

Stuart Nash sacked from Cabinet, but won't stand down as Napier MP

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NOW PLAYING • Focus: Stuart Nash sacked from Cabinet after new email scandal

Chris Hipkins has announced that ex-Police Minister Stuart Nash will be stripped of all his cabinet portfolios after a new scandal has emerged. Video / NZ Herald ...

Calls for Stuart Nash to leave Parliament are growing in the Opposition after he was sacked from Cabinet last night by the Prime Minister.

P Chris Hipkins revealed Nash was sacked after disclosing confidential information from a Cabinet meeting to two businessmen, both former donors, after a string of scandals beset the Napier MP.

National Party leader Christopher Luxon said he was scratching his head as to why Nash hadn't been sacked from his Napier MP position.

Luxon told AM that he was very interested in what Hipkins had to say on the matter today.

"The question for me is, if he has lost confidence with him in Cabinet how has he not lost confidence with in caucus and how can he be sure that other information hasn't been leaked," he said.

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Asked if Nash should stay in the Napier MP role until April 14 to avoid an automatic byelection, Luxon said: "I think we're letting the tail on the dog wag at that point because we're essentially saying we'll walk past the standard."

"The bottom line is you stay around just because we want to avoid a byelection? That's just doesn't seem the right way to have the conversation."

Luxon said Hipkins should "definitely" be undertaking a prime ministerial review to determine if other information has been leaked.

National MP Mark Mitchell, who hosted a radio segment with Nash for years and played alongside him in the Parliament rugby team, said he wasn't surprised by the revelations last night.

"There's the old saying where there's smoke there's fire," Mitchell said.

"I do have sympathy for Stuart but at the end of the day he is a Cabinet minister and he obviously is bound by Cabinet rules and he kept on breaking those."

Mitchell said questions needed to be asked to Hipkins on whether this was an isolated incident.

"Has it been a wider pattern of behaviour? Because like I said to you when that first incident happened it became pretty obvious that even Chris Hipkins did not understand how serious it was."

Mitchell said when Nash's original scandal appeared he waited to see whether he'd publicly apologise.

"But he didn't do that he doubled down on it so what it clearly signalled to everyone is that there is no self-awareness."

The new scandal relates to a pandemic-era commercial rent relief package.

In the leaked email to Troy Bowker and Greg Loveridge, Nash wrote "I am as annoyed (and surprised) about the final outcome of the 'commercial rent relief package' as you are".

The email detailed Cabinet discussions and noted Nash's personal disagreements with Cabinet colleagues and the positions they took.

It noted that Andrew Little was keen on an arbitration model of rent relief and that Nash had "got Parker across the line on the 50:50 proposal) [SIC]".

It notes the support of another part of the policy proposal as being backed by Ministers Winston Peters and Shane Jones.

The Cabinet Manual, which governs the conduct of Cabinet Ministers, states "discussion at Cabinet and Cabinet committee meetings is informal and confidential" and members of Cabinet are bound by collective responsibility and must not detail who took what position on an issue".

Bowker had donated \$10,000 to Nash for the 2020 campaign, Loveridge had donated \$5000 via a company, GRL Holdings.

Both men, who Hipkins said had done nothing wrong, were also involved in the property industry.

"They are also commercial property owners who had an interest in the Cabinet decision.

"That crosses a line that is totally unacceptable to me," Hipkins said.

Nash had already had to distance himself from Bowker after a 2021 incident in which he accused animation entrepreneur Sir Ian Taylor of “sucking up to the left Māori loving agenda”.

Back then, Nash said he wouldn't be “taking any more donations from Troy”.

String of scandals

Luxon called on Stuart Nash to resign from Parliament immediately, triggering a by-election.

Luxon said the crime was “akin to insider trading”.

Nash has been sacked from Cabinet after disclosing confidential information from a Cabinet meeting to two businessmen, both former donors.

Nash was on his final warning after a string of scandals before the latest misstep came to light, but Prime Minister Chris Hipkins said the most recent scandal was “inexcusable” and this incident alone would have seen Nash sacked.

“He needs to leave Parliament tonight,” Luxon said.

“We have standards here, this is a senior minister it's his fourth contravention of the Cabinet Manual, Chris Hipkins finally faces up to it tonight, it is a serious and egregious issue, he needs to be gone tonight,” Luxon said.

Act leader David Seymour said Nash's offences didn't necessarily disqualify him from being an MP and he also questioned calls, like those from Luxon, to have a by-election, doubting whether it would be a worthy use of time for the people of Napier, who were among the hardest hit by Cyclone Gabrielle earlier this year.

“With everything New Zealanders are facing at this point in time, how will having a by-election make the boat go faster when actually we're going to have an election for the whole country including Napier in just over six months' time?”

Asked whether Luxon's demand for Nash's resignation prompting a byelection was hypocritical given National's criticism of the Government's spending habits, Seymour said his concern was less about the roughly \$1.2 million needed for a byelection but the time it would take given the proximity of the general election.

“I wouldn't jump on the fact that a byelection costs money, I'd just ask with everything New Zealand faces; people trying to pay their bills, wondering why their dairies are being robbed again, and to then say what New Zealand really needs right now is a byelection ... doesn't really seem like the most pressing need of the people of Napier and New Zealand right now.”

'Lifeblood ... is confidence'

Victoria University law professor Dean Knight said the key issue over Nash's sacking was whether Hipkins could continue to have confidence in his minister.

“Constitutionally, the lifeblood of Cabinet ministers is confidence. Confidence of their ministerial colleagues. Confidence of their colleagues as expressed by the Prime Minister. The political judgment about whether collegial confidence remains or has been burnt up is also influenced by political heat — whether the confidence Parliament and electors have in the government risks being eroded by the actions of a minister.