



(1News, 2024) [quotation]

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Brooke Van Velden: Minimum wage, 90-day trials, workplace relations, social media

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6:00am

The Workplace Relations and Internal Affairs Minister speaks to Q+A about the changes the Government has planned for businesses and workers.
(Source: 1News)

The Internal Affairs Minister says it's a "really valid question" to consider New Zealand's value of a statistical life during the pandemic response as the Government expands the scope of the Covid-19 Royal Commission.

ACT deputy leader Brooke van Velden clarified, when asked today, about her comments on the subject from before the election.

At a medical technology event last June, the now-minister said she was asked "quite bluntly" about the value of life by an attendee.

She said, as part of her reply, at the time: "When it came to Covid, we completely blew out what the value of a life was, completely, I've never seen such a high value on life."

Van Velden is the minister responsible for the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the country's Covid-19 response.

Asked about the comments, she said: "I said [last year], 'There are a range of different ways you could value life based on which government agency that you're talking to'.

"For example, ACC puts a value on your life. The Transport Authority also puts value on your life. When it came to Covid, the government made active decisions on how much money they would spend to save each life from Covid."

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The balance of the elimination strategy and management of the MIQ system are two issues critics say should be included. (Source: 1News)

Van Velden suggested New Zealand had been "spending up large to save people from Covid, which I think was right," but at the expense of other groups, like people who needed breast cancer screenings.

She said the previous government made "an active decision to not value the lives of women who were forced not to have breast cancer screening."

The minister continued: "It is a very valid question to ask for those women, who missed out on breast cancer screening, who then had illnesses that have now cost far more for them in terms of their life, their health, their family, and their social wellbeing.

"Is it okay for us to have made that trade-off? As a government, these are the questions we have to make every single day with scarce resources. These are very adult conversations, and I can understand they're discomfoting to people."

She said the scope of the Covid-19 inquiry had been "too narrow" and that the terms of reference didn't canvass impacts on private businesses and "wider social contexts".

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"We should just dump it because it's not making a difference," the ACT leader told Q+A. (Source: Q and A)

Throughout parts of the pandemic response, ACT often criticised the government and health officials for imposing certain restrictions and not loosening some ones sooner.

Expanding the scope of the inquiry had been part of National's coalition agreements with both New Zealand First and ACT.

At the time of van Velden's comments last year, New Zealand Doctor editor Barbara Fountain **responded in an editorial**.

She wrote: "It is far too easy to forget the many unknowns of those early days.

"Our television screens showed torrid scenes in Italian hospitals of Covid proving deadly to patients and health workers, of a desperate shortage of ventilators, of bodies being stored in refrigerated trucks.

Govt to dump all remaining Covid-19 restrictions

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"No one knew whether the virus would become more or less virulent. No one knew there would be such a thing as long Covid.

"Steps were taken on the information available."

Alongside Australia, New Zealand maintained an elimination strategy during the first several variants of Covid-19, which emphasised the use of contact tracing and lockdowns to "stamp out" cases as they arose in the community.

At Alert Level 1, this meant normal life could continue for stretches without physical distancing, masks or other measures needed in other countries.

However, this came at the cost of "short and sharp lockdowns", heavily restricting international arrivals and the controversial managed quarantine system.

Meanwhile new variants changed to become increasingly transmissible, making it harder to stamp out outbreaks, culminating with the milder Omicron variant in 2022.

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