

PM: We've had an estimate and I'd want to get the revised number from Treasury around their estimate of uptake. But, of course, it will very much depend on the status of the business for, you know, a 30-day period for the 40 days prior. And the reason that we've given them that ability to, you know, not necessarily take an exact period, is there is still the potential for some businesses to have experienced a real post—you know, a post-exit, a post-isolation, bounce that might not have been sustained. And so it is quite hard to estimate how many will use it and therefore how many employees will be affected, but we'll keep giving the same reporting we have in the past.

Media: Do you expect to have David Clark remaining as health Minister until the election?

PM: I've said many, many times he is our health Minister and I've no plans to change that. I'll take the last couple of questions.

Media: Will businesses be required to display the Government QR codes? I understand that was something that Dr Bloomfield had asked of the Government.

PM: Yeah, and we have discussed this very point and we have talked to the retail sector, hospitality, restaurant sector, and at the moment what we've opted for is to continue to work with them to make it easier for their members to access the QR code. At the moment, accessing the QR code does require you to have your business number and RealMe. We're trying to work on ways where, actually, we're dispatching out to businesses

their QR code to make it easier. So while we're still doing that, we've kept it at voluntary. We will keep working with the sector and we're keeping open the option of mandating that in the future. But at the moment, we're going to work together, and I do think that we can improve people's access to it.

OK? All right. Thank you, everyone.

conclusion of press conference