

**POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 10 MAY 2021**  
**HANSARD TRANSCRIPT**

**PM:** Kia ora koutou katoa. Apologies, everyone, for the brief delay in coming down this afternoon. I wanted to make sure that I had the latest information to hand on the situation as it's evolved in Dunedin. This afternoon you will have seen that there has been a serious knife attack at a Dunedin supermarket. Police were quickly at the scene, and a suspect has been apprehended and is in police custody. At this stage we understand there are five victims, two of whom have been confirmed as supermarket employees. I'm advised that all five have been taken to Dunedin Hospital with stab wounds or other related injuries. At this time we have limited further information to provide, including the formal motivation for the attack. I am advised—and I do caveat that this is early stages. I am advised that at this stage there is nothing to suggest, from the police's perspective, that this is what they would define as a domestic terror event. Police will, however, release new information as it comes to hand. So just again to repeat that: nothing at this stage that suggests that it is a domestic terror event.

Needless to say, such an attack is hugely concerning, and I do want to acknowledge the really early reports of courageous acts by bystanders who have taken action in order to protect those around them. Our thoughts are with all those who have been affected by this attack. As I say, though, we will make sure that you are kept updated. I'm advised that at 5 p.m. Dunedin police will hold a press conference in order to provide further information, and that will be led by Paul Basham.

Coming then to our usual post-Cab read-out, and starting with a brief look to the week ahead: tomorrow and Wednesday I'm in Wellington and in the House. On Wednesday evening I'll be speaking at the 53<sup>rd</sup> Ockham book awards in Auckland. On Thursday I'll be launching the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy annual report—that's part of our new reporting regime as part of the Child Poverty Reduction Act—and alongside that, the child poverty - related indicators report. Then I'll give a pre-Budget speech to BusinessNZ with a focus on our plan to reconnect to the world as part of our economic recovery. On Friday morning I'll be speaking at the Auckland's Future, Now event. On Saturday morning I'll be co-chairing a global leaders summit on the Christchurch Call.

Today, though, I have important news with regards to our COVID-19 response. You will have heard us call 2021 the year of the vaccine, but to my mind it, of course, deserves a dual focus, the second one being the efforts that we're making as a Government to reconnect our people to the world. One element of reconnection is ensuring our border settings bring in the people and skills we need to support our recovery. The trans-Tasman bubble has given us some flexibility in this regard by freeing up spaces in MIQ.

So today I'm announcing that over the next 10 months, thousands of skilled and critical workers will be allocated spaces in MIQ to help provide a boost to key sectors. About 500 MIQ rooms will be made available every fortnight for this purpose, including spaces for around 300 RSE workers every month from June, with a total of 2,400 arriving by March 2022. I'm advised that roughly 300 specialised construction workers will be able to enter MIQ in these specially designated spaces between June and October, and 400 international students for arrival in June, out of the 1,000 previously announced for the start of semester 2. We'll also be ensuring that we have 100 refugees every six weeks from July—of course, noting that refugees have been coming in since February, but that's been on an ad hoc basis. This ensures, under this policy, that we will have an allocation to ensure that we're consistently meeting our obligations under our refugee quota. We've also renewed border exceptions for shearers, rural mobile plant machinery operators, and essential travellers to and from the Pacific.

The last 13 months have been tough for many but have been particularly challenging for our agriculture, horticulture, and viticulture sectors. Today's decision should, as I say, see around 2,500 more RSE workers entering New Zealand and provide a boost to our rural communities

and take some pressure off. These workers will be doing harvest preparation, picking autumn and summer fruit, harvesting grapes, and pruning through winter.

The 300 specialised construction workers will facilitate the progress of key infrastructure projects, which is central to our recovery, such as the Auckland City Rail Link, Transmission Gully, and Te Pae Christchurch Convention Centre. Meanwhile, the 400 international students underscore our commitment to international education, and Minister Hipkins will say more on that in a moment.

In terms of New Zealanders wanting to return home, vouchers will remain available online in our allocation system. More than 20,000 rooms will be made available over the next three months for this purpose. There is currently excess capacity in MIQ, so we're not experiencing the same levels of demands as previously. Today's announcement comes off the back of quarantine-free travel regimes with Australia and the Cook Islands, world-leading arrangements marking major milestones, as part of our plans to reconnect New Zealand to the world. And all three show the momentum we're building, seizing those opportunities that have been created through New Zealand's collective response to COVID-19 and the work of our team of 5 million.

I'm now going to hand over to Minister Hipkins to talk about the international education element. His remarks will be pretty brief. Minister—well, sorry if they weren't; they—

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** They will be now.

**PM:** Ha, ha! Minister O'Connor is here and available to pick up any specific questions on RSE workers, so we'll pick that up in the Q and A. So, Minister Hipkins.

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** Thank you, Prime Minister. Today's announcement of a dedicated allocation of space in June for international students is to help us to fulfil the 1,000 extra spaces that we made available for international students back in January. It builds on us allowing 250 PhD students to come back into the country.

To be eligible for this additional space, students must hold, or have held, a visa to study in New Zealand in 2020. They need to be studying towards a Bachelor's degree or above—they have studied in 2019 or 2020 towards that particular qualification—and they need to be in the country in order to be able to complete that. The dedicated allocation of space will allow providers to work with the airlines, potentially, to charter flights to bring international students in from some of those areas where we know it's difficult for people to be able to travel to New Zealand.

We have, in making this decision, carefully balanced the need for New Zealanders to be able to return home. We are seeing, at the moment, lower demand for our managed isolation facilities. As the Prime Minister's indicated, around 20,000 rooms available over the next three months. Now is a good time for New Zealanders to return home who want to return home. There is space available, and I would add a word of caution that it is possible that demand will increase again later in the year. So now is a good time for those who need to get back into New Zealand to take up those vouchers that are available.

**PM:** OK, we'll move to questions—Minister O'Connor. So anything further on RSE and international students.

**Media:** If demand does ramp up for the MIQ facilities from New Zealanders, will we turn the tap off for these guys?

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** So what we work our way through carefully is a combination of—we monitor group allocations and the number of vouchers that we're releasing through the managed isolation system. If we started to see that we were becoming oversubscribed for managed isolation—for the vouchers, I should say—we'd be able to consider whether we released further group allocations. The group allocations that we've announced today, we're confident that we're going to be able to meet those. The RSE one is an ongoing one; the others are more time limited, but we obviously have the ability to make further decisions, depending on what demand from returning New Zealanders does.

**PM:** The reason we've spread it out, though, is to ensure that we can do two things: give certainty to the horticultural and viticulture sector, for their planning, and by doing that, with those smaller numbers over a period of time, that also takes off a bit of pressure for the unknown demand that we often get from New Zealanders seeking to return home.

**Media:** On the situation in Dunedin, is there any suggestion that it's gang-related, and is there anything you can tell us about the victims—any identifying features to—

**PM:** Already you would've heard that, of course, they've identified that some have been workers from within the supermarket that's affected. Other than that, I've been given no further details on the nature of those who have been affected, other than, obviously, those early reports that some bystanders had become involved in order to try and de-escalate the situation and protect others. And I know that all of us would just want to acknowledge that those were courageous acts, and we're thinking of them and their families at this time.

The advice that I've had from the Commissioner of Police is that they are still working through the motivation but their early assessment—because we need to establish very early on if it's considered to be a terror-related event, there are other elements of our system that we stand up very quickly. Their initial assessment is that it's not, but I do want to give them the time to make further assessments as to what has happened today here in Dunedin.

**Media:** How were they able to come to that conclusion that it wasn't—

**PM:** Because they have some early indications of some of the underlying factors that may have contributed, but I think they want to give themselves just a little bit more time before they make public statements on that. So I'll allow them to do that—

**Media:** You're not able to tell us what those underlying—

**PM:** I don't feel comfortable sharing their current view on what has happened here until they're ready to do so. One of the questions for me, though, of course, is the wider safety concerns for the rest of the community and the rest of New Zealand, and that's why my first initial question is: do we have a national security incident on our hands? They've quickly made the assessment that they do not believe that is the case.

**Media:** Do you know if police are looking for anyone else beyond the one man, I think, that they've arrested so far?

**PM:** So—sorry; to be clear—I'm currently advised that they are not and that there is nothing to suggest that there is more than one person involved at this stage.

**Media:** So no further threat to the community?

**PM:** That's the advice that I've received. Currently, they have no reason to believe anyone else has been involved.

**Media:** Can I just ask, on MIQ, what consideration have you made or is there any as to which country these people are coming from? Is there going to be a sort of allocation for people from high-risk—

**PM:** I'll let Minister Hipkins speak to the effects for international students and so on, but Minister O'Connor can speak to RSE workers.

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** So ultimately, the RSE workers, we do get a lot from the Pacific and, again, Minister O'Connor can comment more on that. In terms of the overall management of managed isolation facility space, we use our low-risk, high-risk, very high-risk framework. So there are four countries currently in the very high-risk framework where we do restrict the number of people who can come in from those places. Everyone else is high risk unless they're low risk, and those low-risk places at the moment are those where we have safe travel arrangements in place or we're in the process of putting them in place. And so other than that, the restriction is ultimately about just being able to secure a voucher and then being able to secure travel. But I'll ask Minister O'Connor to add to the RSE workers.

**Hon Damien O'Connor:** Just in terms of the RSE, one of the requirements is that the countries are prepared to take those workers back. That's been a challenge with some of the countries, so that's one of the conditions along with a few others. Of course, they have a minimum rate of pay of over \$22. So I think the industry will welcome this announcement. It gives some certainty. It will bring the numbers back up at peak season to the figure that we had in the country in 2019, which was just over 10,000. So while we appreciate it will still be a challenge, this will go a long way to alleviate the pressure across horticulture, viticulture, etc.

**Media:** Has consideration been made to opening up spaces from split migrant families?

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** So we do have rooms available now for those who—Minister Faafoi a few weeks ago made an announcement around the ability for those family members, those migrant family members, to be able to bring their other close family members into the country, and there are vouchers available. So, basically, the biggest challenge for them is getting through the visa paperwork. Once they've got the visa paperwork, at the moment with 20,000-odd rooms available, they can get a room without us needing to allocate specific space to them.

**PM:** I'd say we should be very open about the fact that one of the issues that some families maybe experience is whether or not they're currently in a very high-risk country. So whilst we have rooms available, unfortunately, if a family is currently resident in a country that is considered very high risk, there will be a time delay. They'll need to wait until that country is designated differently if they're not already, obviously, a citizen, in which case they'll have already returned.

**Media:** And that very high risk won't affect this announcement today—people will still be able to come through?

**PM:** So, no—at this stage, very high risk, you're only able to travel if you are a citizen or next of kin of a citizen. And so, obviously, that will affect anyone still on an ongoing basis from Pakistan, from Brazil, from India, and from Papua New Guinea. That's not permanent status. We keep that under revision, but that will be having some wider impacts for other potential travellers.

**Media:** And what about the costs? I think last time RSE workers were allowed through the system, there was some comment from the horticulture industry that—

**PM:** About the room charges?

**Media:** Yeah. They had to assume a lot of the costs for bringing these people in and that it was basically—it was prohibitively—too high. Are they still expected to pay the costs here?

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** Yes, they are still expected to pay the cost and there are some costs associated with this group that are higher than for other groups. For example, they require translation services in many instances, and so we have to be able to supply those. So there are some unique needs for this group—that we want to make sure that they're brought through our managed isolation facilities safely and comfortably. And, yes, industry is asked to contribute to that. They're contributing most of the cost now, but there is still some good will here.

**Media:** Did you consider subsidising it further to make it more viable for some of these companies?

**PM:** There's already subsidies.

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** There are already subsidies. We're already subsidising managed isolation. Even the full cost recovery rate still doesn't quite fully recover the cost.

**PM:** I think it just demonstrates—I mean, keeping in mind, you know, in that calculation that means that those employers are putting that equivalent amount into the efforts of incentivising domestic workers. So that means, really, the RSE workers that are being accessed, it is demonstrating that that is where there is genuinely critical need.

**Media:** The universities won't be paying for students, I take it, right?

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** Ultimately, there is a charge there for those international students. It's up to the provider as to who pays. So the institution can choose to pay or they can ask the student to pay.

**PM:** Yeah. But it's not carried by taxpayer.

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** That's right.

**Media:** Of the 240 specialist construction workers—

**PM:** Sorry, I had that revised, actually. I'm advised now it's 300.

**Media:** Sorry, of those specialist construction workers, is there a tagged contingency for the City Rail Link in some briefings the Ministers have received, that the labour supply is putting the cost of that project under scrutiny?

**PM:** So, essentially, I'm advised that obviously a project is able to use the general allocation. But what we've now provided, and this is through the hard work of the construction sector accord, and we really do want to thank those participants for working through a solution with us—that if they're unable to do that, we now have the special allocation. That means that we should, we hope, not see delays in critical projects because of an inability to access MIQ.

**Media:** Did City Rail Link factor in specifically to this decision to—

**PM:** You will have heard that we do believe that it will help with ensuring continuity and facilitating the delivery of City Rail Link but also Transmission Gully and Christchurch Convention Centre, just to name a few projects.

**Media:** Prime Minister—

**PM:** I'll just check whether or not, Jenna, on the subject was as well, perhaps? No?

**Media:** This one is for Minister Hipkins.

**PM:** Oh, he'll stay; that's fine. Anyone else on RSE?

**Media:** Not RSE.

**PM:** OK. I might release Minister O'Connor then if there's nothing further on RSE or—

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** What about me—Haha!

**PM:** Great. Thank you, Minister O'Connor.

**Media:** Minister Hipkins, we spoke to people in Auckland today who had bookings to get a vaccine, turned up, were told there was no record of their booking, and had to rebook. Have you been given any information about why this is happening?

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** No, that's news to me. I mean, at the moment, DHBs are using their own localised booking systems. I don't know whether it would be a primary care booking system that's in question here. The national booking system is gearing up to go live over the next month, and that's what will be used when we get into the big scale-up.

**Media:** If you're having this kind of problems when we're not at the big scale-up, how much of a problem—

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** Well, that's one of the reasons that we're developing a national booking system, so we won't have this when we do get to those big numbers each day.

**PM:** Yeah, and I think what we've said all the way through is that in this period, we are dealing with numbers that match the vaccines we have available. In that time, we are trialling piloting our new booking systems that will be used in the large scale roll-out. We may, from time to time, identify issues with those regimes. We absolutely acknowledge that is going to be part of our preparation. So whilst I don't have the details of what's happened there, we will

have to iron out some of those details before we get to the point where we are asking all New Zealanders to come forward for a vaccine.

**Media:** What's happening with decommissioning facilities that you talked about when the trans-Tasman bubble was first opened?

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** So I can confirm that we are decommissioning the Ramada facility in Auckland, which is the one that we've been using for the Australian deportees. It's a small facility, and I asked for advice on whether we could repurpose that as a general use MIQ facility. But the nature of that facility—for example, it doesn't have its own kitchen and so on—would make it difficult for the use as a more general purpose facility. We're talking about, I think there's about, 60 rooms, so it's not a big facility. At the moment, that's the only one we've made the decision to decommission. Other decisions are still pending, so we're still looking at that, and that will also be tied up with the review work we're doing around ventilation systems and so on. If we find that through that work there are any that we have risk associated with it that we don't think can be mitigated, then we would consider that.

**Media:** Because that's been going on, obviously, for quite a while, particularly the ventilation system. So is that nearly—

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** One of the challenges with the ventilation systems work is, to do it really well, you need to have the facilities empty. So the first phase of the work was to do the desktop review, you can do that while people are in there, but then to actually get in there and have a good poke around in their air conditioning systems, you need to empty them out. We can't empty them all out at once. So what we've been doing is working our way through, emptying out facilities, doing that more invasive work, and then filling them up again. So, as a result of that, we're starting to develop more of a picture now. It's coming—it's looking good. In some cases it's quite simple remediation that needs to be put in place, some extra HEPA filters and so on, but I haven't seen the full work—the full work's not completed yet.

**Media:** Has that been able to be carried out because of the extra spaces because of the trans-Tasman bubble? Has that given the flexibility to be able to empty out and move around?

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** It has meant that we've been able to temporarily empty out facilities so that we can do this, but also look at some of the maintenance. These facilities have been being used pretty consistently, pretty full, for a year now. So they have maintenance needs, and so we've been able to work our way through some of that too. That's ongoing.

**Media:** Just a bit of a review, if it's OK, of the latest pause to New South Wales? Because the New South Wales Premier, Gladys Berejiklian, obviously called it an overreaction and I wonder if there's a *[inaudible]* in that all the other Australian states didn't lock down to the entire state, they locked down to people that had actually been to those locations of interest. Could New Zealand also, in future, when there's a similar situation just refuse entry to New Zealand to the people that have been to locations of interest or suburbs or the city, rather than the entire state?

**PM:** Yeah, I think one of the complications there, of course, is that we have to be able to make a judgment via the systems we have at an airport to establish whether or not people have been at a place of interest or in a region of interest. Look, that does really rely on, therefore, almost declarations by people at the gate. Our perspective is, actually, we are not a neighbouring state, we do have borders that are different, we are a separate—there's not the same expectation around the flow of movement. It's not like being able to move between Hamilton and Auckland. So that might mean, from time to time, that we take that precautionary approach in the same way Australia did with our Northland case, and I will point out there that we knew where that case had come from. We knew the risk attached to it, because it was attached to MIQ; there wasn't a missing link. So I think really our response has been proportionate to New Zealand and the information we had.

**Media:** There are places captured, though, *[inaudible]* further away as Auckland and Christchurch. The northern New South Wales region has a million people. They all fly out of Queensland, but they couldn't travel. It seems nonsensical.

**PM:** But, again, of course, that would then imply that we have a system within our airports at check-in that are able to make those determinations. That's not a great way to be making those public health judgments, which is why we are caught in the position of having to take a much more blanket approach because we're dealing with a tool at our border that doesn't really allow for much nuance around suburb you live in.

**Media:** Is your Government totally up front and honest when it comes to COVID cases?

**PM:** Yes. If you could give me a little more detail on what sits behind that question?

**Media:** You feel like you're as transparent as you can be when it comes to COVID cases?

**PM:** Yeah, when we have the information available to us, you will—of course, there will from time to time be delays in when we're able to report information, simply because we ourselves will be gathering as much as we can share, but everyone's well used to that practice. We have regular reporting cycles. We'll give what we can at the time that we have it.

**Media:** And when you know it, you tell us?

**PM:** Yeah, but we have put it at times of the day, where—and we use that to make sure we have all the information before we come before you. Because whilst we might get information through, say, in a morning testing round, we want to make sure that when we stand in front of you, we have a bit more than just simply a notification around a case. But everyone in the past year is well used to that.

**Media:** Were you surprised by the public backlash to the pay freeze announced last week?

**PM:** Look, when I read some of, perhaps what those who are reacting are reading, and if they're left with the impression that, for instance, we're not going to follow through on existing agreements or that we're not going to continue to allow pay progression, then perhaps that reaction isn't surprising—but it's also wrong.

**Media:** Should your Ministers have been clearer?

**PM:** Well, I think probably, for us, it was a given that we would not walk away from agreements we have already signed up to, nor would we walk away from people being able to move up through their pay bands. We certainly—looking at some of the coverage around it—certainly believe we should have put more emphasis on that so people were very clear, and for that I, again, would emphasise collective agreements stand. Our obligations to negotiate stand. The fact people move up their pay scales still stands, and I will continue to highlight that whilst also highlighting that we are in a tough post-COVID environment right now.

**Media:** Your meeting with the PSA tomorrow—is there any scope for any sort of reversal in this position?

**PM:** No. Look, we're still clear on what the guidance set out and our rationale for that, which is: we have persistent inequality in New Zealand, and a quarter of our public sector workers are in that bottom \$60,000 or less. We want to see a lift there, and that's what we're committed to—trying to see a lift there. Some Governments in the past, when they've had significant economic shocks, have taken a blanket approach. Our view is: despite the times we're in, that's not right. We want to see those in the lowest pay brackets move, and, of course, at the same time, existing pay bands, meaning that other workers will continue to progress too.

**Media:** We've spoken to people in DHBs who have been front-line testing staff over the last year—already lost two staff in the last week since this announcement. Is it really—you're not returning at all on this?

**PM:** Look, again, for all—and we've said this all the way through. For every single worker who has been with us through COVID, they have the gratitude of every single New Zealander. But our responsibility to them, as well, is to make sure that we can do all of the

things we need to do for health and for public health. That means continuing to employ nurses that we need to take pressure out of the health system—continue to provide the services we need to keep people well and safe. So that does mean we have difficult decisions we need to make, and one of those difficult decisions is that—actually, there are very low-paid workers in our health sector; we've got to keep moving their wages, but we won't necessarily be able to move pay bands for every single worker.

**Media:** But you're unable to quantify how much you're actually gaining from that, which would suggest that it's much more political than actually numerical.

**PM:** I'm going to be—I'm going to really—no, I'm going to really—I'm going to defend that very, very strongly. The reason for that is we can't have it both ways. We have to enter into collective negotiations in good faith, and we do that. So the idea that we would be able to quantify how much has been saved without having gone through those good-faith negotiations actually undermines the very argument we're making, which is that we still—these are our principles for negotiation; the unions will have theirs, and then we come to the table.

**Media:** Is it good faith when you've said clearly that you're not going to be giving a pay rise to anyone earning over \$60k—isn't that—isn't your starting position—

**PM:** Of course, I think we have a duty to put out what our principles are for those discussions, of which, included in those, of course, are around the principles around collective bargaining. And, again, that's where I want to emphasise: the idea that we would walk away from those obligations is completely wrong.

**Media:** The PSA have said they're open to industrial action in response to this. Are you worried about that?

**PM:** Yeah, I'll have Minister Hipkins speak to that point, but just to come back to the meeting that I'm having tomorrow, that's one that actually—I have regular meetings with the PSA, and so that's been scheduled for some time. Based on the letter that they've written me, that says to me, actually—and based on the principles that we've released and have been released by the Public Service Commission—there's actually areas in which we agree. Pay equity is a huge focus for both of us. Making sure that we are lifting the lowest-paid workers is a focus for both of us. So there's areas there where I think that, I hope, together we can make good progress. But on action—

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** Look, perhaps if I could draw people's attention to what the actual guidance that was issued is, and in terms of that middle group of income earners, so adjusting the pay for lower to middle income earners in restricted circumstances, we particularly talk about the sorts of circumstances in which that would be considered. So it includes things like modest progression within a band, demonstrable recruitment pressures that can't be addressed solely through modest progression, increase in—or changes to the remuneration system, consistent with the rest of the guidance that we've issued, because there are instances where unions have been negotiating different pay systems. But also, really importantly, is the last bullet point on that, which is wherever an increase is proposed, it's comparably less for those—it's more for those on low pay than for on high pay.

One of the challenges that we've seen over the last three years is broad percentage-based increases actually increase the gap between the lowest-paid workers and the highest-paid workers, because a 2 percent increase for someone on \$90,000 is double the amount that a 2 percent increase for someone on \$45,000 is. So we've been very clear as a Government: we've got to move away from those broad, across-the-board percentage increases that actually increase inequality. So what we're saying is we want to see those increases—the bulk of those increases—going at the lower end of the pay scale.

**Media:** I just want to read the preamble to the guidance you just read out. The preamble says, "The default position is that there are to be no increases to bands for lower or medium earners." So the preamble does say that it's only in different—exceptional—



**Hon Chris Hipkins** Except in the circumstances listed.

**PM:** The ones that he's just listing.

**Media:** —circumstances you can have increases. And when you introduced this last week, you did say the point of it was to lighten the Government's wage bill. So for those 75 percent of workers who make more than \$60,000 a year, do you have any sense yet on how many of them will earn, adjusted for inflation, less money in three years than they are today?

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** Well, no, that would be an impossible calculation to make, because I can't predict exactly what's going to happen under those criteria that I just set out there. I mean, it says to the workers and to their representatives that they need to make the case against those criteria.

**Media:** To Tova's earlier questions around transparency around COVID cases, are you aware of any instances where there's been a case recorded that you've not publicly disclosed within, say, 24 hours of Government officials finding out about it?

**PM:** I don't—look, I don't believe so. I can't imagine a circumstance. You will have seen on this podium we've even debated and discussed circumstances where something has been, after the fact, recorded as a COVID-related death, even when it's been in question whether it has been. We have tried very hard to be transparent around the way that we've recorded our figures and the way that we've conveyed—if anyone in the gallery has an actual case here that they want to raise with me, feel free to do so. But unfortunately I'm not quite clear on what it is that you're raising, at this point.

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** What I would say, though, is if there is anything, it would be at the margins. So if a lab processes a test result, depending on what time the swab arrives, depending on what time it's processed, depending on what time the retest is done—bearing in mind that a positive result immediately triggers a retest of that swab sample. And it's on the second result that they'll notify us, for example. There can be timing issues there. But we work very quickly, as soon as we get a positive result, to make sure we're getting the relevant information together and that we're sharing that.

The other thing that I'd say is sometimes there is suspicion, right at the beginning, that it could be an historic case that we're dealing with, and where there's evidence of that, then it may take, you know, an extra few hours—and we're talking hours, not days—to actually nail down that information.

**Media:** So, essentially, we are talking—you wouldn't have a case where it would be publicly disclosed three, four, five days after the event?

**PM:** No, no, particularly because if it's a case of concern, we would react to that and there would need to be in place—you know, if it was indeed a case in the community, we need to put in place mechanisms to deal with that. So it's in no one's interests that we would do that. I can tell you that you are triggering a lot of sentiments in me by asking this line of questioning. Yes.

**Media:** This is on the Government's Carers' Strategy Action Plan. Childcare advocates say there are great plans to help them in that strategy, but those plans aren't being actioned. How committed are you to ensuring the change when it comes to the way our country support these young people?

**PM:** Yeah. And, look, I've seen some of the early—some of the coverage around young carers in New Zealand. And, you know, it's certainly the case that I think we are trying to ensure that we have an accurate picture of, you know, how many young people we have in these circumstances, what we can best do to understand these circumstances so that we have policies and programmes that are supporting them. And so that has to be part of our response. It could be the case otherwise that we put in place a response that isn't actually meeting the needs of those young people. We do have, for instance, tools within Work and Income, funding tools, but, you know, in some cases, I would imagine that they wouldn't be necessarily known to those families. So how do we make sure that no one is missing out on

their entitlements? So certainly some of the feedback to me is “We are just still trying to build an accurate picture of how many young people are in these circumstances.”

**Media:** When could we expect some of those plans to be actioned?

**PM:** Yeah, certainly a question I’d say that would be worth putting particularly to Minister Sepuloni, but also Minister Davis. But early stages here for me, or that I’ve been advised, is, again, we’ve got to collect the data, we’ve got to know how large the problem is, and we’ve got to know that our response is actually meeting the issue.

**Media:** Are international students, for students who would’ve applied and gotten into university, and then been in the process of trying to apply for a visa, but the visa suspension came in before they got that—will they have any sort of flexibility here in being able to apply for a visa to come over when they already have received that offer of study?

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** The feedback that I’ve had so far is that we will be to fill that thousand places that we’ve allocated with those who meet the criteria. Of course, if the opportunity arises to allow for more, then we would look again at whether there are others. You can see the direction of travel we’re talking about here—so whether it’s progressively working our way through different categories of students who have the greatest claim to come back the soonest.

**Media:** For the Prime Minister, on the situation in Dunedin, is it your preliminary understanding that the individual who was arrested is known to police?

**PM:** I think I’ll leave that to police, if I might. I don’t want to overstep in the information that I share at this early stage, but, hopefully, they’ll be able to provide you with that information in 15 minutes.

**Media:** Just on the *He Puapua* report—just to check, have you read the whole thing, and also Judith Collins at the weekend raised another section of that report around Department of Conservation land. What’s your thoughts, I guess, on her interpretation of that, connected to the report?

**PM:** Yes, I have read the report. It’s fair to say when I was first questioned on it, I had not. That’s because, of course, it had not gone through any formal process through Cabinet or Cabinet committees or consultation amongst wider Ministers. When it comes to what’s been raised by the Leader of the Opposition on conservation, I actually would give the same response that I gave on issues around the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. That, you know, here we have something again that hasn’t been formally received by the Government. It’s been a piece of work that was commissioned and that’s publicly available. That work has been put on the Conservation website. That work started because the courts challenged whether or not DOC were fulfilling their obligations as set out in legislation that’s been around for decades. So, again, I come back to: what’s the motivation here? Because when National were in Government, they did plenty to make sure that they were working collectively and collaboratively alongside iwi. I have a number of examples—Te Uruwera probably being the most significant. So at that time, no discomfort. Now they’re in Opposition, apparently they’ve changed their mind.

**Media:** When you look at, I guess, the recommendations, proposals, whatever you want to call them, in the report, a lot of them are things that, I guess—

**PM:** Sorry. Which report are you referring to?

**Media:** In the *He Puapua* report. If you look at the proposals within that, there are a lot of things that, you know, would make sense to do, perhaps are in play—some of them, obviously, have started to happen, with the likes of Māori wards, for example. Have you been through it since you’ve read it and identified things and said, “Well, this is something we would do.”, and in fact, separate to the fact that the report exists?

**PM:** No, no. I personally have not done that. And, actually, to your point, yes, some of the things we’ve been progressing have been separate—I mean, the work we’ve done in

health. We flagged that even before the election, and so I think the Minister of Health himself had acknowledged that that's work he had done and was doing without even having read at that stage the report that the Opposition is very fixated on. So these are things we've been progressing regardless. The report itself—it hasn't again come through Cabinet, hasn't been integrated into any work programmes, because we haven't decided what our next steps are.

**Media:** When will Willie Jackson take that paper to Cabinet?

**PM:** Look, I don't have a set time line for that, but the whole point of it was to say, "Hey, look, what's the process for us to go out and talk to New Zealand about how we uphold this declaration that the National Government signed up to?" So there will be public engagement on it. That's got to be part of the way that we deal with those obligations. OK, thank you every one.

**conclusion of press conference**