

POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2020
HANSARD TRANSCRIPT

PM: Kia ora koutou katoa. Good afternoon, and welcome to the last post-Cabinet press conference for what has been an incredibly long 2020. It's been a year nobody would have imagined just 12 months ago, and I'll share some reflections in a moment, but first I'll touch on Cabinet today and outline my week ahead.

Tonight, I will take part in a virtual summit with a number of world leaders to mark the 60th anniversary of the OECD. I imagine you'll all be tuned in! It'll be screened between 10.50 p.m. and midnight tonight. On Tuesday, I am in Christchurch to attend the opening of Kate Sheppard house, an important landmark in our country's history recently brought into public ownership. On Wednesday, I'm in Wellington for final Cabinet committee meetings, and I'll host the annual Barnardos Christmas party at Premier House. On Thursday, I am in Auckland, where the Government will provide an update on our vaccine strategy, and on Friday, I am in Auckland, doing a final media round.

At today's final Cabinet meeting for 2020, Ministers discussed travel bubbles, specifically with the Cook Islands and Australia, and, for the purposes of questions, I have Minister Hipkins with us today. Cabinet has agreed in principle to establish a travel bubble with Australia, we anticipate, in the first quarter of 2021, pending confirmation from the Australian Cabinet and no significant change in the circumstances of either country. Officials have been working on a range of matters, and good progress has been made. There has been some public focus on the requirement for 28 days free of community transmission, but that is just one of the criteria and areas where preparation needs to be done before opening. As important is having clear plans in the event of community outbreak in either country that may see borders close and potentially thousands of New Zealanders seeking to return who may need to go into isolation.

There are also arrangements to be made with airlines about the management of the aircrew and separation, for instance, of trans-Tasman flights from other services to ensure that there's no potential cross-contamination between those who are transiting from high-risk areas. It is our intention to name a date for the commencement of trans-Tasman quarantine-free travel in the new year, once remaining details are locked down, but I think, for now, New Zealanders by and large appreciate the approach of the Government to ensure that we are not taking on unnecessary risk as we're going into summer and a much-needed summer break for New Zealanders.

So, looking back on 2020, the year has been dominated by one issue: COVID. In the very first post-Cabinet press conference of the year, we provided an update on the situation of New Zealanders in Hubei province. Little did we know then that the evacuation of those Kiwis in China would, in rapid succession, lead to the closing of our border with China, and then Iran, and then the entire world. By March, we made the unprecedented decision of moving our country into a nationwide lockdown; we were amongst some of the first to do so. Our hard and early approach broke the back of the virus, and despite flare-ups since, most notably the Auckland August cluster, the vast bulk of New Zealanders have enjoyed freedoms for the majority of the year that few other countries have.

I'm incredibly proud of what our team of 5 million has achieved, but I also want to acknowledge the huge sacrifices and hardship many have faced to get us where we are. And where we are is a place where work must still continue, but everyone should still feel proud none the less. New Zealand currently has the lowest COVID-19 mortality rate and the lowest number of active cases of all OECD countries. We also have one of the widest testing regimes in the world. Of the 135 countries that have conducted at least 100,000 COVID-19 tests, only Hong Kong has a higher number of tests per capita. None of that is to say our response has been perfect; it hasn't. But that doesn't change what New Zealanders have achieved.

Like every country, we have not been immune to the economic damage caused by COVID. The world has seen the largest economic downturn since the Great Depression, and the long-term impact will be with us for some time as we recover. But just as our health response has put us at the front of the pack globally, it's also meant our economy has recovered better than expected. Many indicators at year's end have shown our economy performing better than expected, and the half-yearly economic forecast and third-quarter GDP, due this week, are anticipated to show the economy bouncing back strongly. Unemployment at 5.3 percent has come in significantly lower than expected, and the Government's books are already showing signs of improvement, with the deficit to the end of October coming in \$4.8 billion better than forecast at PREFU. So, while we'll continue to face a challenging economic environment for some time to come, there is no doubt our actions to date have put us in a stronger position.

So, before we head to questions, I again want to thank everyone for the part that they have played. This year may have been dominated by COVID-19, but for me it was the year of the team. It was our response that I urge people to remember as we head into the holidays and a well-deserved break for those who get one. And, on that note, I do want to pay final tribute to our essential workers, our front-line border service staff, our service and hospitality workers, and all those who are working in our managed isolation facilities—people who won't get a break as they work to keep us safe over the summer months. We owe you all a debt of gratitude. Now happy to take questions.

Media: Prime Minister, on Ihumātao, did a deal go to Cabinet today, and when will anything be able to be announced?

PM: As per my usual practice, when we have any announceables from Cabinet we'll be making announcements on those at the appropriate time.

Media: Is that Waitangi Day?

PM: I'm not here to make any announcements relevant to that issue today, or to give a time line for announcements.

Media: But if it did go through Cabinet and you did agree on something, why not just announce it today? Why wait?

PM: I'm not going to go into a set of hypothetical situations. Once we have an agreement to be announced, we'll announce it.

Media: We've been in this place before, haven't we, with the kind of sense that a deal was pending. Is there false hope out there, or is something coming this week?

PM: Look, I think it's understandable for an issue that has bubbled away for well over a year that there will be a lot of speculation. Our job is to make sure that when we're in a position to announce something with some finality, then that's what we'll do, but I'm not going to speculate in the meantime.

Media: But now that New Zealand First isn't in Government with you, you can just get cracking with it, right?

PM: Throughout that entire year, with or without different Government arrangements, it's always been our desire to find a resolution to this issue. That hasn't changed.

Media: So are you saying it didn't go to Cabinet today?

PM: No, I'm not giving you any confirmation of what was on the Cabinet agenda today. You'll know that it's my general preference not to do that until we have a point where we're able to make decisions on any agenda item. It's not been my practice to ever publicly talk about what's going to Cabinet unless we have proactively chosen to do so in anticipation of a specific decision.

Media: Grant Robertson had said that they were working towards a resolution, wanted to have something before Christmas. Is that still going to happen?

PM: There's a number of areas where we've looked to have resolution before Christmas, and at a time and a place when we're ready to make announcements, we will, but today's not that day.

Media: With the trans-Tasman bubble, you mentioned before that New Zealanders need a well-deserved break. Are you saying that if it wasn't on the eve of Christmas and the Christmas holidays, we would be ready to go now?

PM: No. No, but there are other things that need to be worked through: segregation of staff, making sure—and I'll ask the Minister to comment on this as well—making sure we have contingency in place. If there were an outbreak, for instance, in Australia—and it's not a hypothetical; there have been several—we would need to make arrangements to have potentially thousands of New Zealanders brought back to New Zealand in numbers that we wouldn't be able to facilitate, necessarily, in managed isolation. So making sure we have in place contingency for how that will work safely is a key part of us being able to finalise these arrangements. Minister?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Yeah, look, there's obviously some logistical issues that we've got to work our way through. Tomorrow I'll be going to Auckland Airport to look exactly at how they're going to do the operational separation. Nobody wants to see travellers coming from a safe-zone country mixing with travellers who are coming from somewhere else, so we'll be making sure that that's all lined up. The airlines themselves need a bit of time to prepare, to make sure they've got sufficient planes and crew to fly the routes that we're talking about—so both with the trans-Tasman and with the Cook Islands. So we're working through all of those things at the moment, and then of course, as the Prime Minister's indicated, we've got to have resurgence plans in place. Because, if we end up with tens of thousands of New Zealanders in Australia, then we would not be able to bring them back through our managed isolation facilities. So we would have to have alternatives in place in the event we had to bring them home.

Media: What kind of alternatives are you talking about?

PM: Just the ability to ensure that, if there is an outbreak and people have been in a high-risk area, that we're satisfied that they will be complying with a public health standard that keeps other New Zealanders safe. And so those are details that we do want to have some assurance that we have planning in place, because, as I say, it hasn't been a hypothetical. We have seen outbreaks before and we need to have that contingency in place.

Media: But how would we possibly have ten thousand New Zealanders coming back? It wouldn't be able to do it through managed isolation, so would we have mass facilities, or—what are we talking about?

PM: Not necessarily. I mean, what we've done previously is had an expectation of people self-isolating. Now, that hasn't been our preference in the past, so this is one of the issues that we have to satisfy as ourselves as a Cabinet that we have contingency in place that matches the risk that would exist. If it was a sudden outbreak, your assumption would be that you would be able to manage it in that way. But these are things we don't take lightly. That was my reference to summer. You know, I think New Zealanders desperately need a break. Of course we want to progress these issues, including quarantine-free travel, but we haven't taken risks before that mean that New Zealanders won't be able to keep their freedoms, and I certainly don't want to take those risks right now.

Media: Did the Queensland Premier mislead Kiwis by announcing that the border was open without quarantine, when it's not?

PM: Look, I've taken at face value the announcement by the Queensland Premier. Keep in mind, though, we haven't changed our expectations. So I think most New Zealanders would be looking at that announcement and saying, "Well, fundamentally, it probably doesn't change things for me just yet.", because the quarantine arrangements for New Zealand are still in place.

Media: And what's the very earliest that the travel bubble could open?

PM: We've never been wanting to put specific dates prematurely before we have final decisions, because people make plans, people book flights, and people may potentially have quarantine bookings that they could cancel. We don't want anyone to do that prematurely until we have certainty around when it will be open.

Media: Is the Cook Islands still first in the pecking order?

PM: Look, for that one-way travel, that is our expectation, recalling that we said this week we'll give some dates around that, because the Cook Islands made specific representations to say, "Look, we're both in agreement we need to do a bit more work around the two-way travel." But there are those in the Cook Islands who do need access to New Zealand for things like medical appointments, so we expect that that will be the first thing to start.

Media: This has been in the mix for a long time now. Why are we still not able to have these logistical things locked down?

PM: A lot of it does come to the planning that, for instance, airlines are even able to do, and for them to move with some certainty around their crewing arrangements and even which planes they will be making available for use. So that's part of it, but not all of it. I'll have Minister Hipkins talk in a bit more detail.

Hon Chris Hipkins: Yeah, the airlines have indicated they do need a notice period. You'll be aware that they've grounded a lot of their fleets. They have a lot of their crew on furlough, or not currently working, so they need the opportunity to bring them back, get them current again before they can get them back in the air. We have been clear that we want to see separation of the crews who are working in the safe zone vs crews working elsewhere, and so that requires some logistical rearranging for them, some timetabling shifts, and so they need some opportunity to prepare for that.

Media: Minister, just on New Zealand's COVID-19 resurgence plan, could you broadly outline what that will entail and how necessary it is or isn't?

Hon Chris Hipkins: So, I think as I indicated in the weekend, I'll be doing a fuller update on that tomorrow, where I will go through our planning for the summer and what we've got in store. But, obviously, the first line of defence are the good public health protection measures, which we did a bit more around yesterday, just reminding people to keep the virus out, and to make sure that we're doing all of the things that support us keeping the virus out—so good contact tracing by using QR codes, by using Bluetooth, staying home if you're sick and getting a test, good hand hygiene, and all of those public health measures that we've been talking about now all year. Those things still apply over the summer. So while you might be enjoying the sunshine, you've got to keep doing those things. I will outline tomorrow the work we've been doing around scenario planning for how we would respond over the summer if different things happen, recognising that the summer's a different time for New Zealanders. We're incredibly mobile as a country over the summer. A lot of people will be in places where they wouldn't normally be. And so we've worked our way through that and we'll release the details of that tomorrow so that everybody knows what could be expected in all of those different scenarios.

Media: Prime Minister, late last year you instituted a Cabinet process where all decisions which would have an impact on emissions would go through an impact analysis. Only eight decisions have had a full go-through on that. Is that enough?

PM: Well, look, my expectation, of course, is that as a Government, given climate change is a priority for us, that we will be looking—regardless of whether or not there's that impact analysis, that we'll be looking at it with a climate-related lens, in the same way that we do for inequality.

Media: To the best of your knowledge, has that analysis ever actually changed or modified a Cabinet decision?

PM: Yeah, well, of course, they're always taken in its totality. You know, when we sit there as a Cabinet, we will be taking into account every aspect, including environmental impacts. That's what we do. And so it would be a bit difficult for me to say that a decision was singularly because of one issue, but, keep in mind, some issues may never come to the Cabinet table because of our views on climate-related issues.

Media: You can't point to a single decision that was made differently because of that climate impact?

PM: Oh, there will be decisions that will never come to us because of our view and perspective on climate-related issues, and of course there'll be other decisions that we're making solely because we have to transition our economy. Those will be very obvious to you.

Media: Should the Speaker stay in his current role?

PM: Yes, he should. Look, my view is—and obviously he agrees—he has made a mistake. No one is debating that, but does that change my view that he is the right person for that job? No, it doesn't. We have to acknowledge, as well, the Speaker role, despite being independent of the Government, is a politicised position. There'll be very few Speakers who haven't had at some point an Opposition party call a confidence vote or a question of confidence on them.

Media: Has he upheld the standard that you expect?

PM: Oh, he has made a mistake. No question here, and I'm not going to defend that. At the same time, he has also instigated a piece of work to try and make Parliament a place that meets our expectations for workplace safety, for bullying, for women to be safe. Those are all things that I utterly support his work around.

Media: Have you sought an explanation from him around the false accusation that he made?

PM: So we have spoken. What particularly was important to me, and also to him, is that he remains answerable to Parliament. His role is on behalf of all MPs, not just leaders, not just me. So his decision that he wants to appear to a select committee on Wednesday, so that he can give details and answer to the best of his ability to the whole of Parliament, I think is the right thing to do.

Media: But he refused to answer to Parliament last week. He was given the opportunity to make a statement at the start of question time and he repeatedly refused to do that.

PM: Yes, well, of course there will be things that he can and cannot do as a result of the agreements that have been signed. Of course, his view is that he can appear before select committee. That's the right thing to do. He's proactively booked in for himself to do that on Wednesday.

Media: Should he apologise?

PM: It's not for him to apologise to me. He represents and serves on behalf of all of Parliament. But he absolutely acknowledges that a mistake has been made, so I think that that serves as such.

Media: What about apologise to the taxpayers of whom he wasted \$330,000?

PM: I don't think there's any sense here that he is in any way defending or in any way blocking the view that he has made a mistake. It is very clear we wouldn't be having this conversation if he hadn't. However, it is also for him to make sure he's available both to parliamentarians, and therefore the taxpayers, to give explanation over what has happened here.

Media: And isn't writing it off as politicisation a bit glib, given that he did waste \$333,000?

PM: I don't believe that that is what I've done. I don't believe I was trivialising it. Absolutely, he himself acknowledges that he has made a mistake.

Media: Do you find the timing a bit suspicious, though, that he announces that he had defamed the person and it's cost \$330,000 like two weeks—

PM: Again, only he is privy to the time lines here. These are not things that I'm involved in or privy to, so I think those are questions that he's best able to answer in a forum like, for instance, the select committee process.

Media: What would the repercussions be for one of your Ministers if they wrongfully abused someone of rape and then wasted \$333,000 of taxpayer money?

PM: Again, I do want to draw a distinction here. A Speaker does not serve as though they were a member of the Government. They do need to have their ability to operate across Parliament. That does not, however, mean that the Speaker cannot and should not acknowledge when a mistake has been made. Quite clearly, it has. But I do want to give him the ability on Wednesday to give his explanation for what has happened here.

Media: But if this was one of your Ministers it would be a sackable offence, right?

PM: And I would deal with it, with a Minister, at any given time. Keep in mind, however, this is not the first time a Minister's legal costs have been covered. Both parties across both sides of the House at some point have had to call on the provisions that cover legal costs. That is unfortunately not a new set of circumstances.

Media: Can you just confirm on the travel bubble, the trans-Tasman one, will that mean you get on a plane at one end, you get off at the other—there's no quarantine requests? Like, just as per pre-COVID, yeah?

PM: Correct. That is why we take it very, very seriously. Correct.

Media: Greta Thunberg has had a bit of a crack at your Government over its climate change record on Twitter. Is it disappointing to see somebody of her stature criticise your efforts like this?

Media: Oh, look, so whilst I haven't seen the tweet, it's been described to me as a reference to our Public Service carbon-neutral goal of 2025, and all I would of course give the context there that if that was the sum ambition of any Government, then that would be worthy of criticism. It is not our sum ambition and it is not the totality of our plans on climate change. But again, I think that it's actually for us just to get on with the business of fulfilling our obligations and expectations.

Media: So should she do a little bit more research before coming after you?

PM: No, no, not at all. Not at all. No. I'm not going to pass any judgment. As I say, if it was the sum total of what we were doing, it would be worthy of criticism. It's clearly not. But equally, you know, I think it's only a good thing that there are people out there continuing to urge ambition and action.

Media: When it comes time to announce the travel bubble, will it be done immediately—like, you know, "Border will open in a couple of days"—or will it signal that it'll be in a week or two weeks' time? How will that process—

PM: My expectation is we'll give a bit of lead time, because, of course, that's where we'll have to give something definitive to the airlines.

Media: Those provisions around Ministers' legal costs being covered were only expanded last year—

PM: That is incorrect.

Media: —to cover the Speaker. Isn't that dodgy timing?

PM: No, that is incorrect, and I really welcome the opportunity to explain this. Provisions like that have always existed for Ministers. Of course, there is a question over how a Speaker is defined. That decision was ultimately made by the Deputy Speaker at the time, because, of course, it wouldn't be appropriate for Trevor Mallard to decide that himself. So that decision

was made by Anne Tolley on the advice of the Solicitor-General. What's been conflated by the Opposition is an entirely separate decision over how MPs should be treated. That was triggered by some legislative changes. That decision was taken by, I believe, the Business Committee, of which the Opposition were a part of, where the Business Committee determined that MPs should be treated in that way. So quite different issues. The Speaker issue was dealt with separately. I hope that helps.

Media: Just back on climate change, Prime Minister, was it embarrassing to miss out on that speaking slot at the Climate Ambition Summit, and what can New Zealand do to get back amongst the leaders, people that are chasing ambitious climate targets?

PM: I really welcome the opportunity to clarify this, because, in my view, this has not at all justified the level of commentary that it has. Look, for the climate summit, the organisers specifically wanted announcements, and so that was the basis. We were invited to take part in the summit, but, as with those participating, the instruction was that invitations or speaking slots would be given to countries who would make announcements specifically at the summit. We expressed two views: one that we prefer to make our significant announcements to a domestic audience—I think it's something that actually there's been criticism before, around anything that even looks remotely like an announcement on an international platform before a domestic one. So that's been our preference. These are issues that are significant to us, and that should take priority. The second issue for us also was, of course, many of the things that we're doing work on now, particularly through our climate commission, we're expecting early in the new year, and so the alignment for us around substantive new work that we're doing is not eight weeks after our election but a little bit further down the track.

Media: Is that the carbon budget?

PM: We've already highlighted, of course, we're reviewing our NCDs at the moment. We've got our first budgets coming through, the climate commission's opinion on our biogenic methane targets. So all of that's coming in the new year. What, again, I would highlight: you can see from the climate summit that, actually, countries are in various different positions. Some, not necessarily as ambitious as New Zealand, have been part of that because, of course, they were extending their ambition. So it wasn't a relative judgement as to who was the most ambitious; it was whether you had announceables. So that's a bit of background for you.

Media: Did Adrian Orr deliver a sort of a rebuke to your suggestion of including house prices in the monetary policy remit?

PM: No, not that I—I wouldn't read it as such, no.

Media: He distanced himself from your suggestion, though, and said that he didn't think it was a good idea, following your advice.

PM: Look, of course, we asked for a view because we wanted just that: a view. I don't interpret any response as being a rebuke. You know, these are exactly the issues that between both monetary policy and fiscal policy we should be debating.

Media: Do you think you'll go ahead and do what you suggested in the first letter to Adrian Orr now that he's said that he doesn't think it's a good idea?

PM: I'm going to leave any final decisions in that regard to the Minister of Finance.

Media: Adrian Orr said that he wanted debt-to-income ratios as a tool. Is the Government happy to give the Reserve Bank that tool?

PM: Again, we're doing a range of work at the moment and have asked Treasury in particular, MHUD, to prepare a range of advice around both demand and supply side. I'd rather us complete that work before making any further announcements.

Media: On Southern Response, those top-up payments—is that throwing in the towel and giving up on the legal fight?

PM: No. No, it's an acknowledgment of what people have gone through and what needs to be resolved. And you'll recall that, you know, at the time, we very much even acknowledged the work that the Dodds had done to lead the charge on an issue that would give further clarity to the Crown on what was needed next.

Media: What's the estimated cost for taxpayers?

PM: Look, it's not something I could provide you now, but, obviously, we have had Treasury, as I recall, do some estimates on that. But what we need to keep in mind here—it's about fairness and whether or not those individuals have been treated fairly, and that's what needs to be resolved. After many, many years of heartache, and at potentially, down the track, great legal expense, it makes sense for us, from a fairness perspective but also a cost perspective, to resolve the issue.

Media: What does this mean for your legal battle, then?

PM: Oh, well, I don't know if I would call it our legal battle. You know, ultimately, there are a range of issues in Christchurch that we have inherited and have tried to resolve. We were very open that in pursuing the case with the Dodds—and they understood why we were doing it—we just needed to get some parameters to understand fully what the court understood of the ruling in order to then make a judgment on how to finalise things with everybody else that was involved.

Media: Just on the travel bubble with Australia, if we wait until after the summer break, and then giving people plenty of lead time, that's necessarily going to put it in the sort of very latter part of the first quarter, isn't it?

PM: I'm not going to give any time frames here and now. We've said the first quarter, but, you know, as I've said, the constraints we're working to aren't just around preparation; it's literally what is viable for the airlines as well, keeping in mind a key thing for us—and you'll see from the weekend—we want to make sure that the staff that are crewing flights are, essentially, part of the safe zone as well. We don't want to take risks with crew who are exposed on different legs that are higher risk being part of safe zone, and that actually is quite a logistical challenge.

Media: Just looking further, later into the year, can you see giving exemptions to people that have had vaccinations?

PM: We'll be able to talk about this in a little bit more detail later on in the week, but one thing that I have just acknowledged is that it's fair to make the assumption that a vaccine means that you both won't become ill from COVID but also make an assumption you won't pass it on. Actually, when it comes to transmission, we don't know yet whether the vaccines will be effective in stopping transmission. Data over time will tell us, and it may well be, but it's a bit premature for us to make judgments around that, unfortunately, at this stage.

Media: Prime Minister, on housing settings, a few weeks ago there was an announcement there would be a review of housing settings coming to the Cabinet before the end of the year. Has Cabinet looked at that review, and are you expecting to say anything before the summer break?

PM: Rather than get into some of the specifics on decision-making time lines, our expectation has always been that we wouldn't be saying anything to indicate the outcome of that work until the new year.

Media: Just to go back to Ihumātao, you said that you've been in a close working relationship with Waikato-Tainui. Has anything come out of those conversations?

PM: Yeah, we have consistently worked with Kīngitanga. They've played an incredible role in bringing together mana whenua to try and progress a solution that meets their needs, and that work continues, but I have equally leaned very heavily on the advice of Kīngitanga on everything, including, for instance, when would be appropriate, eventually, in the future, to visit.

Media: And do you think that a potential deal on Ihumātao could open up a can of worms for other blocks of land that have been confiscated by the Crown?

PM: We've been very specific that one of the criteria for any resolution at Ihumātao has to be that it doesn't undermine the Treaty process, and that's been one of the fundamentals for us as the Crown. We just can't do that. It would be an act of bad faith for all other iwi and Treaty partners.

Media: Have you thought about when you might visit?

PM: As I say, you know, to date I have taken the advice of the King around what would be most appropriate in terms of a visit, and I'll continue to do so. So, no, I have no set date. My focus, actually, rather than a visit, has been resolution, and I do think that's been the priority.

Media: My question was: what advice did Kīngitanga, or King Tūheitia, give you about this?

PM: All I'd say is that I've been following that advice to date.

Media: Prime Minister, do you expect by the last post-Cab of next year life will basically be back to normal, that people will be vaccinated and people will be travelling around the world, or is that wildly optimistic?

PM: Do you know, things have moved so rapidly, if you had asked me six months ago what would be possible in 2021, I think there'd be very few who would've predicted the progress that has been made on vaccinations to date. It is nothing less than remarkable. And so, for 2021, I think we're all trying to be as optimistic as we can be. We all want life to be back to normal, but our duty is to make sure that, in getting there, we keep everyone safe and well.

Media: How would you describe 2020 in two words?

PM: I'll give you one: horrendous.

Media: But you won a 64-seat majority.

PM: Oh, yeah! You know, even I am not so selfish as to say that even that overrides what everyone has experienced.

Media: Prime Minister, on cricket, the New Zealand—

PM: That was an appalling segue. On cricket—yes?

Media: New Zealand's win today means your men's test cricketers are the number one ranked side in the world. Do you have a message of congratulations to them, and is it nice for New Zealand to be best in the world at something?

PM: You make it sound like that's something new. I'll refer you to our women's rugby team. Look, I think everyone celebrates with extra enthusiasm anything that distracts us from 2020. And I know it's been particularly hard in this environment for our elite sportspeople to be able to be at the top of their game when so much of their training and their usual calendar has been so disrupted, so it just adds that little bit of extra excitement. OK, last couple of questions.

Media: Would you be open to putting Labour's support behind the call for a select committee inquiry into out-of-control infrastructure price inflation, given you've green-lit so many infrastructure projects?

PM: I think, probably—two things I would say. Obviously, we've tasked the Deputy Prime Minister to—working on all things implementation-related. So I think he's well-placed, if any work is to be done directly with Treasury, to do anything in that field. Secondly, we have already identified very specifically concerns around the cost of building in New Zealand. So slightly different than what you've raised, but even that is something that, obviously, we've indicated we want the Commerce Commission to look into.

Media: And are you open to the Reserve Bank's idea of a housing commissioner or the commission for housing to coordinate actions across Government to deal with housing prices?

PM: Do you know, I'd be reluctant to assume that just a machinery of Government change will fix this. We know so many of the issues; we just want to make sure that everyone's pulling the right lever at the right time. And this is one of the complexities of the housing market challenge. We want to support first-home buyers, but, in supporting first-home buyers, of course, the cautionary tale is that you don't want to add extra heat to the market where simply they end up paying an overinflated price for a house. We want to make sure that there's additional supply side, but how do you do that without incentivising the people who may already be significant investors in the market from being potentially incentivised over first-home buyers. These are complex levers, which is why we're working through them as quickly as we can, but with a mind on everything. OK, thanks everyone.

conclusion of press conference