

# Proactive Release

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The following Cabinet papers and related Cabinet minutes have been proactively released by the Minister of Foreign Affairs

<b>Title</b>	<b>Reference</b>
<i>Proposed Overseas Travel: Rt Hon Winston Peters – 1-2 April 2026</i>	CAB-26-MIN-0101
<i>Proposed Overseas Travel for 2026: Cook Islands, 1-2 April 2026</i>	

Some parts of this information release would not be appropriate to release and, if requested, would be withheld under the Official Information Act 1982 (the OIA). Where this is the case, the relevant sections of the OIA that would apply have been identified. Where information has been withheld, no public interest has been identified that would outweigh the reasons for withholding it.

Key to OIA redaction codes:

- 6(a): to avoid prejudicing the security or defence of New Zealand or the international relations of the New Zealand Government;
- 7(b)(i)/(ii): to avoid prejudicing relations between any of the Governments of New Zealand and the self-governing State of the Cook Islands; and
- 7(c)(i): to avoid prejudicing the international relations of the Governments of the self-governing State of the Cook Islands.



# Cabinet

## Minute of Decision

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*This document contains information for the New Zealand Cabinet. It must be treated in confidence and handled in accordance with any security classification, or other endorsement. The information can only be released, including under the Official Information Act 1982, by persons with the appropriate authority.*

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### Proposed Overseas Travel: Rt Hon Winston Peters – 1-2 April 2026

Portfolio                      Foreign Affairs

On 30 March 2026, Cabinet:

- 1        **authorised** the absence of the Rt Hon Winston Peters from New Zealand, from 1 to 2 April 2026, to travel to Rarotonga, Cook Islands to sign a Declaration on Defence and Security between the Government of New Zealand and the Government of the Cook Islands;
- 2        **agreed** that he be accompanied by three members of staff, one of whose costs will be met by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade;
- 3        **approved** the estimated expenditure of up \$2,898 for the travel expenses of the Ministerial party as a charge to Vote Internal Affairs (Members of the Executive – Travel);
- 4        **noted** that a RNZAF plane will be used for this travel;
- 5        **noted** that he will also be accompanied by officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, whose travel costs will be met by their agency;
- 6        **agreed** that in his absence:
  - 6.1      Hon Todd McClay act as Minister of Foreign Affairs;
  - 6.2      Hon Simeon Brown act as Minister for Rail;
  - 6.3      Hon Casey Costello act as Minister for Racing.

Rachel Hayward  
Secretary of the Cabinet

Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs

Chair, Cabinet

**Proposed Overseas Travel for 2026: Cook Islands, 1-2 April 2026**

1. Cabinet approval is sought to undertake official travel to the Cook Islands. The intended date for travel is 1 April to Rarotonga and returning to New Zealand on 2 April.
2. The Prime Minister's Office has approved the travel in-principle.

**Purpose of Travel**

3. Since mid-2024, New Zealand and the Cook Islands have experienced one of the most fractious periods in the 60-year history of our free association relationship.
4. The relationship has been pushed <sup>s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)</sup> including: the signing of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with China in February 2025 without any meaningful consultation with New Zealand; the pursuit of a separate Cook Islands passport <sup>s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)</sup> and the Cook Islands shipping registry <sup>s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)</sup>
5. These issues have highlighted a significant discrepancy in how New Zealand and the Cook Islands view our free association relationship. New Zealand considers that the free association model, which guarantees Cook Islanders New Zealand citizenship, <sup>s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)</sup>
6. This lack of a shared understanding of the free association relationship, led us to pause New Zealand's direct budget support for the Cook Islands Government (worth around \$30 million over two years) <sup>s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)</sup>  
Yet this stark discrepancy in understanding of the free association relationship persisted through many months of negotiation among officials <sup>s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii), s7(c)(i)</sup>

7. s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

sought to remove previous ambiguity around the constraints and obligations of the free association model, including by clearly articulating New Zealand's responsibility for the defence and security of the Cook Islands and the Cook Islands' obligations to notify and consult New Zealand on all matters likely to impact our national security and the security of the Realm of New Zealand.

8. s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

9. We wish to travel to the Cook Islands at the earliest possible opportunity following the agreement of this Declaration, s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

The key visit objectives are:

- Sign with Prime Minister Brown a Declaration on Defence and Security between the New Zealand and the Cook Islands;
- Reaffirm New Zealand's role as the Cook Islands' principal partner on security and defence matters;
- s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)
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#### Outline of Proposed Visit

9. We will:

- Attend a ceremony to sign and announce a Declaration on Defence and Security between the Government of New Zealand and the Government of the Cook Islands;
- Meet with Cook Islands Prime Minister, Mark Brown; and
- Attend any hospitality organised by the Cook Islands Government.

### Ministerial Party

10. We would be accompanied by our Specialist Ministerial Advisor, Senior Press Secretary and Senior Foreign Affairs Advisor.
11. Travel costs for us, our Specialist Ministerial Advisor and Senior Press Secretary will be charged to Vote Internal Affairs: Members of the Executive – Travel. The costs of the Senior Foreign Affairs Advisor will be covered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

### Acting Ministers

12. If this travel is approved, we have asked Hon Todd McClay to cover our foreign affairs portfolio, Hon Shane Jones to cover our racing portfolio, and Hon Simeon Brown to cover our rail portfolio. If approved, note that we be absent from Cabinet committee meetings on 2 April.

### Estimated Cost

13. The estimated cost for this travel is:

Item	NZ\$
<b>Flights</b>	0
<i>RNZAF plane</i>	
<b>Rarotonga</b>	
<b>Accommodation</b>	\$1,800
<i>Per person (x3), per night (x1)</i> <i>600.00 per person, per night</i>	
<b>Transport</b>	\$510
<b>Gifts</b>	\$200
<b>Other expenses, including incidentals</b>	
<i>1 day (meals and other sundry expenses)</i>	\$250
<b>Pre-contingency total</b>	\$2,760
<b>Contingency 5%</b>	\$138
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>\$2,898</b>

## Recommendations

This paper recommends that Cabinet:

1. authorise our absence from New Zealand, subject to leave from Parliament being secured, from Wednesday 1 April to Thursday 2 April 2026 to the Cook Islands for a bilateral visit;
2. approve the estimated expenditure of \$2,898 for the travel expenses of the Ministerial party, as a charge to Vote: Internal Affairs - Members of the Executive – Travel;
3. agree that we be accompanied by two members of staff from our office;
4. note that we will be accompanied by officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, whose travel costs will be a charge to Vote: Foreign Affairs;
5. agree that in our absence:

5.1 Minister McClay would act as Minister for Foreign Affairs;

5.2 Minister Jones would act as Minister of Racing; and

5.3 Minister Brown would act as Minister for Rail;

If these Ministers are unavailable to act in our absence, then we will confirm alternative Ministers to cover our portfolios.

6. note that the House is not sitting during my absence.

Authorised for lodgement

Rt Hon Winston Peters

Minister of Foreign Affairs