

**POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 2 AUGUST 2021  
HANSARD TRANSCRIPT**

**PM:** Good afternoon, and welcome back to a two-week sitting block for Parliament, following the mid-year recess. Today, I have both Minister Faafoi and Minister Hipkins with me to give an update on decisions made relating to RSE workers and efforts the Government is undertaking to assist industries hard hit by worker shortages because of COVID-19.

But, first, let me give an overview of my coming week. Tomorrow and Wednesday, I will be in Wellington in Parliament. On Thursday, I head to Christchurch to attend the reopening ceremony for the YMCA's Hotel Give, following the YMCA hostel's seismic strengthening and refurbishment, courtesy of the Government shovel-ready funding.

On Friday, I am in Auckland for a virtual Pacific Islands forum leaders meeting. With COVID still raging around the world, we'll discuss the Pacific's response and how to keep populations and economies safe.

From today, I'll be providing a weekly update on our vaccination programme. Last week saw a major milestone reach with the opening up of bookings to group 4, New Zealanders 60-plus. It is also the launch of Book My Vaccine and the 0800 number, which now means we can manage all booking nationwide rather than just by DHB by DHB. These changes have already made a real difference. Last week, we vaccinated over a quarter of a million New Zealanders, with 253,163 people receiving a vaccine, our biggest week to date. Friday last week was also our biggest single day of vaccinations.

The mass vaccination event in South Auckland was a success, with 15,881 Aucklanders vaccinated over three days. We'll be assessing how it went and what we can learn from it for future events, given it was our first mass vaccine event. But we'll likely see more vaccination events like this around the country over the coming months.

The booking system is performing well—345,734 vaccinations were booked last week. And over the last three days, 15,728 calls were handled by the 0800 call centre. Feedback has been that it's been a fairly seamless and speedy process, with average wait times of less than one minute on the 0800 number.

Six hundred and fifty-nine thousand, three hundred and sixteen over-65s in group 3 have now either had their first vaccination or are booked. That represents more than 80 percent of people in this group. We continue to encourage anyone over 65 who hasn't yet booked their vaccine to take up the opportunity to do so.

More than 60 percent of people aged 60 to 64 have either booked or received at least one vaccination. Less than a week into this group, that is a great result. Again, we urge any members of this group to book as soon as possible.

Finally, we saw the roll out of more vaccination sites. Last week, 76 sites were on-boarded and started vaccinating. This include a vaccination clinic on Rakiura / Stewart Island. That was a great success. Because of the island's isolated nature, the clinic was available to all residents aged 18 and over, and 257 vaccines were administered, more than 80 percent of the eligible population. As well as expanding our vaccination programme, the Government is also focused on supporting our economic recovery.

COVID has closed borders around the globe, and New Zealand, like many other countries, is experiencing workforce shortages. Our closed border has been critical to keeping COVID out and keeping our economy running. Numbers out last week showed our goods exports rose 9.5 percent in the June quarter to \$16 billion. Our agriculture sector led the charge with milk powder, butter, and cheese up 31 percent; fruits up 33 percent; and meat 13 percent.

But despite these improved numbers, we know our agricultural sector is experiencing challenges. We've heard the call from primary sectors and others to bring in additional

workers in a safe way, and we think that that is now possible. Cabinet has made the decision to work to open up one-way quarantine-free travel to New Zealand from Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu for RSE workers, without having to use the MIQ system.

While there may not be travel from all three immediately, we're working towards this opening up in September. This policy will open up the ability for significantly more workers to enter the country to assist with an expected peak demand for workers in February and March of 2022. While we are currently bringing in 150 RSE workers every 16 days, this new one-way travel policy will significantly expand the potential workforce available for those experiencing labour shortages.

We'll also have the potential to free up existing MIQ spaces set aside for RSE workers. Our intention is that any quarantine-free travel arrangements would be one way, for entering New Zealand only. Travellers would still undergo quarantine on return to their home country, as has been their home country's policy. This expectation has been made clear to the countries that we are talking to.

We are talking to these countries because the risk associated with MIQ-free travel is low. Tonga has had no COVID-19 cases at all, Samoa has had one, and Vanuatu has had four—all were at the border and none have experienced community transmission. The Government is aware there are significantly fewer temporary migrant workers coming to New Zealand than employers have traditionally had access to. While there are approximately 7,000 RSE workers currently onshore, there are normally over 10,000 onshore for the February-March peak. Some people here will go home before that peak, and there are also fewer working holidaymakers here than in previous years. One-way quarantine-free travel for RSE workers will help manage that shortfall.

We're already in conversation with the Samoan, Tongan, and Vanuatu Governments, and we'll shortly be talking to industry bodies to confirm the details of the scheme. Minister Faafoi has had preliminary conversations last week with those industries most affected by this decision. We'll be working through some of the detail, including repatriation pathways, and one of the critical components of our agreement with these countries will be that they must accept RSE workers and enable their return so that we don't risk stranded workers. We'll also be looking for specific job opportunities, and ensuring that we don't put at risk either countries' COVID-free status.

We're looking at additional health precautions to give added reassurance, both in the New Zealand side, and we'll be discussing with those we're working with whether or not there's further assurance on their side that may be required.

And I would note that we're only opening up this option to specified workers at this stage, so we can ensure that we can undertake it in a safe and managed way. This policy represents the kind of safe change to border settings we can undertake as a result of keeping COVID out.

Further decisions on changes to our border based on our vaccination uptake has been the significant piece of work across Government called "Reconnecting New Zealanders to the World". A key piece of this work is scientific advice from Professor David Skegg and his committee of experts on the different levels of vaccination required in New Zealand in order to make safe changes to our border settings, and what those changes may look like.

On Thursday, August 12, there'll be a forum held here in Wellington, where the research will be discussed, and I will set out how the Government plans to respond to it over the next six months. Everyone wants our border settings to change, but no one wants to throw away our hard-won gains. I'll work to make sure we balance both demands.

Now we're happy to take your questions.

**Media:** Prime Minister, how many workers are you expecting to come in under this new one-way travel bubble, and what are you doing to mitigate the risks—you talk about precautions?

**PM:** We are only able to do this, firstly, because New Zealand has the position it has where we are COVID-free, but also because those Pacific Island nations that we've chosen to work with are also COVID-free, but we are working on extra assurances—things like pre-departure testing, on-arrival testing, and some mitigations at the early period of their arrival, alongside their employers, to ensure that we do indeed have COVID-free workers.

**Media:** And what about the numbers that you're expecting to come in?

**PM:** Well, at this stage, our goal is to ease the pressure with the horticultural industry. So we'll be working closely with industry to make sure that we are achieving that goal—taking some of the pressure out, making sure that we're not having fruit rot on the grounds, meeting the demand that we know is coming, particularly into the first part of next year. Minister Faafoi's been having discussions directly with industry so I might have him speak to that as well.

**Hon Kris Faafoi:** Yes, so we met with the sector last Thursday, I believe. They've obviously taken the news very well. There is some work to do with them in terms of capacity of what they are able to bring in through when we're able to being the quarantine-free travel. But they are keen to work with us to make sure that they do have sufficient numbers of the next season.

**Media:** Minister, this addresses one of many issues that have been thrown up by the closure of our borders. Will more border exemptions follow?

**Hon Kris Faafoi:** Look, we're working on those issues as we speak. Obviously, with the likes of split families, etc., it's about getting the balance right and making sure we do have managed isolation capacity to make commitments in that area. We're very happy that we're able to make sure we meet the demands of the hort and vit sector. Obviously they had troubles with being able to access sufficient labour last season. We've been talking to them every fortnight for the last six months to make sure that we're aware—and they're aware—of what moves we're making, and it was nice to be able to give them some good news.

**PM:** I'm just going to add, this is actually a decision that we can make that doesn't jeopardise New Zealand's hard-won status but at the same time doesn't impact on those New Zealanders who may be offshore and seeking to come through our managed isolation facilities.

**Media:** In terms of timing, did Cabinet sign off on that today, and why have you chosen to announce that today?

**PM:** No, actually we signed off on this—it would be a couple of weeks ago now. We've been doing some—of course, once Cabinet made the decision we needed to start some initial conversations with those countries who we would be working alongside, but now we're at the point where we do need to start moving along those talks. That's the point at which we wanted to make it public, because we will start holding more conversation with industry now.

**Media:** Why now? Why today, though? Why not wait till those talks are finalised?

**PM:** Because, simply, we'll be talking to a wide range of individuals and stakeholders, and once we start doing that, of course, at that point these conversations often will reach to the public domain. It's the point now for us to share it publicly. We've made the decisions a few weeks ago. We've started the work. That work is ramping up, and now we're in a position to share it.

**Media:** What about people in other categories, including in medical categories—the case we've been reporting, the guy in Singapore cannot get an MIQ spot guaranteed. What emergency provision is there for people like him and indeed his sister, and is it acceptable that this man is waiting in Singapore?

**PM:** OK. So I'll split it into two parts. The issue of those who may for instance be in a country where we've made a decision that we can bring quarantine-free individuals within RSE scheme in: in principle, Cabinet are of the view that if there are those in emergency

medical situations in those countries for which we're accepting RSE workers, that we would be willing to consider allowing emergency medical situations where that travel could be quarantine free. We want to, however, first establish the system, get the health settings right and the assurances right. So that's the process we're going to work through, but in principle Cabinet did take a view that we should be in a position to support those who have health circumstances. For the issue of Singapore, I'll have Minister Hipkins just respond to the case that you've raised.

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** We have 350 rooms each fortnight available for emergency allocations, for people who have a desperate need to come into New Zealand for whatever reason, and that does include some medical grounds as well. I have been discussing with officials—and we'll get some more advice in the next day or two—on people who have to travel out of New Zealand for critical medical procedures that aren't available in New Zealand. That's a very small number of people but we will get some more advice just to make sure the settings are right on that. But where there are people who need to get back into New Zealand, time critical, there's 350 rooms available a fortnight. Probably what I would observe, though, is that we are seeing examples where people don't give us as much information, or don't give the people processing those applications, as much information as they subsequently share if their application is declined. So my request to people is: put as much information as possible in your applications, because there have been examples over the last year where people have been declined an emergency allocation and they've then shared a whole lot of information publicly, which has prompted us to review that, and that was information that was not available to the people making the decision on whether or not to approve them in the first place.

**Media:** But is there a straightforward process where someone in an emergency situation, or in a time where you can't work around time frames necessarily; it's an emergency situation—that they can easily get hold of someone and go through it?

**PM:** Because this is someone who hasn't actually made an application to come back because they're not sure when they will yet. Is that the understanding of the case?

**Media:** Yeah, and part of it is around the timing and having to make it. But, I suppose, for people who aren't always going to fit into a slot or a category, is it easy to ring up, in these exceptional circumstances, and talk to someone and say, "This is the situation I'm in."? Because a lot of the frustration seems to be actually joining the two up.

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** So there is a process and we do ask people to provide written information, because, of course, we need to verify the information they're supplying if they're asking for an emergency allocation. As I said, there is one group where I'm just checking to make sure we've got it absolutely right and that is people who are in New Zealand now but need to travel in order to have some essential medical procedure that they can't get in New Zealand. That is a small group, as I've said, but I just want to make sure that the settings for them are right.

**Media:** Is that the Ministry of Health high-cost treatment pool patients?

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** Well, that could be one of the groups of people that are covered by that.

**Media:** But what about, I mean, David Willetts specifically? Can the Government help him in this specific situation? I know there are lots of individual cases, but this seems like a case where, you know, he really should be given some help and assistance to get emergency MIQ to come back.

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** I've always taken the view that I don't publicly discuss individuals' cases, particularly not where I haven't been in communication with them and, therefore, don't have any consent to speak on their behalf or to share their personal information publicly. People choose to share their own information publicly. I've generally not responded to that, but we do have systems in place to review individual cases and I'd encourage people to go through that process.

**PM:** Yeah, and keep in mind, you know, we keep those 350 places a fortnight for the circumstances that are often described—real emergency situations where people do have genuine need. But the reason, of course, the stories we have now are coming to the fore is because there is considerable demand for people to come back, even though we actually accommodate the equivalent of the small town in New Zealand every single fortnight in managed isolation—4,000 people. And so it is a significant group at any given time, but there is a lot of demand right now and that's why we're seeing these stories come to the fore, where previously we were criticised for the fact that there were empty rooms because New Zealanders weren't using the demand that was available.

**Media:** Just to follow on from that, is it a demand thing or is the system just too inflexible?

**PM:** Demand. Obviously these issues don't arise when we have the same demand and supply. There are peak points where, for instance, during April and May we had capacity. The Minister at that time urged New Zealanders who may need to return home to come in at that point, because we could already see some hefty demand in the system down the track. Another important point: we have not yet released all of the space available for, for instance, November. We don't release every single room available right through to the end of the year. They are released in batches, because if someone has an emergency need, say, come up in August to go in November—that they have a fair chance of being able to access spots rather than those who knew they needed to travel early on. But one thing the Minister is looking at is whether or not there are settings changes that will make the system fairer. So he is examining some of those options because we hear some of the issues with, for instance, withholding some of those vouchers.

**Media:** I just wanted to ask about the RSE workers. Last year brought in 2,000 on the condition that they'd get paid the living wage. Is that going to apply [*Inaudible*]?

**PM:** So all of those conditions still apply. We're also very aware of accommodation, welfare needs, and those are things that we've always worked with industry on, to be assured of when we're bringing in RSE workers.

**Media:** How many workers are expected to come in?

**PM:** Look, on that, Barry, we don't have an exact number at this point because we've only just started the formal conversations with industry. That conversation started on Thursday, and now that we have the decision in the public domain we'll get into some more of the detail. But as I've said, 7,000 currently onshore; there's normally 10,000 and that doesn't take into account how many may depart between now and some of the peak periods in early 2022, but we'll work through with industry.

Some of the constraint will be their ability to return home. There's limited capacity in the managed isolation facilities for Samoa and Tonga and Vanuatu, so we'll need to work with those countries to be assured that once they have completed their work they're able to return, because we have had distressing situations where RSE workers have not been able to go home when they wished to.

**Media:** Prime Minister, you're talking about using the workers as kind of a test case here for, you know, you can have [*Inaudible*] medical reasons and stuff. Is it your in principle decision to eventually allow normal travel, family members who live in Tonga to—

**PM:** Not at this stage. The in-principle extension at this stage—once we're comfortable with the arrangements that we've established—is critical healthcare need, and those who may, for instance, have a scholarship to come into New Zealand for long-term study. Not coming and going but to come into New Zealand for long-term study. So those are the in-principle decisions. One of the reasons we haven't gone beyond that is because of the fact that you would then run the risk that people come into New Zealand and are stranded, because there's not that flow of people two-way.

**Media:** On the minimum wage requirement, how is the Government actually requiring that and do you have a labour inspectorate basically watching and making sure that—

**PM:** I'll have Minister Faafoi speak to that.

**Hon Kris Faafoi:** Look, to be perfectly honest, while there was some discussion about that at the time with the sector, I think they realised that in a constrained time of labour that that was the right thing to do. Again, we haven't had detailed conversations with them. We just gave them the rough outline of what we're trying to do in terms of discussion with Governments last week. We'll continue to do that as those talks progress.

**Media:** New Zealand's seen quite a lot of wage inflation in the last year or so. Do you expect that wage inflation might be a little bit deflating, Prime Minister?

**PM:** No, I don't expect that.

**Media:** Do you agree with the human rights commissioner that the Government is failing on the basic human right to a decent home?

**PM:** Well, actually, what I heard them also say is that we had made steps towards, of course, housing provision, and they acknowledged the work that we had done. But it is ultimately their decision. They are an independent body. It is absolutely their decision to inquire into any subject matter that they choose. I for one have frequently said that I believe everyone should have access to a warm, dry, affordable home. And all of the work we've done on extending and retrofitting homes to ensure they're insulated, Healthy Homes standards to make sure landlords are insulating, building more houses than any Government since the 1970s, and record consents have all been because of that belief. If the Human Rights Commission choose to do an inquiry, that is their prerogative.

**Media:** Do you agree that the housing crisis is a human rights crisis?

**PM:** Well, I believe we have a housing crisis, and everything we've done as a Government has been an acknowledgment that we need to act and we need to do what we can as Government, and, of course, encourage as much activity and support as much activity in the private development sector as we can, because we believe everyone deserves a warm, dry, affordable home.

**Media:** But you don't see it as a human rights crisis?

**PM:** You can call it a housing crisis or a human rights crisis; it needs to be dealt with, and we have long acknowledged that we do have a housing crisis in New Zealand—we do. Everyone should have a warm, dry home. That is not currently the case and that is why we have put all of the energy we have as Government into this issue. I don't mind what label you put on it. A crisis is a crisis.

**Media:** Prime Minister, on the announcement of the one-way bubble, does this indicate that the overall review of migration settings, which were supposed to be tightening, that that may not be the case?

**PM:** Sorry. Go through that again?

**Media:** So the overall review of migration settings, how does this fit within it? Does it mean that it will be quite some time?

**PM:** Oh, well, actually, right at the beginning when we set out the work we were doing on immigration we always said that RSE would remain as a policy for New Zealand, because it actually is part of our development work with the Pacific as well. And so we were clear on that from the beginning, that that was one area which we would see continuing as we were doing the work on our immigration settings.

**Media:** And is the Government considering a widespread amnesty on residency for those people who are here on temporary visas and applied—

**PM:** We haven't made any decisions in that regard. But what we did do when it was asked of us, quite some time ago, actually, as part of the consideration of an apology around the dawn raids—at that time we heard different calls from different sectors to consider amnesties. We've said we didn't believe it was appropriate to make an ad hoc decision, but,

rather, any consideration of such issues should be part of our wider immigration review work that is under way. But no decisions have been made.

**Media:** On the dawn raids, yesterday, which was obviously quite moving, if they're important enough to apologise for, why is it not essential enough to make it a mandatory part of the school curriculum?

**PM:** Because we, of course, allow schools to develop elements of their curriculum. So whilst we, of course, are requiring all schools to teach New Zealand history, there'll be elements within that that will be localised and decisions that will be made by schools. Already some schools do teach the dawn raids, but one of the issues that they've raised is they don't always have enough supporting material. Some of the work that we're going to do will mean that there are resources now that schools can draw on. Helpfully, the Minister of Education is here, though, and he may wish to speak to that.

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** I don't have a huge amount to add to what the Prime Minister has said, but schools, of course, are very enthusiastic about the New Zealand history curriculum and the ability to pick up a variety of different events that are significant in New Zealand's history. That can include some more recent history. So I think there's almost an impression out there that we're talking only about early New Zealand history. Actually, we're talking about New Zealand history right up to the contemporary, and that includes things like the dawn raids.

**Media:** Can I also ask Prime Minister, you were lobbied quite directly by some of the speakers, including the Tongan princess, to consider amnesties more seriously. Has that weighed upon you, the gravity of yesterday?

**PM:** Well, as you've already heard me outline, you know, that has been a call that, very early on, when there were questions over whether or not the Government would or should apologise for the Dawn Raids, that question of the status of overstayers was raised some time ago. And so I've already set out for you our view that any consideration there needs to be more broadly considered.

**Media:** I just meant did yesterday really bring it home to you?

**PM:** Oh, I guess the point I'd make is any time it's raised by me by a member of the community, I give it that due consideration, and we have, and our view is that it needs to be part of a wider piece of work. One thing that may not be known is, of course, the last Labour Government in 2005—2001; forgive me, in 2001—did undertake a piece of work on pathways to citizenship to support those who may not have legal status to go through the process to have legal status at that point. So there has been a point in the immigration programme where there was an amnesty of sorts, but it was some years ago. *[Interruption]* I'm sorry—Tova, I'll let you finish that supplementary.

**Media:** Thank you. That was coupled with the tightening of immigration settings back then, wasn't it, which is something that you're looking at doing, so it seems like it could be something. Because in the past, I feel like you've poured cold water on the idea of a pathway to residency for people who have overstayed.

**PM:** What I wanted to do was keep in check expectations that it would be a part of that apology, because, as we've outlined, our view is it needed to be considered amongst all of our immigration settings.

**Media:** So now you're opening the door for it to be part of the immigration reset?

**PM:** Oh, I've said no decisions have been made. We didn't think it appropriate to make an ad hoc decision without considering the wider ramifications. So that's where that sits now.

**Media:** Minister, on the MIQ voucher system, there's growing pressure from expats and also New Zealanders here who rely on work overseas. When you designed the system, did you expect it to be this hard?

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** What we've seen with MIQ is we've gone through different phases, so we initially had quite a high degree of demand, and we were just managing our demand and

managing our way through that. And then, of course, that demand, started to turn down, and it looked like we'd got on top of that. We've then seen demand turn up again, and it happened quite quickly—literally, within a space of a week or two, we went from having thousands of vouchers available to having next to no vouchers available. The MIAS system—the Managed Isolation Allocation System—that we have at the moment works well where supply and demand are roughly evenly matched. Where there is more demand than supply, it can be challenging, and so we are having another look about how we could ensure that we're getting fairness in that system. So, for example, the speed of someone's internet connection advantages and disadvantages some groups. So we'll look at a variety of different things there.

**Media:** So are you saying it's not fair at the moment and you'll look to make some changes?

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** There are certainly some equity issues there, and issues of fairness, and we want to make sure that we're looking really closely at that to make sure that everybody's getting a fair opportunity to get a chance to come back to New Zealand.

**Media:** Kiwis are feeling left out and locked out—do you feel that pressure?

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** I guess I stood here four or five months ago and said, "Look, we've got space available. Now is a good time to come home if you're in New Zealand or abroad who needs to come back into the country." And so there has been opportunity for New Zealanders to come back. Of course I feel for New Zealanders who are finding themselves somewhere else around the rest of the world and want to come back to New Zealand. That is a reality in a global pandemic—travel is going to be difficult, it's going to be expensive, it's going to involve delays and disruption, and therefore people should grab whatever opportunities they can get.

**PM:** You know, New Zealand's a small country—we'll know people who will want to return home, and I want every New Zealander who's currently abroad who has a desire to come home to be able to do so. However, I want them to come home to a safe New Zealand, and our managed isolation system has been what has kept New Zealanders safe, so we constantly have to strike that balance between safety for them and their families but also allowing people to come back.

**Media:** So when will you fix those equity issues by?

**PM:** Yeah, so some of those issues are being worked on now.

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** That's right, so obviously, first of all, I want to be very clear: we're not going to change the bookings for people who already have a booking. So what we'd be looking at is as we release more space—you know, future space—are there additional things that we can build into the system to ensure that there's, you know, greater fairness and equity there? As I said, up till sort of a couple of months ago, we had a situation where we weren't getting demand for emergency allocations because people could just jump online and book a room at short notice, and that just changed very quickly.

**Media:** So when are you going to fix the unfairness by?

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** As quickly as we can, we're working—I've got some options coming. I don't want to put a particular time frame on it. I'd imagine it would be within the next six to eight weeks, we would have more to say on that.

**Media:** Would you look at a waitlist?

**PM:** The question of a waitlist—we are also concerned that, in some cases—sorry I just said I'd pick up Mark's then I'd come back to you—that also poses issues as well, because, as I said, some people will have genuine emergency needs that mean they suddenly need to travel. They wouldn't have been able to put themselves on a waitlist, but with the system we have at the moment, where you see regular releases, it gives them an opportunity as well.



So no matter what you do, there will be—in some way—an issue that that creates for somebody. So it's something we constantly try to balance.

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** One of the challenges with a waitlist, too, is making sure that you're matching up timings in terms of when people want to return, the availability of rooms, and the availability of flights. For some places around the world, actually, flights are very difficult to get at the moment. There's often quite a narrow window, and making sure that we're matching all those things up is a huge logistical undertaking.

**PM:** Because if we release vouchers that have no alignment with flights, then that means those individuals have no chance of coming back, so we do release them with flights in mind.

**Media:** New Zealanders who have been stuck overseas for more than six months are now reporting that their pensions are being cut. Is that fair, and is the Government going to do anything to address that?

**PM:** So the question I'd ask is where have they been stuck for more than six months? Because, of course, in April and May we had capacity in MIQ. We've actually done some analysis with MSD over those countries where people have been drawing down pensions and/or their benefit, and for the most part they have been countries where there have been free movement and availability to come back to New Zealand. However, since New South Wales is an example someone's put out, in those circumstances that is beyond their control and I would ask that individual to make contact with Work and Income because they should not have their support cut off. That is a particular set of circumstances where, yes, they have been genuinely stuck and should continue to be supported.

**Media:** On that urgent order for syringes, can you just confirm how many have actually been ordered in, and how long the current stock is supposed to last?

**PM:** That story is wrong. I'll have Minister Hipkins speak to it.

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** There is no shortage of syringes. We have more than enough syringes for the vaccination campaign. Of course, like all health supplies, there are international supply constraints there, but there is absolutely no concern around the availability of syringes. We have plenty of syringes to be able to be going on with our vaccination campaign. That includes a variety of different types of syringe as well. So when you're extracting the sixth dose, they'll often use a different type of syringe to the first five doses, in order to maximise what we're able to get out of each vial. In the early part of this, when we were looking, particularly, at that ability to extract the sixth dose, there was some concern that we wouldn't have enough—I can't remember what the exact term is, the low something space syringes—but we ordered plenty at that time to make sure that that wouldn't be an issue.

**PM:** My understanding is that story was based on the fact that we had a request for quotation, we were seeking quotes on different brands in syringes for ongoing contingency planning. We already have enough orders in place to cover our vaccination programme already.

**Media:** Prime Minister, is part of that contingency planning around product stewardship with what's going to be happening with the medical supplies that are coming in with vaccinations? Because I assume there's going to be a lot of waste generated from this. Is there a plan in place—

**PM:** Ah, the product stewardship around waste for consumables. Forgive me, it's a good question but not one I can answer though.

**Hon Chris Hipkins:** No, look, I'm happy to get some more information for you on that. I know that medical waste, if you like, has some interesting challenges around it, but I'll certainly get back to you on that.

**PM:** Yeah, the same question could be asked for masks and PPE globally.

**Media:** Back on the call to grant residency for temporary workers, why don't you want to do that?

**PM:** So you will have seen that we've already taken a decision as Cabinet on those individuals who've been on temporary visas to ensure the roll-over of those temporary visas for two years where they are in areas of work where we would otherwise be seeking workers into New Zealand. It just makes no sense to be seeking a workforce offshore for those who are already here on temporary work visas. We're now seeking advice in a similar vein to those who have put in residency applications. I've heard in particular from the likes of the agriculture sector who may have workers here now who are actually seeking some certainty about their future, and we agree—we need to try and expedite some of that decision making. So we're seeking some advice on that.

**Media:** What about the expressions of interest queue? Apparently it's been closed for some time. Minister Faafoi, you've possibly had advice on it since April but are yet to make a decision and meanwhile doctors and software engineers are leaving the country.

**Hon Kris Faafoi:** Yeah, that's part of the advice the Prime Minister is alluding to. We want to make sure that we're making decisions like that in concert with some of the wider decisions we might have to make around setting for our residence programme. So, again, we don't want to make decisions in isolation. It's about gathering all the issues that we want to deal with and we're getting advice on that at the moment on that, to the wider sector.

**PM:** My view is that we'll probably have something to say on that in fairly short order, so this is not something I see taking months. I see decisions being made sooner than that. We prioritise make those decisions for people on temporary visas so that they could do some planning. Next in the queue is those who are in-country with residency applications.

**Media:** There's just been some confusion about those proposed conversion therapy changes. Just to clarify, could a parent be breaking the law if they stop their child taking hormone blockers?

**Hon Kris Faafoi:** I made it very clear on the weekend that the purpose of the bill is to make sure that we're having open discussions and responsible discussions about conversion practices, especially with young people and vulnerable people. The way that we have designed the system isn't targeted towards criminalising anyone. It's about making sure that we give the ability for those discussions to have. There's a very long process before anyone would see the inside of a court room, and that includes getting the consent of the Attorney-General as to whether or not the public interest test has been met to take a criminal case. We don't want people to be criminalised about this. We want the harm that is being done by conversion practices—which there is strong evidence that is happening, and the fact that the conversion practices don't work—to be the main purpose of this bill.

**Media:** Just on the residency, what sort of scale are we talking about in terms of the numbers of people who could get residency if there was an amnesty, and what sort of time frame are we looking at?

**PM:** That is a wild hypothetical. No decisions have been taken, so that's not a level of detail I'm in a position to provide, and it is a hypothetical at this stage.

**Media:** The Greyhound Protection League say dozens of dogs died on Kiwi race tracks last year, and hundreds more are killed for other reasons. Your Government was due to have an animal welfare report into the industry come back yesterday. What does the report say?

**PM:** You'll have to forgive me, Ben—I would like to confirm with our Minister for sport before I give you a final answer on that. So you'll forgive me if I just take a little bit of time. Perhaps I can come back to you tomorrow on the caucus run.

**Media:** Do you personally support the industry?

**PM:** I want to make sure that we uphold our reputation as a country that takes seriously animal welfare issues, and that's why this work has been done in the first place.

**Media:** I was just going to ask you on the housing as a human issue, will your Government commit to implementing the Human Rights Commission's guidelines?

**PM:** Its guidelines?

**Media:** Guidelines released today.

**PM:** Well, they're obviously undertaking their own inquiry into housing. Our view is that no further work is required to tell us that New Zealand over a number of years has worked up to a housing crisis, which we now as a Government are investing billions into both making sure we have the infrastructure and also the Government builds programme to address what is in our view a crisis. All right, thank you everyone.

**conclusion of press conference**