

Parliament protest: Police arrest 122 in efforts to control occupation

6:06 am on 11 February 2022

Tensions rose on Thursday as the protest against Covid-19 protection measures dragged on into its third day, with police hauling away dozens of protesters who refused to leave Parliament grounds.



Police make multiple arrests in an effort to remove protesters occupying Parliament's precinct for a third day. Photo: RNZ/Angus Dreaver

Police made more arrests as they continued to hold the line.

Police said it was disappointing that despite the grounds being officially closed to the public earlier today, a number of protesters are still refusing repeated requests to leave the precinct.

"We continue to acknowledge people's rights to protest, however those who behave unlawfully will face arrest."

Some protesters responded with abuse, haka and hurling objects at officers.

Police update on the anti-mandate protest at Parliament Grounds | Feb 10 2022



At a media briefing this afternoon (<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/461228/live-police-say-anti-mandate-protest-at-parliament-unprecedented>), Wellington District Commander Superintendent Corrie Parnell said the health and safety of police staff and the public was paramount.

Parnell said two police officers who had been assaulted in today's confrontation with anti-mandate protesters were now recovering.

Police had twice deployed OC spray after officers were pulled into the crowd. He said they were not seriously injured and such behaviour was unacceptable.

Parnell said that earlier today police saw some weapons such as placards and sticks, as well as a knuckle duster which signalled the sentiment of some of the occupiers.

He said the presence of children was a significant risk factor and that some protesters had placed children in front of adults.

He said police could not control that but could control how they dealt with the children.

"There has never been an occupation of this scale, it's unprecedented and there has to be a measured approach," he said.



Police and protesters at Parliament during the Covid-19 protest on 10 February 2022. Photo: RNZ / Samuel Rillstone

Asked how long the occupation would continue Parnell said "my intention is it won't be here for another week".

Photo: RNZ/Angus Dreaver



Politicians react as protest continues

Inside Parliament, Minister for Covid-19 Response Chris Hipkins stressed that the pandemic is not over.

Hipkins made the comments in the debate of the Prime Minister's statement in the House this afternoon.

He referred to the number of protesters outside Parliament and the number of Covid-19 deaths experienced overseas.

"More people are dying of Covid-19 in Australia than were on the Parliamentary forecourt. Each week, more people die from Covid-19 than have been standing on the Parliamentary forecourt each week."

Hipkins also thanked police officers for protecting those working on the Parliamentary precinct.

Police with a handcuffed anti-vaccine mandate protester on 10 February 2022. Photo: RNZ / Samuel Rillstone

Speaking after visiting a Covid-19 vaccination centre in Albany, Auckland, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern told the group of anti-vaccine mandate protesters to 'move on'.

Ardern said it was ultimately an operational matter for police.

"Obviously every New Zealander has a right to protest, but there are also rules around what is able to happen on Parliament's forecourt and of course we would expect that people have behaviours that don't disrupt the ability of others to go on with their lives as well."

She said the majority of New Zealanders shared a similar sentiment, to keep one another safe and do as much as they could to ensure we could continue to live our lives as we did before the pandemic.

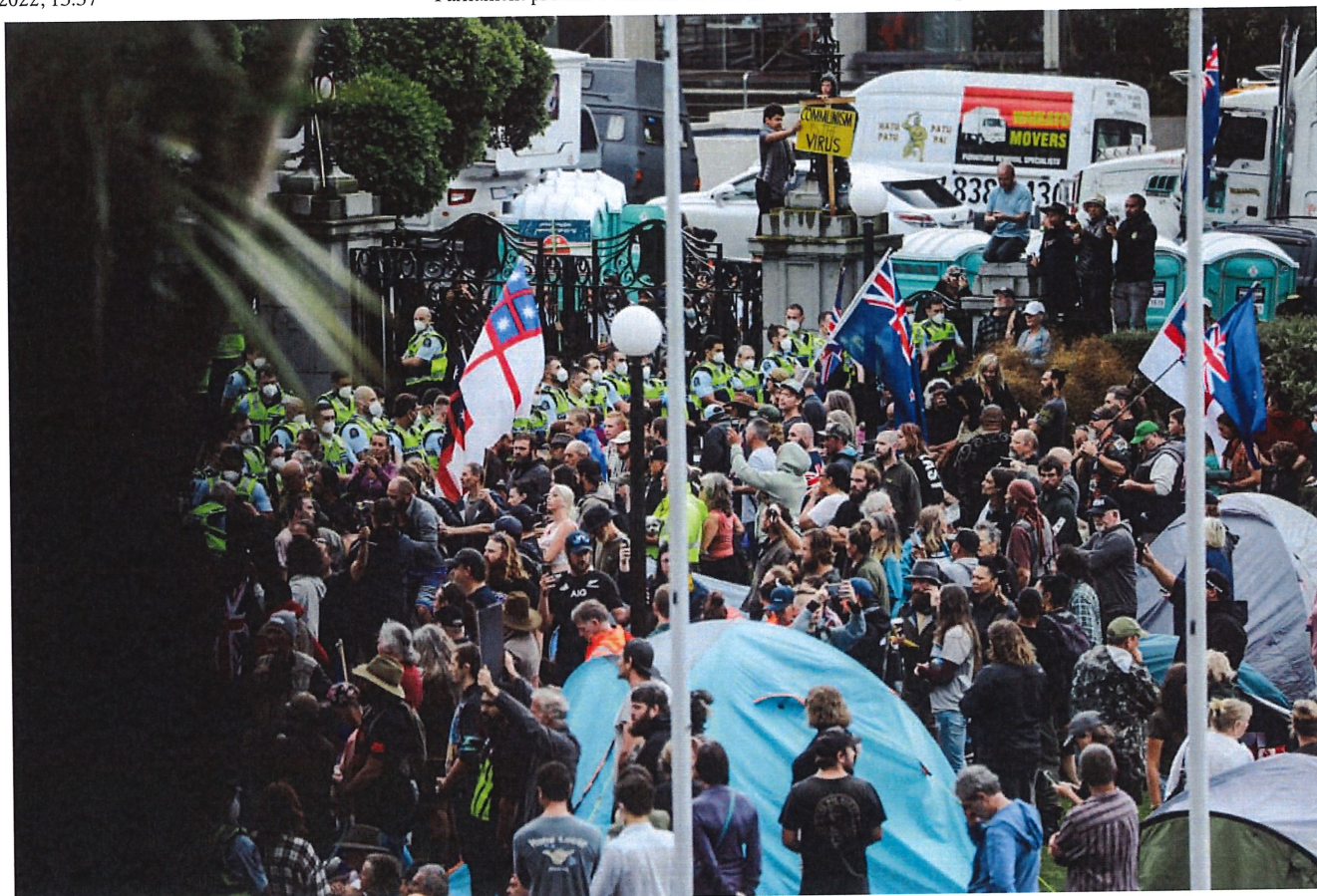


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"It is not unusual to have protest activity at Parliament, that is part of our democracy, but we do need to make sure that we keep that balance with people being able to live their lives - particularly people who live in the Wellington region or work in the Wellington region. So that is of course what the police are endeavouring to do.

"I'm not going to question those who have the expertise around how to manage situations like this."

She said she had seen a number of protests in her time in Parliament and this was certainly not the largest.



Covid Convoy protest day three at Parliament grounds. Photo: RNZ / Samuel Rillstone

The National Party confirmed it did not support the convoy protest, despite one of its MPs posting on Facebook that she wanted to thanks the protesters.

Maureen Pugh edited the post before deleting it entirely, saying she didn't know the protesters were anti-vaccination. The party's Covid-19 spokesman Chris Bishop said he did not see the post before it was deleted.

Bishop said Pugh has apologised for her actions and that there are no anti-vaxxers in the National caucus.

Wellington CBD retail sales down 70 percent because of disruption

On the streets surrounding Parliament, Wellington retailers say the disruption caused by the large protest at Parliament is further straining business.

They said staff are being verbally abused in the city.

Retail NZ said the protest had brought sales down across the CBD by at least 70 percent, and businesses were already struggling with red light restrictions.

Chief executive Greg Harford said with much of the public avoiding the area, many of the protesters want to be served - but can't be because they don't have vaccine passes or masks.

He said retailers are worried about angry people dispersing from Parliament grounds and through the city, and he wants the city council to support retailers if that happens.

With the protest rumbling on, New Zealand recorded a new record high 306 new community cases of Covid-19 today (<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/461247/covid-19-update-record-306-new-community-cases-in-new-zealand-today>) - with 216 cases in Auckland alone.

Police accompany parking wardens at the Covid Convoy Protest Photo: RNZ / Samuel Rillstone



Police on hand as ticketing of protesters' vehicles begins

After parking tickets were withheld due to safety concerns yesterday, Wellington police have now begun helping parking wardens clear blocked roads around Parliament (<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/461253/police-on-hand-as-ticketing-of-protesters-vehicles-begins>).

The anti-mandate demonstrators were asked to shift illegally parked vehicles and tickets have now been issued.

The Wellington City Council said while it would like to start towing vehicles, a lot of resources would be needed.

Council spokesperson Richard McLean said the council was in constant discussions with the police about the vehicles.

Owners will be fined \$40 if their vehicles are parked on the footpath and \$60 if they are on yellow lines or parked on the road.

Each parking officer is being accompanied by at least two police officers.

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Experts warn protest could become superspreader event

University of Otago professor of public health Michael Baker told *Morning Report* the event had the potential to increase transmission of the virus, with protesters travelling from around the country and probably mixing with others outside their family group.

"That's really the definition of a super spreading event and we know that's how this virus gets around the world. We've seen that already in New Zealand with the Soundsplash Festival in Hamilton. We've seen it a lot internationally at big gatherings," professor Baker said.

"Even though it's mainly outdoors, there will be a lot of indoor gatherings associated with it, you know, shared transport and accommodation, meals, the shouting and singing, which we know generates these aerosols," he said.

"But the big extra problem here, of course, is that these groups, almost by definition, have low vaccine coverage low mask use. And they're probably less likely to present for testing and self isolate if they're sick. So all of those are really increasing the risks for this event."

He said after two days the point had certainly been made and any decision about whether to break the protest up would be a complex one, but it is currently presenting a risk.