

POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 28 JUNE 2021
HANSARD TRANSCRIPT

PM: Kia ora koutou katoa, good afternoon, everyone. A quick look to the week ahead: tomorrow I'm in Wellington for the House, Cabinet committees, and meetings; the same applies for Wednesday. On Thursday, I'll be undertaking visits in Northland. On Friday, I'll be speaking at the Antarctic Heritage Trust Inspiring Explorer conference, and attending and speaking at the official opening of the new Auckland ferry building redevelopment.

The last week has seen COVID re-emerge across Australia, and cause significant disruption here in New Zealand. The rise of the Delta variant and the risk it poses to the trans-Tasman bubble means it's timely to consider additional measures for our tool box, to strengthen the bubble and reduce the risk of COVID spreading in New Zealand.

Part of the reason New Zealand's response to COVID has been so successful so far is our willingness to adapt and improve our systems as required. Today I want to signal the Government's current thinking on two steps we can take to strengthen that response. I'll start with record-keeping. Using the QR code Tracer app is strongly encouraged, but not currently compulsory at any alert level in New Zealand. But in order to get and keep in front of the virus, we need to be able to contact trace quickly. If you look at the recent positive case, who travelled to Wellington from Sydney, here we had an active user of the app, which proved invaluable in tracing his movements and allowing us so quickly to identify locations of interest. Approximately 2,600 potential people at places of interest were identified, yet only 585 alerts were sent out to people who had used the New Zealand COVID Tracer app. What this suggests is that less than a third of the potential contacts of the positive case used the app to scan into locations of interest. Use of the app is consistently low across the country presently. New Zealand has gone from a peak of 2 million scans per day in the first half of September last year to a low of 405,630 scans on 7 June this year. This leaves us exposed in the event of cases in the community.

That's why Cabinet has commissioned advice around introducing compulsory QR scanning in high-risk locations, and we'll be looking to make decisions on that next week. Places we are considering are those where there is increased risk and where people are in close quarters, like bars and restaurants. The advice will also consider options for those without cellphones, who will need to use alternate record-keeping methods. We acknowledge there will be some inconvenience associated with the idea of mandatory scanning, but it's an inconvenience that pales compared to venues having to limit gatherings, physically distance people, or shut their doors altogether. We would expect that, over time, requiring people to scan in would become a part of normal life, just like checking people's ID at a bar.

The second tool we can enhance to prevent the spread of COVID is mask-wearing. Face coverings have been shown to prevent the transmission of COVID by reducing both emission and inhalation of droplets and aerosols containing the virus. Emerging evidence and experience has shown it's not hard for the virus to spread this way. Face coverings are particularly useful when physical distancing is not possible. Face coverings are currently mandatory on public transport in New Zealand, but not beyond that. We continue to learn from our own experience and look at the experience of others, including Australia. In regional Victoria, for example, face coverings must be worn inside all public places, as well as outside if people can't maintain physical distancing during higher alert levels.

Cabinet is currently considering mandating the use of face coverings for people at alert levels 2 or higher in certain high-risk locations. To date, our approach has been to avoid restrictions as much as possible, unless needed. But, with the inherent risks associated with the trans-Tasman, combined with the emergence of more transmissible strains, we should, and will, keep adjusting our footing. Again, we'll keep you informed of our thinking around this, and any subsequent decisions, once advice has been received by Cabinet.

Lastly, today the extension of alert level 2 in Wellington has triggered the resurgence support payment, which is available to businesses or organisations facing a reduction in revenue due to alert level increases. I won't traverse again what that contains or the criteria, simply to say, applications will be able to be made from 8 a.m. this Thursday, via IRD. We're now happy to take questions. I have Minister Hipkins here as well for any questions you might have.

Media: With the Delta variant, why aren't we just doing these things already? Why aren't we making QR codes mandatory? Why aren't we wearing face masks more regularly?

PM: Well, of course, we've always encouraged, even when we don't have a case—because it's actually the scanning you do in the lead-up that's really important—people to continue to scan. Our hope had been, of course, that people would maintain that vigilance, without having to mandate it, because, actually, in some areas or for some businesses mandating that and enforcing it would be tough. But, look, our view is, in certain high-risk situations we do need to look at whether it's mandated.

Media: Why not just do it now, though? What's the delay?

PM: So what we need to look at is how we can enforce that. So we wouldn't put in a provision where we were mandating something without having a plan on how it might be enforced and, of course, checking the penalty provisions. So these are things that we just need to get some advice on.

Media: Mandating that would also likely increase contact, though, [*Inaudible*]. I also wanted to ask whether Cabinet considered extending the public health vaccination order to cover all the work that currently it doesn't cover—non-MIQ, privately [*Inaudible*]

PM: We're aware. Yeah, Minister Hipkins is doing work on this.

Hon Chris Hipkins: Yes, so on that last issue around extending the mandatory vaccination requirement for people to be vaccinated in order to do some jobs, that will extend to a much bigger group of border workers. That work is being done at the moment. I imagine that we'll be in a position to make announcements on that fairly soon.

Media: Why wasn't that done originally when the first public health order was passed?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Largely practical, logistical considerations, which we've been working our way through.

Media: Minister, last week you said you'd ruled out mandatory QR code scanning. What changed between then and now?

Hon Chris Hipkins: No. I think you'll find that every time I've stood on this I've never ruled anything out, and I did foreshadow last week that we were having another look at it, which we've been doing over the last few days. I think, particularly in light of what we're seeing around the Delta variant and the potential speed of transmission and—

Media: We knew about that last week, though, and you said that there are some really big logistical hurdles there. In principle, you were saying "Yep, we could do that but the reality is, how would you enforce it?"

Hon Chris Hipkins: Well, exactly, and that's the work that we're working through at the moment.

PM: Yeah, I don't recall—actually, my recollection is that we've been reasonably open-minded on needing to move potentially in these phases. We've always pointed out why it isn't straightforward, but particularly if you are narrowing in on certain areas, high-risk environments such as bars and restaurants, they are environments where you are more likely to have individuals who are greeting at the door, who could act as a way of checking that people were scanning—a bit easier than you might in a retail environment, for instance.

Media: So who would be liable? Would it be the individual who doesn't scan or would it be the business?

PM: Yeah, and so, ultimately, of course, we want people to be responsible for scanning themselves, but in terms of who's checking and enforcing, that's when you're looking at an operator. We know that's a big burden for them to carry, which is why we don't take these things lightly, and these are the questions we're getting advice on.

Media: What kind of penalties are people looking at?

Hon Chris Hipkins: It will have to be penalties consistent with the COVID-19 Public Health Response Act. So there is an ability for fines—they're relatively modest fines—and there's also, of course, the ability for prosecution, but more likely to be at the fines end, which are relatively modest fines.

Media: Minister, in March you said that if you were to mandate even just scanning in at locations, Apple and Google would pull their support for the Bluetooth tracing part of the app. Have they indicated to you that they're open to this, sort of, more limited mandate?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, that's one of the things that we work through at the moment.

Media: Would you look to get a different Bluetooth [*Inaudible*] provider [*Inaudible*] protocol?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, that's one of the things that we will look at.

PM: One of the helpful things is that we now have some other jurisdictions where they are mandating this kind of requirement or behaviour, and so we can fall back on what's happening in other jurisdictions. But, again, ultimately though, even if we are mandating that people scan in to environments, we do still rely on those individuals, if they receive an alert, to follow through on the instructions they receive. So through all of this there is a degree of us continuing to ask the public to comply with the follow-up activities if they happen to have been in a location of interest, and we will still rely on that.

Media: Seven hundred and fifty-four people were tested in Wellington yesterday. Is that good enough?

Hon Chris Hipkins: No, look, I'd like to see higher testing numbers in Wellington. We've popped up additional testing sites. Our teams—[*Clears throat*] Pardon me. Sorry, it's just that I've been talking too much. Our teams have been working very hard to make sure we're identifying as many people who've been at those locations of interest as possible. I can give you the current numbers in terms of the testing. We're up to a much bigger number now in terms of who we've identified. So, as of this morning, we were up to 2,597 overall contacts; 2,273 of those had been tested as of 9 o'clock this morning. So we're seeing good testing of the people who need to be tested, but for those who are showing symptoms or who have been in a location of interest, please do still come forward. We saw a slight uptick after our press conference yesterday, when we encouraged people to come forward. The same message applies today.

PM: I know the weather was bad over the weekend. We don't want that to be a reason that people aren't coming forward, but my recollection, Minister, is that of those we are expecting to have had their tests by now, we're outstanding about 91.

Hon Chris Hipkins: Yeah, just under 100 still outstanding. There's about 200 who are not yet due, so one of the things when people contact us and say, "Look we were in a location of interest.", they'll be interviewed to identify when they were there and they'll be given advice on when to be tested, because we don't necessarily want people being tested too early.

Media: Did Cabinet give any consideration to whether and when businesses which were affected by the Australian lockdowns and closure bubble might get Government support, such as the tourist operators reporting cancellations?

PM: No, look, in the same way that—we haven't been in a position to compensate those businesses who have been affected by the closure of our borders throughout COVID. There just isn't the capacity for us to compensate those who experience bookings because of a change at the border. What we do, of course, provide provision for are those businesses

affected by alert level changes and when we explicitly put in place restrictions in-country that affect their revenue. I think the important point here is that the reason that we put a pause on the trans-Tasman arrangement is so that we don't have further domestic incidents that might lead to restrictions and alert level changes, because those are the things that would affect domestic tourism and, potentially, for instance, our ski season.

Media: So there'll be nothing for those operators who might have geared up ready for the Australian school holidays if the bubble remains closed?

PM: No, that hasn't been part of our support package, but, for instance, resurgence payments, payments for those who have staff who go into isolation, for instance, are. One thing that I would say, as well, is that the numbers across the trans-Tasman arrangement, generally a lot of our flights and travel, a good portion do come out of New South Wales. That obviously has been an area where their restrictions and their lockdown is affecting, of course, the ability for people to travel.

Media: Prime Minister, speaking of testing, you came through Wellington Airport at 10.30 last Monday, and that was the allotted time they said that was a place of interest. Have you been tested?

PM: No. I sought advice on that, Barry, and the advice that I received was that I had come through—so the time that the individual in question's flight lifted off, I was advised was 10.30, at the time that my flight landed in the opposite terminal. So the advice that I needed to follow was to monitor my symptoms over a 14-day period, which I do on a regular basis. In fact, I think I landed at 10.35, potentially.

Media: The two miners who travelled here from the Northern Territory—how long did they spend out in the community before they were put into isolation?

PM: That's not information I have. I'll hand over to the Minister for that one.

Hon Chris Hipkins: My understanding is that they are both isolating. One's already returned a negative test. I don't have information on exactly their date of arrival, though.

Media: Are there potentially people that they came into contact with who need to be—

PM: Keep in mind that they are identified as possible contacts. I think the Northern Territory's identified 600 of them, so they are contacts rather than someone who has tested positive, which is obviously where we would contact trace. But we might be able to put more information out about their movements over the next 24 hours perhaps. Did you have anything further on that?

Media: Yeah. Are they in a managed isolation facility or are they—

PM: No, we don't tend to put contacts into managed isolation facilities. We ask them to isolate under our current—in the same way we have for everyone in Wellington.

Media: Are you able to say where they are in the country? Is that something that you would be able to share?

Hon Chris Hipkins: No, sorry, I don't have that information.

Media: When we asked that to the ministry, though, they said that they wouldn't provide that information. Don't the public have a right to know if it's in a city or an area that need to be on higher alert?

Hon Chris Hipkins: If there is an increased risk, then we would certainly let people know the location of that increased risk.

PM: As we say, at the moment they are one of 600 to 700 who have been identified.

Media: But doesn't that put the people around them at an increased risk, though, because they are a potential contact?

Hon Chris Hipkins: No, not necessarily. At this point they're a potential contact. There's not even any evidence at this point to identify whether they are a contact. We've already had one

test result back from them—from one of those two people. It's already come back negative. If we were to see anything that suggested that there was any risk, then of course we would use our contact tracing system to run that risk to ground.

Media: Just following on that question earlier about the people who are still yet to be contacted, that seems like a really large number.

PM: The 91, you mean? They're not yet to be contacted. They're the ones that we need results to be returned from. So we already know about them.

Media: So how many are yet to be contacted?

Hon Chris Hipkins: All of those people—all of those people—every one of those, has been contacted. So because this is a self-identification process, so these people are people who have got in touch and they've said, "I have been at a location of interest.", they will have been talked through the process, saying, you know, to identify the risk they will have been given guidance about when to be tested. So in terms of those people who have been asked to be tested by now, there's somewhere between 90 to 100 of those outstanding as of this morning who we'd hoped to have been tested by now. There's about 200 more who are still to be tested because they're not yet due that test.

PM: Did you want to clarify that—

Media: Oh, just because from the press release, there was the 300 people who—and it's just one group who were potential contacts, and it didn't differentiate whether they had been contacted or hadn't been contacted and just hadn't come forward for testing. But you're saying all of those people have been contacted—it would just be helpful if—

PM: They're just called "potential contacts" because in some cases they might have been in some part of Te Papa. We can't determine whether or not they actually came in contact with the person. We've taken a very broad scope for this purpose.

Media: Could you run us through what criteria Cabinet will be looking at tomorrow when it comes to reassessing the pause on the Aussie travel bubble, as well as looking at potentially moving Wellington back to level 1? What, in broad strokes, will Cabinet be assessing?

PM: I'll let the Minister pick up, perhaps, on the assessment for the level 2 arrangements. For the trans-Tasman, for us at the moment, it's the level of uncertainty that we see from a few cases or incidences where we're still awaiting the impact of those. So, for instance, the fact that from Victoria we've had an air steward who has been on multiple domestic flights, in Brisbane there seems to be an infection control issue around a quarantine that's led to cases, and, of course, in the Northern Territory, they're still running down potential contacts in cases that may have spread through other parts of Australia.

So we'll be looking at the status of each of these situations, and, of course, the impact of New South Wales on other states. We'll be looking at the border control measures that each state has, and, therefore, how confident can we be that they've contained themselves from New South Wales, or, indeed, other outbreaks. And then we'll just be applying a level of cautiousness. You know, we don't want a situation where, because we haven't taken a cautious approach, we've exposed New Zealand unnecessarily to risk. I'll just let Minister Hipkins just finish on the level 2 criteria.

Hon Chris Hipkins: I think the Prime Minister's covered that relatively comprehensively. Probably the one bit that I would add to that is that we'll also be looking at what step-down measures we may have for those states where we reopen travel at some point, and pre-departure testing is highly likely to be one of those measures.

PM: And on the Wellington step down, sorry—the criteria for stepping Wellington out of level 2.

Hon Chris Hipkins: Oh, right, so in terms of stepping Wellington out of level 2, we're going to be looking at exactly how many of those test results do we have in; are we seeing anything extra out of that? We'll be particularly looking at it on a location-by-location basis; so we know

that at some of those potential exposure sites, we've had very high levels of testing. And others, we've still got some question marks. Actually, it's pretty high across all of those sites, but we know that there could still be more potential in a place like Te Papa, for example, where there could potentially be contacts who haven't yet come forward. So we'll look at all of that tomorrow. A lot of work has gone into sort of pushing information out there, including looking at tickets for exhibitions and making sure that, you know, all of that information is being drawn on to create as much of a net as we can to capture everyone. So we'll look at all of that tomorrow. But it's encouraging, what we're seeing at this point.

Media: Just on that pre-departure testing, obviously you've got Kiwis who are in various different states. If you are to, I guess, un-pause the bubble for some of those states tomorrow, you need to get a pre-departure test, you need to get the result back, it all takes time—are we likely to have Kiwis who are going to end up missing flights 24, 48 hours after you lift it, and how problematic is that?

PM: Yeah, and this is the exact discussion that we had a preliminary talk-through of these issues with Cabinet today. And so, yes, we are very seriously considering additional requirements before returning to New Zealand. We will factor in what lead time is required to enable people to schedule their bookings and their flights. So we'll be really pragmatic about how we do it, and also airlines need a bit of time to gear back up as well. So all of that will factor into our thinking, including the risk profile of some states—if we are going to have a longer period of time, can we at least bring people home in the interim; we will think through all of that.

Media: OK, so there is the potential, then, that if someone has a flight that can't get a pre-departure test in time, they could come back and self-isolate, for example?

PM: Ah, what we would be more likely to do is allow a bit more time in order for pre-departure testing to be concluded before we would start flights. We might factor that in, and that would probably be easier for the traveller than having to go into a form of self-isolation on return.

Media: Prime Minister, did you want to set the record straight on hate speech after your interview on the *AM Show* this morning. You said it has to incite violence, but that's not right, is it?

PM: There's a range of factors; incitement of violence is one of them. As I said at the beginning of that interview, what we'll look to do is take in provisions that have existed for the better part of 50 years. We have changed some wording, based on the advice of the royal commission, because some language, such as the use of the word "ridicule" isn't particularly clear or modern. And, at the same time, we've proposed an expansion of those who will be included. But, again, all of that's set out both by the royal commission and, obviously, in the discussion documents.

Media: Is insult a high enough bar for hate speech?

PM: Well, of course, not on its own, and so you'll see in the proposal that's put forward—which is based on our existing law—it does say that you have to intentionally incite or stir up, and, of course, then—so that has to be the intent. Then it talks about the different methods that may be used. One thing that I think is also helpful to clarify: when we're talking about intentionally inciting or stir up, the language the royal commission has also used is "maintain or normalise hatred". Just to provide some context around that: what they're trying to cover off there is that in some cases—for instance, if you are a white supremacist group and you are engaging with a white supremacist group, say, at a rally, that may be a group that is already incited to behave in a certain way. So in order to ensure that that wouldn't be excluded, the royal commission recommended the use of the word "maintain" or "normalise". That's the exact kind of area where that would be intended to be used.

Media: Why did you say that political opinion isn't covered when it is?

PM: Because when the discussion document was brought to us as a Cabinet, in the discussion document in proposal 1 it explicitly did reference political opinion. You can see now it says, “Groups experience hateful speech based on other grounds as well, including their sex, gender (including gender identity), religious belief, disability, or sexual orientation.”, and it did include political opinion in that section. We removed political opinion. Our view was that if people recommended it be included, they could do so, and that’s why the question is asked, “In your opinion, which groups should be protected by this change?” It also asks, do you think there are other groups that need to be protected by this change? We removed it as an example. Our intent was the starting point [*Inaudible*] and I imagine in the proactive release you’ll see the minuted decision to remove it.

Media: So why didn’t your justice Minister know that?

PM: Oh, look, he was in the discussion. He did know it. Just whether or not he was—

Media: We asked him about it in the press conference about the proposed changes and he said we need to be careful about it as though it was still part of the discussion.

PM: Because we’re, of course, still allowing people who may wish to offer up that it should be included. Keep in mind, our human rights legislation already says that you shouldn’t be discriminated based on your political opinion. The question we’re asking is, should that be included in extreme hate legislation as well? And the reason for that is there are some countries where people are discriminated against for their political opinion. They may, for instance, seek refugee status in New Zealand and there may be good grounds to make sure that they see within our laws that the things they’ve been previously discriminated are included. We haven’t used that as a starting point for some of the reasons you would probably expect. In our view, it wasn’t really the most common concern in New Zealand, so we chose not to include it as a starting point.

Media: For clarification, is it on the table as part of the proposals or is it not?

PM: We haven’t included it as our starting point, but we left open the fact that people may choose to suggest it to us.

Media: So it is in there, because it says that anything under section 21 of the Human Rights Act could be covered—some or all of the groups are protected.

PM: In the annexe, you can see in our—

Media: It’s in the annexe?

PM: In the annexe it refers to section 21 of the Human Rights Act, but we removed it as an explicit example—instead asked a general question: what do you think should be included? You will see from the Cabinet minute we explicitly removed it. Our view was that there were other more important areas such as religion and, of course, such as sexual orientation.

Media: You were also really explicit on the *AM Show* this morning. You said, “This is about extreme speech where you’re inciting violence and hatred against an entire group of people.”, but it can be stirring up hatred by being insulting, right?

PM: I think, again—

Media: So do you want to correct the record?

PM: I think probably what I’m best to do is actually refer back to the royal commission, which is where all this came from.

Media: Or the discussion document that you put out.

PM: Which lifts the royal commission’s wording. And they themselves say in para 31(b), “The language of hatred and calls for violence that we propose would catch only extreme speech. We do not see a reframed offence as engaged by microaggressions, and so on. Nor would it be a mechanism for criminalising the vigorous expression of opinion on controversial issues. ... Stirring up of hatred and calls for violence are towards the most damaging end of

the continuum of harmful behaviour”. So that’s why we accepted the wording of the royal commission, because it really captured that this is at the extreme end.

Media: But you were categorical that it was about inciting violence. And that’s not right, is it?

PM: Well, actually, I—

Media: It’s not just inciting violence.

PM: Incitement of violence is one example of that.

Media: It’s one example; so is insulting people.

PM: But it also has to be with the intent—and it is about extreme hostility. Look, the point that I am making here is that just to hold an opinion about another group or person is not enough. The threshold is high. The intent with these proposals is, yes, to modernise the language, but not to lower the threshold.

Media: But is expressing that opinion up for discussion?

PM: Again, no. Expression of an opinion alone is not sufficient.

Media: On the snap bubble closure that was announced on Saturday, you obviously did that without cases too in South Australia, ACT, Tasmania, Northland, and Queensland. You did that because of the fear the miners might have got into those places. Do you think the way that that decision was done—sort of last minute, late night—would undermine confidence in the health response of some Australian states?

PM: Or, otherwise, the argument could be made that we didn’t move quickly enough. We’ve always had to be agile. So we’ll identify an issue as quickly as we can. We’ll sometimes receive health advice verbally as a result of that. And, in order to get in front of an issue, that does mean acting quickly. Perhaps Minister Hipkins could speak to that.

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, I think, as we’ve indicated when we opened the trans-Tasman bubble, when it comes to these kinds of decisions we will err on the side of caution. I mean, as we’ve seen, additional cases have come up in other Australian states since we made that decision.

Media: [*Inaudible*] reviewed state border settings you said you were going to do, will there be scope to move to a more common sense approach that’s not as rigid with state borders—for instance, not including Cairns, which is 20 kilometres—sorry, 20 hours—drive from Brisbane, where there’s no cases; not including northern New South Wales, which has southern Queensland as its catchment?

PM: Yeah. Some of the issues, of course, though, are around our ability to identify at the border people’s travel and movements and where they’ve come from. We rely on declarations. Sometimes that has proven to be not as failsafe as we would like, and so that’s why, yes, sometimes you sacrifice nuance for the fact that it is actually quite hard to create distinctions when you’re dealing with one point of departure that is an airport. So those are some of the difficulties we encounter.

Media: Are you satisfied that the bubble—yeah, if you take yourself to two months ago—like, it’s worked as you had hoped? Or is this problematic [*Inaudible*]

PM: No. I think the reason we took our time was because we always anticipated that we may have occurrences like this, and that’s why we always use language like “flyer beware”. We try to give people a bit of an insight into situations where we may shut down. We don’t anticipate being frequently in a situation where we’d have an all-of-Australia pause, but what happened in New South Wales—and potentially Northern Territory—had the potential to almost be a starburst event, where things and people move very quickly but the lockdowns may not have necessarily captured those people quickly enough. So just putting everything on hold gives us a chance to see whether or not that was in fact something that occurred and whether or not we’re ready to safely re-open.

Sorry—I did have Clare. I had a little speaking list. Forgive me, I might have had Henry. Would you like me to go to Henry?

Media: I've long forgotten what I was [*Inaudible*]

PM: Oh, forgive me. Henry—and then I'm going to give you another chance, Clare, in case you remember.

Media: Of the locations of interest, several of the cases of interest have told us they're quite unhappy with the support scheme, especially because if level 2 hadn't been extended to seven days, they wouldn't have been eligible at all, despite the fact that many of their staff would have to, you know, isolate for 14 days. And there's the kind of perception issue, like, going to a location of interest afterwards—being a location of interest with the Delta variant. Are you looking at all at maybe upgrading that scheme to take into account this very small number of businesses who become—

PM: Often—very rarely have we had a change in restrictions that's only been three days in its entirety. So I certainly saw the comments of some of those—particularly hospitality businesses—where, because of their business model, 80 percent of their staff might have been caught up by a requirement to isolate for 14 days and that therefore led to the business closing down for that period. But, of course, now, with the decision around restriction levels, the alert level for seven days, the resurgence payment kicks in. So not only do they now have a payment for all of their staff members for the period they're required to isolate; in addition, they get a \$1,500 payment and a \$400 payment—from memory—for individual staff per FTE. That's in order to create a bulk payment. So they're not required to pass that on; that is in order to calculate magnitude of effect, and that is a payment that can now be made to those businesses. And they can receive both.

Media: But they won't be able to apply for that until Thursday?

PM: Until Thursday.

Media: Are you looking at—

PM: Literally because of our ability to then—but we move those applications through as quickly we can. The other recommendation I'd make is just to be in contact with IRD. I know we're at a particular point in the cycle where some bills are due, and IRD do have discretion to work with those businesses who are affected by some of these restrictions.

Media: It's a follow-up to one asked 15 questions ago, about the level 2 decision for Wellington. Hipkins said that one of the things they'd be looking at is rates of testing at the different sites. The question was, are you particularly looking at rates of testing for the Sunday sites and the Monday sites that you were most concerned about, and how high are those tracking compared to what you would like to see?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Yes, we are. We've seen a good rate of testing of those contacts who have come forward from those sites. In the case of the Wellington Airport, we would like to see more in that area. Those are the sorts of things that we'll look very closely at, yes.

Media: Prime Minister, RNZ had an article this morning about Chinese Communist Party spies infiltrating universities. Are you aware of this? What are your thoughts on it?

PM: Look, as a general statement, from the moment that I took up this role, one of the things that I said of course we are concerned around foreign interference in all its forms, whether it be through a suggestion of education institutions or any manifestation, including, for instance, through donations, and that we would maintain vigilance in assessing whether or not our legislative framework is fit for purpose for dealing with that. But, also, that we work very closely with those institutions that may be affected, and that includes our tertiary education providers. Perhaps for some more specificity, the Minister might like to comment.

Hon Chris Hipkins: A university lecture hall should absolutely be a place that's free from foreign interference. If any of the universities, or, indeed, any other educational institutions have any concerns about that, I think that NZSIS would be keen to hear from them. This is

something that we shouldn't have a tolerance for, but you obviously need to have evidence that it's taking place, rather than just a general assertion.

Media: Had this come across your desk already, this issue?

Hon Chris Hipkins: No, it hasn't. One of the things that I guess we have to be mindful of is that people can make claims, but we need to see some evidence to be able to back those up. But, absolutely, if there's evidence that there are concerns, then I will be fully supportive of those concerns being properly dealt with.

Media: Is that the same for you, Prime Minister? You hadn't heard about it until today?

PM: Again, the things that I'm briefed on I'm not always obviously explicit about. As I've always said, we've always been live to issues of foreign interference across a range of potential areas. We've got good working relationships with those that we need to support to potentially address where that foreign interference may exist.

Media: Apologies if you were asked this yesterday, I missed it, but have you got any figures as to how many New Zealanders are currently trapped—well, for want of a better word—in Australia?

PM: I personally don't; we don't—usually we do that through MFAT, where Kiwis register when they travel on SafeTravel. I imagine most Kiwis wouldn't necessarily register for a trip to Australia, and so probably that's something we'll have a better insight of over time, because people often, if there is disruption with travel—but I will check in with MFAT and we'll get those numbers to you if we have them. Do you have them?

Hon Chris Hipkins: No. We do know that more people have arrived in New Zealand than have gone to Australia in the time that the trans-Tasman bubble's been open, but in terms of that data match to figure out exactly who's gone that way and then not come back, don't have an accurate handle on that at this point.

Media: Just on an issue for down in Christchurch—

PM: Once more with enthusiasm.

Media: There's some 20 students at Christchurch Girls' High School have reported being raped in a survey, and the Children's Commissioner is saying that urgent action must be taken on consent and gender equality for boys. What do you make of this?

PM: My recollection is that, for a time, we have had reports—in some cases internationally—that suggest alarming rates of sexual violence in education environments. Particularly, you'll recall that we saw in some university campuses a time where really high rates were being reported there. My view is yes, that, actually, often you'll hear reports that it is sometimes within relationships that we see this violence occur, and sometimes outside of it. Regardless, we need to create environments where young people have safe places to go to report where issues have occurred. But, also, you're right. There are things that we could and should be doing right up front. ACC has been supporting a programme called Mates & Dates, which does talk about some of these issues early on, but I know there are calls for us to ensure that there's greater and wider access for our young people to some of these programmes.

Media: What more could be done? Is it a central government problem? Or—

PM: I think it's for all of us. I do think that we need to make sure we're supporting those in an education environment. These are very hard issues to deal with, and I don't think any education provider should feel left alone in dealing with some of these issues. But we can also support well-evidenced - based programmes that we know make a difference, and that's what things like Mates & Dates is intended to be.

Hon Chris Hipkins: One of the things that we've recently done is give the Ministry of Education more money for curriculum work in the wellbeing space, and that will include these

sorts of topics. Any schools who are experiencing challenges in this space where there is heightened concern, the Ministry of Education is there to help, so please do reach out.

Media: Just on this [*Inaudible*] around the [*Inaudible*] scanning and the mask-wearing, is there any time frame, I guess, for when those reports come back and when they could come into force?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, we'll be working on that over the next week. Obviously, we'll keep you posted as soon as decisions have been made on that.

Media: Has there been any consideration in Cabinet around a more general review of the alert level system?

PM: Oh, look, I mean, some might consider that these are forms of alterations just generally. They're safeguards that regardless—because, as I've said, actually some of the issue is not when you go into an alert level. A case is what triggers the alert level, and you want to know that you've got all the information you need before the case arrives, and that's why preventative measures like QR code scanning is really important. But we always just keep a watch on whether or not our alert levels are broadly in keeping and working well. I think they do serve us well. People understand them. It means you can move very quickly, and that's really key. So I'm not in favour of suggestions that we should have, you know, upwards of eight new alert levels. I think we are pretty nuanced in the way we apply our restrictions and we're pretty nimble.

Media: The discussion document that you prepared around hate speech that's supposed to be a fulsome document that the public can gather a lot of information from, do you regret not explicitly carving out political opinion in that so that the public could be more informed when they're making their views heard on that?

PM: Yeah, well, look, it's not referenced in the proposal, but it is fair to say that it is part of our current human rights legislation alongside disability, sexual orientation, age. Some jurisdictions include all of these and some tend to focus around issues of religion, race, sexual orientation. Ultimately, the point we're making to the public is "Here's a list of things that people consider should be included. Do you think there are more groups?" So we've not limited people. Some people, as I've said, will have experienced in other countries persecution because of political belief. That doesn't tend to be the case in New Zealand, but we've left open to people if they want to suggest it they can; it hasn't been our starting point.

Media: The Opposition says that you and your justice Minister don't understand your own proposed law. Do you understand your own law?

PM: Yes.

Media: Have you or the Government settled on the appropriate State celebration for the Black Caps winning the World Test Championship? Are we talking public holiday or parade or something fitting?

PM: You've all been thinking it.

Media: I mean, it is an historic achievement.

PM: Yeah, it is, and thank you. I'm somewhat alarmed that it's the Australian in the room that needs to point that out! Look, that's something that I know the Minister for sport has considered. One of the issues is different players coming in at different times and so they'll be in quarantine at different times, and so that does pose some logistical questions. But we have been thinking about how we mark it in an appropriate way. So perhaps grab him on the tiles on that tomorrow.

Media: Do you think the justice Minister fully understands the hate speech process?

PM: Yes, I do.

Media: What is the Ministry of Health's view on the expansion of mask use that you talked about today?

PM: It's fair to say the advice has sometimes been different to our view as a Cabinet. So, for instance, there have been periods where the Ministry of Health have recommended that we use face coverings through periods of restrictions but not after. We happen to have taken a different view, but, look, that's not unusual.

Media: Ashley Bloomfield himself gave that advice in a recent Cabinet paper. Is it problematic that you and the health boss, essentially, have certain differing opinions here?

PM: I think, actually, it's relatively rare where we take different views, and this is an occasion where, actually, we took a more conservative view. We wanted to just try and reduce down risk in some of those potentially risky environments. So, look, I don't think that it's something that Dr Bloomfield was particularly concerned that we'd taken that more conservative view.

Media: Just coming back to possible spies, do we need to heighten visa requirements for foreign students to ensure that people aren't coming here with ulterior motives? Is that on your radar or do you need evidence to look into that?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, I think we would need evidence to look into that, and it would be a very, very difficult thing to be able to identify. It would set a very high hurdle for international students to come into New Zealand.

Media: What you've signalled today, effectively, means that because of the bubble and the risk that poses and the Delta variant, we need to have stronger public health measures. And [*Inaudible*] have also changed their [*Inaudible*] around when you pause the bubble. Would we look to pause with states if any Delta cases emerged [*Inaudible*]

PM: I think it's fair to say that all of the decisions we've made have been on the basis that we have unvaccinated populations on both sides, and, in fact, I would say that even if we were in the same position as the likes of the UK, we would still be taking a cautious approach. They've got 60 percent, roughly, of their population vaccinated, but they've over the last seven days had 100,000 cases reported. So, yes, vaccination is one factor, but we will continue to make sure that whatever we do and however we adjust our border restrictions, we take into account what may potentially trigger outbreaks and what we can do that is the least likely to cause lockdowns. That's a big goal for us.

Media: We've also known about the Delta variant for some time and seen what it's done in India and so forth, and we've had public health experts calling for mandatory QR codes and for wider use of masks and also more alert levels. Has the Government become a bit complacent, and [*Inaudible*] with the targets that we need to look at these things?

PM: Not at all. In fact, you have some people who will criticise the decision we made around the trans-Tasman arrangement. I think we saw with the Alpha variant, we changed up some of the things that we did as a result of what we learnt about the transmissibility of the Alpha variant. Equally, we look at the data of what the Delta variant is showing us, and so in every case we will make adjustments based on what we learn on variants. But this will be an ongoing story of COVID. Variants will continue to cause ongoing challenges. Our goal as a country has to be to preserve our position so that no matter what happens with a variant, we're in the best possible position to learn from it without experiencing an outbreak that means we lose control.

Media: Was the justice Minister right to say that Millennials could potentially be charged for inciting hatred against Boomers?

PM: Again, I, of course, without having read the transcript or seeing the full interview, but rather than excerpts, I won't make a judgment on what was or wasn't said in the interview. But what I have said is that in line with our existing legislation, the intention is to keep the bar as high as it has been in the past but to simply modernise the language. It is not enough just to share an opinion or to insult someone. It's very explicit that there's a range of factors and the bar is high. Thanks, everyone.

conclusion of press conference