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QUESTIONS TO MINISTERS

Housing, Affordability—Homeownership

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1. Hon DAVID CUNLIFFE (Leader of the Opposition) to the Prime Minister: Does he stand by his statement that "housing is always a big issue because people need to own a home or, frankly, in most cases, a lot of people want to own a home"?

Rt Hon JOHN KEY (Prime Minister): Yes. The Government does not want to see house prices double. That would be shocking, because that happened under the period from November 1999 to November 2008.

Hon Member: Did it?

Rt Hon JOHN KEY: Yes, they doubled; they doubled in that time, and that significantly had a big impact on homeownership. That is why, for example, we signed the housing accord with the Auckland Council, which will see 39,000 new sections and dwellings consented over 3 years. That is why, for example, we are also focused on another important area of affordability, which is interest rates. We would not want to see interest rates go back to 11 percent, as they did under the previous Government.

Hon David Cunliffe: When the Prime Minister said that the main problem in Auckland's housing market was a lack of supply because not enough homes had been built in the last 3 to 4 years, what responsibility does he take for that?

Rt Hon JOHN KEY: The Government itself does not, for the most part, actually build homes, and the consenting for homes in Auckland is the responsibility of local government. But what the Government has done is a few things, and that is to ensure that special housing areas can now be fast tracked in Auckland, so that houses can be consented and houses can be built. But—

Hon Member: A failed policy.

Rt Hon JOHN KEY: —I know failure when I see it. It is a doubling of house prices and interest rates at 11 percent. It is called a Labour Government.

Hon David Cunliffe: Is he concerned that the latest BNZ-REINZ **Residential** Market Survey indicates that 2,750 New Zealand homes and 12 percent of all Auckland homes **sold** were **sold** to non-resident offshore buyers in the year to February 2014; if not, why is he not concerned?

Rt Hon JOHN KEY: Firstly, the member needs to be very careful because many of those offshore buyers may well be New Zealanders. Secondly, they could be Australians, which, by the way, Labour seems to have exempted from its policy, whatever its particular policy is. But let me make this simple point: if you look at the numbers supplied by Tony Alexander, in terms of his monthly survey of real estate agents, what he says—

Rt Hon Winston Peters: He's got no numbers.

Rt Hon JOHN KEY: Well, I actually reckon he does not have much in the way of numbers. But if we go to them, he says that 6.4 percent of dwellings **sold** in March this year were considered to be

from people from offshore. But when you take out those who are Australians and those who are legitimately moving to New Zealand, actually, it comes down to 2 percent that are considered in that category. When you look at the sellers who are offshore, interestingly enough he says that the net sales and the net **purchases** are about equal—in other words, the number is zero. So we should quote the oracle of all this information, Tony Alexander, when he says that the implication is that there could be close to zero net transfers of New Zealand homeownership occurring to offshore investors.

Hon David Cunliffe: If the Prime Minister thinks that it is all about Australians, is he concerned that the new website statistics show that New Zealand is among the top 10 most searched for countries by Chinese house hunters; if not, why not?

Rt Hon JOHN KEY: There may be many reasons why **Chinese** nationals are looking at New Zealand. For the most part, it will be because it is such a well-governed country under National.

Hon David Cunliffe: Does he agree with the two-thirds of New Zealanders who say that there should be restrictions on offshore speculators buying Kiwi homes; if not, why not?

Rt Hon JOHN KEY: When it comes to speculation of homes in New Zealand, they would be subject to a capital gains tax. That is the reality. Secondly, if the member is talking about his policy, which seems to be banning foreigners unless they are Australians, then, as I pointed out earlier, the sales that fit into that category are next to zero. Interestingly enough, why bother with the theoretical? Let us go to the practical. Australia actually has that system and, by the way, even with that system, the number of sales to foreigners, in total, was more than those in New Zealand.

Hon David Cunliffe: Will the Prime Minister now commit to supporting Labour's capital gains tax; if not, why is he standing by while young Kiwi first-home buyers are outbid by foreign telephone bidders using cheap foreign money to buy up New Zealand houses—for example, like the more than a dozen overseas phone sales witnessed by Auckland real estate agent Adam Wang?

Rt Hon JOHN KEY: The member is asking me whether I am going to support a capital gains tax on every small **business** in New Zealand and every hard-working farmer in New Zealand, and whether we are going to support a capital gains tax in an area that is already in existence. It is already on speculators. If the member does not know that, he does not know anything.

Government Financial Position—Return to Surplus

2. PAUL GOLDSMITH (National) to the Minister of Finance: What progress is the Government making in achieving its goal of returning to fiscal surplus next year?

Hon BILL ENGLISH (Minister of Finance): The Budget next month will confirm that the Government remains on track to return to surplus next year. This will be the first of ongoing and increasing surpluses, provided we stick to the current programme. The financial statements for the 8 months to February were issued yesterday, showing that spending is under control but revenue is below forecast for this year. The deficit for the 8 months was around \$880 million larger than forecast in December. Although revenue was 5 percent higher than at the same time last year, it was still around \$1 billion lower than forecast. This will be factored in to the Budget next month, reinforcing the need for ongoing control of Government spending.

Paul Goldsmith: Why will it remain important for the Government to maintain fiscal discipline, even after the Crown's accounts return to surplus?

Hon BILL ENGLISH: The first reason is that we should not, of course, be wasting taxpayers' money, and, given that this Government has developed much more thoughtful ways of spending Government money, we should stick to that. Secondly, we want to make sure we do not put extra pressure on interest rates. The Reserve Bank has already started to raise interest rates from 50-year lows towards more neutral levels. Keeping Government spending under control means that over the course of the interest rate cycle, interest rates will be lower than they would otherwise be. The Government wants to avoid the mistakes of the previous cycle, when a 50 percent jump in

Government spending under the previous Labour Government led to first mortgage rates of close to 11 percent. Households and businesses simply could not carry that burden this time.

Paul Goldsmith: What will be the Government's approach to allocating new spending in the Budget next month and in future years?

Hon BILL ENGLISH: The Government's approach is to examine critically each of its interventions and to ensure that any new spending shows a clear pay-off. A good example would be the fairly significant commitment to increasing the quality of teaching, with a view that we will gain a clear pay-off of more children reaching national standards and higher levels of achievement in our secondary schools. We have found that if we take that robust approach, many propositions that people have simply do not add up to a good use of taxpayers' money.

Hon David Parker: Did he say in 2008 "This is the rainy day that Government has been saving up for.", after Labour ran nine Budget surpluses and reduced net Government debt to zero, and can he confirm his Government has since borrowed over \$50 billion?

Hon BILL ENGLISH: Yes, I did say that. What the member left out of his little story is that in the last Labour Budget of 2008 they forecast a surplus of \$1.3 billion. What actually happened was a deficit of over \$3 billion, plus forecasts of a decade of deficits and a blowout in Government debt. We are very pleased this Government has been able to get that financial wreckage under control.

Paul Goldsmith: As part of its wider economic programme, what progress has the Government made in reducing previous increases in Government spending?

Hon BILL ENGLISH: If I could use just one measure of progress, following the previous Government's final Budget in 2008, since that seems to be where Labour members prefer to fight their political battles, core Crown expenses jumped \$7 billion, just in that Budget—just in that Budget. This left a deficit of \$3.9 billion in Labour's last year. Since then, under the discipline of the current National-led Government, spending has increased by only 13 percent over five Budgets, compared with a 12 percent increase in just the one Budget in 2008. We are very pleased to be off that track.

Education, Minister—Performance

3. CHRIS HIPKINS (Labour—Rimutaka) to the Minister of Education: Does she stand by all of her decisions and statements as Minister of Education?

Hon HEKIA PARATA (Minister of Education): Yes, in all the circumstances they were made.

Chris Hipkins: Is she satisfied that she allowed sufficient time for Phillipstown School's **board** of trustees to undertake meaningful consultation with its community on her proposal to **merge** the school with Woolston School, following the court's declaration that her original decision was unlawful; if so, why?

Hon HEKIA PARATA: Yes, following the judgment made by Justice Fogarty, who had said that the Crown had consulted in good faith but that there had been one inadvertent error in relation to **property** costings, and that continued consultation on that particular element should be considered. I then wrote to Phillipstown School and Woolston School and suggested that we would continue consultation, how and when we would do that, and invited their feedback. On the basis of that, we began continued consultation on 18 November. That concluded on 4 March. That was a further 10-week consultation process—absent the holiday period that occurred in the middle of that—during which time several boxes of information were provided to both Phillipstown School and Woolston School, and there were officials available to answer their questions.

Chris Hipkins: What alternative proposal to a merger with Woolston School did the Phillipstown School **board** suggest in its 6 March letter to her titled "Response to Minister on continuing consultation process"?

Hon HEKIA PARATA: Over the course of the consultation there were a number of discussions with Phillipstown School, and they included that no further action be taken for a 2-year period, at

the end of which time a review should occur. They included that the school just continue as is without any kind of merger, and they made a number of suggestions around that.

Dr Megan Woods: On what date did her official meet with the Phillipstown School board to address outstanding questions around property information, and what follow-up actions did her official agree to as a consequence of this meeting?

Hon HEKIA PARATA: Officials have been meeting with the Phillipstown School principal and **board** on several occasions since 18 November through to the conclusion of the consultation period—originally on 3 March, but at the request of Phillipstown School on 4 March. I do not know which specific meeting the member is referring to or which specific follow-up action in the context of those numbers of meetings.

Dr Megan Woods: I seek leave to table a letter from the Minister to Phillipstown School, referring to her officials meeting on 28 February to address **property** information follow-up questions.

Mr SPEAKER: Leave is sought to table that particular letter from the Minister to the school. Is there any objection? There appears to be none. Document, by leave, laid on the Table of the House.

Dr Megan Woods: Does she consider that the 6 days between the 28 February meeting, when the school **board** received further information regarding its **property**, and her 6 March deadline sufficient time for it to take independent expert advice on that information, disseminate that information to parents, and receive their feedback in order to make a meaningful submission on the proposal; if so, why?

Hon HEKIA PARATA: As I have already indicated, when the decision was made to continue consultation, I invited both boards to give me feedback on how they wanted that consultation to proceed. They were given 10 weeks from 18 November until 3 March. If the boards had questions to raise, they had all of that period to do so.

Chris Hipkins: Why, after having her initial decision to **merge** Phillipstown School and Woolston School declared unlawful by the courts, and after the community has loudly and clearly rejected that proposal, does she intend to force this change on that local community, ignoring all of its feedback?

Hon HEKIA PARATA: I think it is really important here to recall that there are two schools involved in this process. Woolston School also consulted its community. It had a 91 percent response rate and it is keen for the merger to proceed. In the case of Phillipstown School, there are those who do not. But on the basis that we have been focused on investing in better provision across the greater Christchurch network—and that has involved an investment of \$1.37 billion into the community—it is for better provision, not simply repair.

Crime Statistics—Reports

MARK MITCHELL (National—Rodney): My question is to the Minister of Police. What recent reports—[Interruption]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I am having trouble hearing against the yelling coming from my lefthand side. Would the member please start the question again.

4. MARK MITCHELL (National—Rodney) to the Minister of Police: What recent reports has she received on crime levels in New Zealand?

Hon ANNE TOLLEY (Minister of Police): I am pleased to advise the House that crime fell for the fourth calendar year in a row in 2013, down by a total of 20.2 percent, so that recorded crime is at its lowest figure in 29 years. Overall the number of offences dropped by 4.1 percent in the 2013 year, with 15,600 fewer recorded crimes compared with the year before. This is nearly 91,000 fewer crimes reported in 2013 than in 2009. The biggest drops in crime were in Auckland and Wellington, with a 9.9 percent fall in each of those, and a drop of 5.6 percent in Canterbury. This is an

outstanding achievement, and I would like to congratulate police staff and all those involved in the justice sector on their hard work.

Dr Cam Calder: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. Despite listening carefully, because of the noise from the Opposition benches I found it difficult to hear that answer. Is it possible—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I cannot help the member on this occasion, but the level of noise we did have through that question was unacceptable.

Mark Mitchell: What steps has the Government taken to reduce crime in New Zealand?

Hon ANNE TOLLEY: Under this National-led Government the police have changed their focus from just reacting to crime, to preventing crime. We have provided our front-line police officers with smartphones and tablets, allowing them to spend much more time out on the streets and less time at the station doing paperwork. This technology has delivered 520,000 additional front-line hours every single year. That is the equivalent of an extra 354 extra police. Police have also increased foot patrols by 155 percent in the last 2 years, and they are using their rosters in a smarter way, ensuring that their officers are in the right place at the right time, preventing crime before it occurs. There is no doubt that under National crime has gone down, whereas under Labour it just went up.

Carol Beaumont: Do the statistics show that sexual violence crimes are going down?

Hon ANNE TOLLEY: No. What the statistics show is that there has been an increase of around 11.6 percent in reported sexual offences. That in itself is a very good indicator that the public has much more confidence. This is a notoriously under-reported area and the police are working very hard, in fact, to make sure that more people report sexual crimes and that the police can take action accordingly.

Rt Hon Winston Peters: How many manned police cars were available to act on calls in Greater Auckland last night?

Hon ANNE TOLLEY: I would say to that member: as many as were necessary.

Prime Minister—Statements

5. CLARE CURRAN (Labour—Dunedin South) to the Prime Minister: Does he stand by all his statements?

Rt Hon JOHN KEY (Prime Minister): Yes.

Clare Curran: Given yesterday's decision by the High Court validating the Commerce Commission's draft determination on copper prices, does he still stand by his statement that "The Government's view is that they"—the Commerce Commission—"are interpreting the law incorrectly."; if so, why?

Rt Hon JOHN KEY: Yes, at the time I made it, which was in September, which was—

Hon Annette King: So what?

Rt Hon JOHN KEY: Well, that was because the interim decision was made then, and the Commerce Commission itself said it did not take that into account.

Clare Curran: Does he agree with yesterday's High Court judgment that "The Commerce Commission did not err in law." and that "The new statutory regime was always going to drive a pricing sea change.", and will he rule out legislation overturning the Commerce Commission's final determination on copper pricing?

Rt Hon JOHN KEY: I think we have already ruled out legislation, but in terms of the first part, I think the court made it quite clear that it was not a definitive statement in terms of section 18(2A).

Clare Curran: Given the High Court judgment yesterday validating the Commerce Commission's draft determination on **copper** pricing, will he and his Ministers now refrain from pressuring the Commerce Commission to make a determination that favours Chorus, and let the independent regulator make its decision free from political pressure?

Rt Hon JOHN KEY: No one on this side of the House has tried to intimidate or put pressure on the Commerce Commission, any more than that member did when she told David Cunliffe she would go to the Internet Party if he was not nice to her.

Hon David Cunliffe: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. [Interruption]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! This is a point of order and it will be heard in silence.

Hon David Cunliffe: I seek your advice as to whether that reply was out of order either because of irrelevance or because it was factually untruthful.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! It was a reply that in my opinion was not out of order, but it certainly was not helpful to the order of the House. [Interruption] Order! I am on my feet. Does the member have further supplementary questions?

Clare Curran: Maybe he could try a straight answer this time. [Interruption]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I did not hear the interjection, but if the member could assist the order of the House by simply asking her supplementary question, I for one would be very grateful.

Clare Curran: Does he now accept that he, Amy Adams, Steven Joyce, and Chorus were wrong about the **copper** price determination and that the High Court, the Commerce Commission, and the wider information and communications technology industry got it right; if not, why not?

Rt Hon JOHN KEY: This is the person who got it wrong: "the people of New Zealand who are receiving broadband services now will find that"—

Grant Robertson: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. The member asked the question about the Prime Minister and his Ministers. To begin an answer by saying "This is the person who got it wrong" does not address that question.

Hon Gerry Brownlee: In fact, Mr Speaker, the member addressed the question to you and to no one else by starting the question with "Does he". If we are going to get into the pedantic details of how a question is directed to a Minister, or, in fact—[Interruption]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! This is a point of order.

Hon Gerry Brownlee: If that circumstance is answered, then I think we would go back to the question being asked again, but I am sure the same answer would be quite reasonable.

Mr SPEAKER: I do not think there is any need to have the question heard again. I heard the question. The Prime Minister can continue with his answer if he wishes to.

Rt Hon JOHN KEY: A person in Parliament in 2011, as a result of the proposed changes made this statement: "the people of New Zealand who are receiving broadband services now will find that their existing **copper** services go up in price while they are waiting for fibre." That is up in price, not down in price. Oh, that is right—that person was Clare Curran.

Grant Robertson: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. I invite you to tell me how that addressed Clare Curran's question.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member asked a question. It was certainly a political question. The Prime Minister has answered. If the member wants to elucidate further information, she has the ability to do so through further supplementary questions.

Hon David Parker: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. How can a question that goes to what the Prime Minister and other Ministers said be answered by an answer that does not refer to any of them?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I do not need assistance from the Prime Minister either. The question went on to say did he now accept that John Key, Amy Adams, etc. were wrong. He said no, and in his mind the person who was wrong was somebody else.

Grant Robertson: He didn't say "no" at all!

Mr SPEAKER: Order! That is my interpretation of the question. [Interruption] Order! My patience is very much waning, and if I have further carry on like this, then a member will likely be leaving this Chamber. If I could finish my explanation without interruption from the front bench of the Labour Party—I considered the question was in order, I considered it to be political, and I

consider that it got an answer that addressed the question. I accept that it was not to the satisfaction of members opposite, but it addressed the question.

Grant Robertson: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: Can I just check before I hear this point of order: is it in any way relitigating the decision I have just made? Can I just check—[Interruption] I give the member one more chance. Is he in any way relitigating the decision I have just made? Then I will certainly hear from him.

Grant Robertson: I invite you to, after question time, go back and see whether or not the Prime Minister said "no." You said he—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member will immediately resume his seat. That is relitigating the decision I have made, but I will definitely look again at the answer. For the information of the member, I always do. Are there further supplementary questions? [Interruption] Order! The Hon David Parker will stand and withdraw for that remark.

Hon David Parker: I withdraw.

Welfare Reforms—Impact on Beneficiaries Travelling Overseas

6. MELISSA LEE (National) to the Minister for Social Development: How many people have had their benefits suspended since the Government tightened rules on overseas travel?

Hon PAULA BENNETT (Minister for Social Development): As part of last year's welfare reforms the Government tightened the rules about people travelling overseas while receiving a benefit. Since then more than 21,000 people have had their benefits suspended for taking unauthorised overseas travel. More than 1,750 people have had their benefits suspended for multiple trips. Suspending these benefits has saved taxpayers more than \$10.5 million.

Melissa Lee: Why did the Government tighten the rules?

Hon PAULA BENNETT: We tightened the rules because we believe that those who have work obligations should be in New Zealand and looking for a job. Those with work preparation obligations should be here and looking for a job. If they travel and do not tell us or do not have compassionate reasons for travelling, then their benefits will be suspended.

Melissa Lee: Are there exceptions to allow beneficiaries to travel in some situations?

Hon PAULA BENNETT: Yes. The new rules still allow for overseas travel on compassionate or health grounds, and, obviously, the rules do not apply to those who are on superannuation. People without work obligations can, in most cases, travel overseas for up to 28 days as long as they tell Work and Income they are going. Since July last year we have had around 13,000 exits from New Zealand where the person has been able to keep their benefit while they have been travelling.

Energy and Resources, Minister—Statements

7. Dr RUSSEL NORMAN (Co-Leader—Green) to the Minister of **Energy** and Resources: Does he stand by all his statements?

Hon SIMON BRIDGES (Minister of **Energy** and Resources): Yes, of course, always, within the nuanced context in which they have been given.

Dr Russel Norman: Does he stand by his statement yesterday that he was unaware of Victoria Forest Park, New Zealand's largest forest park, even though he recently opened it up for oil and gas exploration?

Hon SIMON BRIDGES: Yes, because my role, and this Government's responsibility and commitment, has always been, in terms of the conservation **estate**, to ensure that there was no schedule 4, no national parks, and no World Heritage areas. I took that responsibility exceptionally seriously.

Dr Russel Norman: Was Victoria Forest Park mentioned in the briefing papers he received about the areas proposed for oil and gas exploration?

Hon SIMON BRIDGES: No, because what my responsibility was and what the papers briefed me on was where the conservation land was and the classifications of that. I took particular note, of course, about the schedule 4 land, about the national parks, and about the World Heritage areas, and also noted the process in terms of the consultation with local iwi, with councils, and also with the Department of Conservation, which raised no objections in relation to anything, including the forest park.

Dr Russel Norman: Given that he has told the House that he was told of the different kinds of classifications, was he told that this area that sits between Nelson Lakes National Park and Kahurangi National Park was a forest park, and did he inquire as to why the largest forest park in the country was being opened up to oil and gas exploration?

Hon SIMON BRIDGES: Well, I think the premise of the question there is a misconception. As I said, what I was undertaking to do was to ensure that there was none of the upmost sensitive areas in that **park**. What I was also advised of was that there were various classifications within that. But the Department of Conservation does not have a hierarchy of conservation land outside of schedule 4, and so whilst I noted that, I was most concerned about the other, as I say, schedule 4 and national **park** areas and ensured that they were not included in any shape or form.

Dr Russel Norman: Had he heard of the following conservation areas that just last week he opened up for petroleum exploration: Kakapōtahi Ecological Area, Te Wharau Ecological Area, Deep Creek Ecological Area, Mōkihinui Forks Ecological Area, Upper Tōtara Ecological Area, Doctor Hill Ecological Area, Mount Hārata Ecological Area, Coal Creek Ecological Area, Kaniere Ecological Area, Three Mile Hill Ecological Area, Greenstone Ecological Area—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Bring it to a conclusion.

Dr Russel Norman: —and Mount Richmond Forest Park—had he heard of any of those areas that he opened up for oil and gas exploration last week?

Hon SIMON BRIDGES: There are over a thousand such areas, and I had not heard of all of them. One wonders whether the member had heard of the four permits for **coal mining** in the Victoria Forest **Park** when he was last in Government, including for open-cast **coal mining** in the area he now purports to be concerned about.

Hon Trevor Mallard: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. I think you have quite rightly ruled on occasion that we should not debate an answer during points of order, but for a Minister with this experience to assert as part of an answer that a member who has never been in Government has been just shows a level of ignorance that is unacceptable.

Mr SPEAKER: The member has made his point. The question was long, it was answered relatively quickly, and the rest of the answer was actually unnecessary to the order of the House.

Dr Russel Norman: Has he heard of the following conservation areas that just last week he opened up for petroleum and gas exploration, such as Te Wharau Wildlife Management Area, Orikaka Ecological Area, Bell Hill - Granite Hill Ecological Area, Fletcher Creek Ecological Area, Card Creek Ecological Area, Lyall Historic Reserve—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Bring the question to a conclusion

Dr Russel Norman: —and White Creek Fault Scientific Reserve, all areas that he has now opened up for oil and gas exploration, and did he check out whether any of them were on the list before he signed it off?

Hon SIMON BRIDGES: I think behind the question is a premise that there should not be any development in these sorts of areas, but that was not the case when under his watch there were 12 **mining** permits, including for exploratory petroleum, in the very area—the Victoria Forest **Park**— where he now says there should not be any **mining** in.

Rt Hon Winston Peters: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. Mr Mallard raised a point of order with you. It is simply that these matters go beyond being debatable, but the Minister repeated his assertion that someone had been a Minister or had been in Government before. He said "on his watch". He meant that, and it means he comes down here—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The difficulty I have is, again, with the length of the question. When the question is that long, it is clearly going to invite an answer that is likely to raise the temperature of the House, and that is exactly what happened on that occasion. It would help, if the member has further supplementary questions—could he make them concise and to the point.

Gareth Hughes: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. It is a different point of order. It is that the question was not addressed. The Minister simply talked about Dr Russel Norman's motivations in the premise; he did not actually say whether he had heard of any of those parks before he opened them up.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! No, in my mind the question was definitely addressed.

Dr Russel Norman: Is he aware that Victoria Forest **Park**, the **park** he had not heard of until yesterday, even though it is the biggest forest **park** in the country, with 200,000 hectares of land that he recently opened up to be exploited for petroleum exploration, has many ecological areas in it, and many areas that are defined as pristine by the Department of Conservation and worthy of protection from his depredations?

Hon SIMON BRIDGES: I am aware of some of those matters, and also that Russel Norman allowed open-cast coalmining in that area when he was—

Metiria Turei: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. I ask you to ensure that Ministers are not entitled to stand up—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I do not need any—[Interruption] Order! Would the Minister stand and answer the question that was asked. He does not need the political barb about whether a member was involved in a decision, particularly when that member was not part of a former Government.

Hon Gerry Brownlee: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. You have made the point in the past that where politically loaded questions are asked, they will get politically loaded answers back. It is a reality that the previous Government, which did allow open-cast mining in these areas and did allow mining permits and oil exploration in these areas, could not have stayed in Government—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member can resume his seat. If the Minister wanted to answer along those lines, I would find it acceptable. To simply stand up and attack the Green member is unacceptable. If the Minister has an answer to continue with, he should do so. Thank you.

Education, Minister—Performance

8. CATHERINE DELAHUNTY (Green) to the Minister of Education: Does she stand by all her decisions?

Hon HEKIA PARATA (Minister of Education): Yes, in all the circumstances they were made.

Catherine Delahunty: Does she think that she has a better idea about what is best for the children of Phillipstown School than their principal, Tony Simpson, has?

Hon HEKIA PARATA: It is not a question of what just two people think; it is a question of the weight of evidence, a full round of consultation, and what the submissions of both schools confirmed.

Catherine Delahunty: Is she not sticking with plans to merge the school to save face, rather than doing the right thing by the school and their pupils?

Hon HEKIA PARATA: The proposal is driven by substantial educational evidence. It is driven by significant proposed investment of \$11.8 million into the merged space. It is driven by the oversupply of primary school spaces in that particular network. It is driven in the overall about how we get better outcomes for all of those children.

Catherine Delahunty: Does she agree with experts such as Canterbury University's Bronwyn Hayward that children should never be exposed to the prospect of major changes like school reorganisations so close to a major disaster; if so, why did she rush into this?

Hon HEKIA PARATA: Christchurch has faced a significant challenge. It has been 3 years—a process of discussion and consultation. The mergers that were decided on, the closures that have been decided on, the brand new schools, and the redevelopments are all part of the 10-year

programme, for which we have invested \$1.36 **billion** and which is built on providing a better, modern learning education system for all of the children.

Hon Trevor Mallard: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. After consultation with my colleagues, we have agreed that the Labour Party will sacrifice one supplementary question if—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member will resume his seat.

Rt Hon John Key: Can the Minister confirm that the merger of Phillipstown School and Woolston School was part of a wider reorganisation of schools in the Christchurch area as a result of the Christchurch earthquake, can she confirm how much extra the Government is putting into those overall mergers, and can she give the House some feedback on what the general perception has been now that those mergers are actually taking place?

Hon HEKIA PARATA: Yes, I can confirm that. In fact, I took three options to Cabinet for proposals to deal with the challenges in Christchurch: a \$500 **million** option, which was simply to repair and walk away; an \$800 **million** package, which was to repair and refresh some; and a \$1.1 **billion** package, which was to create a modern learning environment there that will be the envy of every part of New Zealand as well as Australia. Since then, there has been feedback from the mergers that have gone ahead. The principal of Hornby High School has told me and the media that it has been a "game changer". Hillmorton High School has seen stronger involvement from its parents. The Windsor-Burwood merger has moved to a completely different provision—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Bring the answer to a conclusion.

Hon HEKIA PARATA: Overall, the reports have been extremely positive.

Catherine Delahunty: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. My point of order is—[Interruption]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! This is a point of order and I wish to hear it.

Catherine Delahunty: This was not a public relations opportunity; this was about—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Every member has a right to ask a supplementary question. It was a supplementary question asked.

Chris Hipkins: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: It is your members' day we are wasting, but Chris Hipkins—a point of order.

Chris Hipkins: In his question the Prime Minister asked the Minister of Education how much extra the Government was investing. The Minister indicated what the total was; she did not indicate how much of that was extra money.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order. If the member wants a supplementary question, he may be able to have one.

Health Services—Colonoscopy Services

9. SHANE ARDERN (National—Taranaki - King Country) to the Minister of Health: What recent announcements has the Government made about colonoscopy services in New Zealand?

Hon TONY RYALL (Minister of Health): Today the Government has announced that we are investing an extra \$3.5 million to provide over 3,000 extra colonoscopies. Some district health boards have traditionally been stretched to keep up with the demand from a population that is both growing and ageing,

but we are making good progress. In the 2012/13 financial year 41,000 colonoscopies were performed by district health boards—a 20 percent increase on 2008/09.

Shane Ardern: How does this announcement fit with the Government's drive to improve diagnostic services?

Hon TONY RYALL: The funding boost is the latest in a range of recent Government initiatives aimed at improving colonoscopy delivery in New Zealand. This includes the \$24 million bowel screening pilot in Waitematā; the \$16 million faster diagnostics project, which aims to improve access to a range of tests and scans; and the \$1.8 million National Endoscopy Quality Improvement Programme. We know that the biggest constraint to a larger roll-out of bowel cancer screening is the need for a workforce, and a symposium is to be held next month in Wellington to look at ways of increasing New Zealand's colonoscopy workforce capacity and efficiency.

Interislander Ferries—Confidence in KiwiRail

10. Rt Hon WINSTON PETERS (Leader—NZ First) to the Minister of Transport: Does he have confidence in KiwiRail following the most recent incidents involving the Aratere and now the Stena Alegra; if so, why?

Hon GERRY BROWNLEE (Minister of Transport): Had the member asked me a question relating to my overall satisfaction with KiwiRail's recent performance, he might have got a different answer, but what I can say is that given the importance of KiwiRail to the transport task in New Zealand, I am confident that KiwiRail's management is dealing with the recent incidents affecting the Aratere and the Stena Alegra appropriately.

Rt Hon Winston Peters: Bearing in mind the original question that I asked the Minister, how can he possibly have confidence in KiwiRail when the Aratere has now been found to have cracks in its rudder stock following its propeller falling off into Cook Strait earlier this year, while its replacement ship, the Stena Alegra—much vaunted by the Minister—is now sitting with a gash in its hull, having crashed into the wharf yesterday?

Hon GERRY BROWNLEE: Well, I think the first point is that the issues relating to the Aratere are being dealt with satisfactorily in Singapore. There is no other choice. It lost a propeller, we have got to find out why, and we have got to fix it. Of course, while—

Rt Hon Winston Peters: You know why-you stretched it.

Hon GERRY BROWNLEE: The member says that he knows why. Well, I tell you what, he probably knows where MH370 is as well. He should tell the House and the world that one. He is an expert on almost anything nautical or aeronautical—

Mr SPEAKER: Would the Minister just answer the question.

Hon GERRY BROWNLEE: When it comes to the issue with the Stena Alegra, the KiwiRail management was not at the helm when it happened, and in time we will find out exactly why it did crash into the wharf.

Rt Hon Winston Peters: If the Stena Alegra is out of operation due to the gash in its hull and the Stena Alegra uses 20 times as much lubricant as the other ferries, indicating a serious engine issue, does he believe KiwiRail will need to get a replacement ship for the replacement ship?

Hon GERRY BROWNLEE: No.

Rt Hon Winston Peters: Is he telling the House that after these incidents—the Arahura missing sailings because of engine problems in April; the Arahura out of action due to cracks in the stern door in February; the Arahura having a lifeboat out of service due to the cable snapping, also in February; problems with the bow door and stern ramp on Stena Alegra in January; and Aratere losing its propeller in November last year, having stabilised its radar problems in May last year and propulsion problems in January of this year, among countless other issues—he still has confidence in KiwiRail; if so, would anything short of a sinking—

Hon Member: I think your rudder's fallen off.

Rt Hon Winston Peters: —cause him to lose that confidence? Do not worry about my voters— they are on the rise, sunshine.

Hon GERRY BROWNLEE: Well, I can answer only some of that question because most of it was mumble. But what I would say is that there is no doubt that the previous Government bought an absolute lemon when it bought back KiwiRail—no question about that—and this Government has poured over \$1 billion into a recapitalisation programme, trying to make the thing work. Sometimes it is hard to kick life into

something that is fundamentally dead, but that member supported that previous decision, and this Government will be the one that makes it work.

Rt Hon Winston Peters: Can it possibly be a fact that his incompetent handling of his portfolio and others is the real reason right now in Canterbury that the National Party is polling to gauge Mr Brownlee's own popularity?

Mr SPEAKER: In as far as there is ministerial responsibility, the Hon Gerry Brownlee.

Hon GERRY BROWNLEE: Oh, I am far too modest to discuss with Mr Peters in the House today my enormous popularity!

Rt Hon Winston Peters: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. Thank you for instructing him with the words "In so much as you can answer", because I asked him whether his own party was polling about his popularity. He knows that, but he will not say so.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member asked the question. It was a marginal question. The Minister has addressed it.

Darien Fenton: How can we have confidence in his Government's KiwiRail Turnaround Plan when his squeeze on KiwiRail has forced it to opt for low-cost procurement and short-term fixes that threaten health and safety and have cost New Zealand highly skilled jobs?

Hon GERRY BROWNLEE: Investing over \$1 billion of taxpayer funds in the company is not putting on a squeeze.

Justice, Minister—Visit to China

11. GRANT ROBERTSON (Labour—Wellington Central) to the Minister of Justice: What was the name of the Chinese official that she dined with during her Ministerial visit to Chine in October 2013, and if she will not name him, why did she give details of his seniority and place of work?

Hon JUDITH COLLINS (Minister of Justice): I assume that the member is referring to the private dinner in Beijing on Sunday, 20 October 2013. I have stated publicly that I attended the private dinner and have disclosed the other attendees at that dinner. It is not appropriate to disclose the name of a person who was a friend of Mr Shi. He was attending a private dinner and is entitled to protection of his privacy. Even though it was a private dinner, the Prime Minister's chief of staff said that it would be appropriate to advise that in their working life the person was a senior Government official with a **Chinese** border control agency.

Grant Robertson: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am seeking your guidance whether under Standing Order 383 the Minister is telling the House that it is not in the public interest for her to tell us the name of the official, because she has refused to answer that part of the question.

Mr SPEAKER: No, I did not hear her invoking that; I just heard her say that it was not appropriate.

Hon David Parker: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. I would refer the Speaker to Speaker's ruling 174/1: "Ministers have a responsibility to the House, and through the House to the country, to account for the public offices they hold. Question time is an important element of this accountability. Ministers should therefore take questions seriously and endeavour to give informative replies to the questions that they are asked." I would suggest that unless there is some ground that I would not understand that a public interest can be claimed in pursuit of not answering the question, then the Minister has a duty to this House to answer it.

Hon JUDITH COLLINS: Strictly speaking, this matter is not a matter for the House. It was not a ministerial meeting. It was not at the funding of the taxpayer. It was a private dinner and I have answered the question appropriately.

Mr SPEAKER: The question was clearly accepted as in order. I listened very carefully to the answer, and in my opinion she has addressed it. She did not invoke the use of the words "It is not in the public interest."; she just said that it is not appropriate. Members can make their conclusions. I cannot accept the argument that the question has not been addressed satisfactorily. The member has further supplementary questions. That is the way the member must make progress.

Rt Hon Winston Peters: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. You have accepted the Minister's answer—and it is her judgment, but it is yours, really—which was that it was not appropriate. However, when you have got ambassadorial staff there at the meeting, like the Ambassador to China—[Interruption] Excuse me. I am raising a point of order. Keep quiet.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member is raising a point of order, but at this stage I cannot actually accept it as a point of order. If the member wants to clarify, I would be very grateful.

Rt Hon Winston Peters: Well, I am trying to clarify it by saying that the use of taxpayers' money for the attendance of ambassadorial staff means that that trip in all respects is one on which she should answer questions.

Mr SPEAKER: No. The Minister gave a far more lengthy answer than just saying that it was not appropriate; she gave an explanation as to the dinner, etc. It was quite a lengthy answer. She then said as to the name of the person and the seniority, etc. that she does not think it is appropriate to know that. That is a satisfactory answer. It is now over to the House, if it wants further information, to elucidate that with supplementary questions.

Hon Trevor Mallard: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. I invite you again, when you look at the tape, as you indicate that you do, to note the fact that the Minister said that it was a private dinner but that she has also said that taxpayer-funded staff were in attendance. It cannot be both. If we are paying for her ministerial office staff—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member will resume his seat. He has asked me to have a look at the transcript and I will do so.

Grant Robertson: With reference to the Minister's answer, if this was a private dinner, why did she invite New Zealand's Ambassador to China to the dinner?

Hon JUDITH COLLINS: Because, for a start, I believe that that is the polite thing to do, and, secondly, it is—[Interruption] It is polite. I know that it might be something strange to the Labour Party to be polite to staff, but, actually, I invited the ambassador and his wife because I thought that that was the right thing to do, it was polite, and also there was no reason not to at least let them know that the dinner was occurring.

Grant Robertson: Why did the ambassador decline her invitation?

Hon JUDITH COLLINS: That is a question for the ambassador.

Grant Robertson: Was the official from the **Chinese** Ministry of Agriculture?

Hon JUDITH COLLINS: I am not able to provide that information.

Hon David Parker: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. There is considerable public interest in this issue, which goes to the probity of Government. [Interruption]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! This is a point of order.

Hon David Parker: It goes to the probity of Government. The Speaker's ruling reference that I gave you, Speaker's ruling 174/1, shows that Ministers have a duty to this House to answer questions so that the House can hold Ministers to account. [Interruption] Mr Henare might not think corruption is inappropriate, but we have an obligation on this side of the House to hold Ministers to account. We cannot do that if Ministers are allowed not to answer questions other than on the grounds of some national interest that supersedes their duty to this House.

Mr SPEAKER: On this occasion, although the member is raising a valid point of order, I do not agree with him. The Minister has answered by saying she cannot answer that question. [Interruption] Well, I have forgotten the words. It is so long ago. But she effectively said she will not answer it. That is the Minister answering the question.

Grant Robertson: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. What the Minister said in her answer was that she was unable to answer it—unable to answer the question. That cannot be true, because she has said the person was from a border control agency. She clearly knows the answer to the question. How is it acceptable for her to stand up in this House and say that she is unable to answer that question? That cannot be an addressing of a question, when we know that she knows the name of the agency.

Mr SPEAKER: But the member needs to think about the question he asked. It is now so long ago I have forgotten. It was about whether the official was from the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Minister said she cannot answer that.

Rt Hon Winston Peters: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: I will have some help from the Rt Hon Winston Peters. It is your members' day that you are wasting, I point out.

Rt Hon Winston Peters: Every Minister who has ever been abroad will know that when you go to meetings, particularly in **China**, the full list of guests is laid out before you, particularly because the language is different from the English language, and both of those titles and names would have been given. This Minister knows full well that that information was available to her, so why will she not give it over now?

Mr SPEAKER: If the member had only listened to the questions earlier. The Minister rose and said it is not appropriate to do so. That is the answer the Minister has given. We are getting to the stage—[Interruption] Order! I am not prepared to entertain this waste of time any longer. If the member has a further supplementary question. I will accept it.

Grant Robertson: Why is it not appropriate for her to name the official whom she had dinner with on a ministerial trip?

Hon JUDITH COLLINS: It was a private dinner, and the person is entitled to their privacy.

Grant Robertson: How does she think it is acceptable to taxpayers, who paid \$30,000 for her and her staff member to go to China, to not give the name of an official from a border control agency, when she was at a dinner with the directors of a company that her husband is a fellow director of? Why should taxpayers not have some honesty from the Minister for once?

Hon JUDITH COLLINS: That question is quite incorrect. In fact, it was a private dinner, and as that member might one day find out, even Ministers are allowed to have private dinners with friends.

Hon David Parker: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. Speakers' ruling 172/5 says: "An answer to a question ought to be given if it can be given consistently with the public interest;". You have already ruled that the Minister has not claimed that it is not in the public interest. She has claimed that it is not in her private interest.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Would the member resume his seat, immediately. I never ruled that the Minister claimed that. I said she did not use those words. This particular question has been asked, and it has been answered perfectly satisfactorily to me. I will accept that it is not to the satisfaction of the Opposition, but we are moving on.

Hon David Parker: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: The point of order will be heard in silence. But before I hear it, I want to make absolutely sure that the member is not in any way relitigating a decision I have just made.

Hon David Parker: I am trying to clarify your ruling.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member will resume his seat. [Interruption] The member will resume his seat. I am on my feet. I am on my feet.

Hon Annette King: Stop yelling.

Mr SPEAKER: I would prefer not to have to yell. But when I rise to my feet, the member then sits down, regardless of who that member is. [Interruption] Order! I just want to clarify. If the member is going to continue to relitigate a decision I have made, that will **lead** to disorder and I will treat that very seriously. If the member wishes to raise a fresh point of order, I will certainly hear it.

Hon David Parker: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: Is this a fresh point of order?

Hon David Parker: It is, Mr Speaker. I am endeavouring to clarify whether your ruling was— and I may have misunderstood it—that the Minister claimed that there was a public interest that prevented her from answering the first question.

Mr SPEAKER: It was quite some time ago. The Minister rose to her feet and said it was not appropriate, or words to that effect. She did not use the words: "It is not in the public interest." That is the point I am trying to make to the member. She gave the—[Interruption] Order! Furthermore, when I am on my feet, I do not want interjections from any member. She answered that it was not appropriate. That is the answer she has given. I invited the member, if he wanted to make further

progress, to ask further supplementary questions and he has done so. That is the way to do it, not to relitigate the answer that has already been given, which I have said has addressed the question.

Hon Trevor Mallard: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. I would like to make two points of order. The first point I would like to make is whether you are in fact making a new Speaker's ruling that a Minister can decline to answer a question because it is in her private interest.

Mr SPEAKER: No, I am not saying that at all. I am saying that a Minister has been asked a question. The Minister then rises and answers. In this particular case the Minister rose and answered the question, and I considered that that answer addressed the question. The second point of order?

Hon Trevor Mallard: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. The second point of order goes to when you look at the tapes. Can you please look at the tone, the laughing support of the Prime Minister from the Chair, and the tone used to the deputy leader of the Labour Party? It is not an indication of a lack of bias. [Interruption]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I will have a look at the tapes on this occasion, but I say to all members again that when I rise to my feet to maintain order in this House, it is absolutely essential that members then resume their seat, regardless of whether that is the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, or the deputy leader of the Labour Party. I want to make that clear to all members.

Rt Hon Winston Peters: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. I seek a point of clarification and it is this. You see, the question came by way of a supplementary question and you allowed the question to be put. Then the Minister's response was that answering the question was not appropriate. Is it to be that henceforth the Minister may decide the appropriateness of a question, or you?

Mr SPEAKER: No, I decide the appropriateness of a question. The Minister then has the discretion to answer. I am just repeating the text or the answer that the Minister then gave and I ruled that that addressed the question.

Grant Robertson: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. When you are reflecting on this, can I ask you to reflect on this. In the answer to my supplementary question asking whether the official was from a particular department, the Minister answered that she was unable to answer that question. In her primary answer, she made clear that she did know the agency the person was from. I would ask that you reflect on whether that is an acceptable answer for a Minister to give consistent with the Speakers' rulings that Mr Parker mentioned.

Mr SPEAKER: I have already said I will reconsider.

Energy Efficiency—Initiatives

12. KANWALJIT SINGH BAKSHI (National) to the Minister of Energy and Resources: What recent announcement has he made about energy efficiency initiatives in the transport and industrial heat sectors?

Hon SIMON BRIDGES (Minister of Energy and Resources): I thank the member for his interest. Earlier this week I announced three new energy-efficiency initiatives. The energy sector, specifically transport and industrial heat, are two key areas where such initiatives have the potential to save business and consumers thousands of dollars and reduce carbon emissions. Administered by the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority, the Energy Efficiency Meat and Dairy Farm Initiative, the expansion of the Heavy Vehicle Fuel Efficiency programme, and the Fuel Efficient Tyres Initiative will increase awareness and provide essential information through energy audits, training workshops, marketing campaigns, and industry partnerships.

Kanwaljit Singh Bakshi: What savings are expected as a result of these three initiatives?

Hon SIMON BRIDGES: From a modest investment of \$3.8 million we expect businesses and consumers to be better off by up to \$30 million. For example, an increased uptake of fuel-efficient tyres represents a great opportunity to reduce emissions at a national level. The initiative is expected to save around 2.5 million litres of fuel each year. In the heavy vehicle programme—already a

proven success—we expect to deliver around \$1.2 million of diesel savings each year, with a potential for fleet operators to save up to 15 percent of their fuel use. With good information businesses and consumers can make smart choices.

QUESTIONS TO MEMBERS

Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Six Months' Paid Leave) Amendment Bill—

Implementation

1. Hon RUTH DYSON (Labour—Port Hills) to the Member in charge of the Parental Page 46 of 294 © 2018 Factiva, Inc. All rights reserved.

Leave and Employment Protection (Six Months' Paid Leave) Amendment Bill: What reports, if any, has she seen on how practical it is to implement the Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Six Months' Paid Leave) Amendment Bill?

SUE MORONEY (Member in charge of the Parental Leave and Employment Protection

(Six Months' Paid Leave) Amendment Bill): I have seen a report in the National **Business** Review on 5 April that says that the way to make 26 weeks' paid parental leave affordable in the current financial settings is to do so by "gradually introducing an increase in paid parental leave ... over a period of three years, adding an extra month each year." This is exactly what my bill proposes to do.

Hon Ruth Dyson: What are the fiscal implications for Budget 2014 of her bill to extend paid parental leave to 6 months?

SUE MORONEY: Core Crown expenses for the next financial year to June 2015 are forecast to be \$73.2 billion. In the same period my bill will cost a net amount of \$36 million—just 0.05 percent of the core Crown expenses. The Government plans \$1 billion of new spending in that period, and my bill would account for just 3.6 percent of that new spending. There is no justification for a financial veto in these circumstances.

Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Six Months' Paid Leave) Amendment Bill-

Purpose

2. Hon RUTH DYSON (Labour—Port Hills) to the Member in charge of the Parental

Leave and Employment Protection (Six Months' Paid Leave) Amendment Bill: What is the purpose of the Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Six Months' Paid Leave) Amendment Bill?

SUE MORONEY (Member in charge of the Parental Leave and Employment Protection

(Six Months' Paid Leave) Amendment Bill): Thank you-

Hon Gerry Brownlee: Read the bill!

SUE MORONEY: —and Mr Brownlee might like to listen up. The purpose is to give families the time to spend with their newborn baby in these precious early months and to support breastfeeding to 6 months. Research and evidence shows this approach will improve the health and education outcomes and the social development of these children.

Hon Ruth Dyson: What support has she seen for her bill to extend parental leave to 6 months?

SUE MORONEY: Twenty-six weeks' paid parental leave has the support of 99.6 percent of the 3,807 submitters on the bill, 62 percent of New Zealanders polled by Colmar Brunton last year, and a majority of MPs in this Parliament. All we need is for National to step aside and let democracy take its course. If you just bear with me, Mr Speaker, I want to describe the document I would like to table in the House. This is a document from the 26 for Babies—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I am not prepared even to put the leave.

ENDS

co aucken: Auckland Council

RE nz : New Zealand | austr : Australia | auckl : Auckland | victor : Victoria (Australia) | apacz : Asia Pacific |

ausnz : Australia/Oceania

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