

PM urges police to investigate IPCA concerns

By [Edward Gay](#)

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Prime Minister John Key says it is critically important police address the child abuse investigation concerns raised in an Independent Police Conduct Authority (IPCA) report today.

The IPCA launched an inquiry into the management of child abuse investigations last year following the discovery of a backlog of more than 100 investigation files in Wairarapa, where there had been little or no progress on the original complaints.

The results of the first part of the inquiry were made public today, along with a number of recommendations regarding how the cases were prioritised and recorded.

Mr Key expressed confidence police would follow up the IPCA recommendations.

"It's important that they do. This is about the safety and security of young New Zealanders and that's critically important," he said.

Whether or not more resources would be needed for police to do that was not clear, Mr Key said.

"I'm not sure I can answer that and it's really an operational question for the police, but I'm sure that if they think they do then they'll make that clear to the minister."

Speaking at a press conference today, IPCA chairwoman Justice Lowell Goddard outlined the recommendations, which included considering the inclusion of child abuse investigations as a priority in the police national business plan.

"The authority has formed the view that the lack of independent treatment given to the investigation of child abuse in key planning documents is a matter deserving of police attention."

The IPCA suggested police review the way child abuse files were recorded in the national database to avoid cases slipping through cracks.

Justice Goddard said the inquiry had shown information was not being accurately recorded, demonstrated by an audit in the Bay of Plenty, which showed more than 100 child abuse files were missing from the database.

A review of the staff dealing with child abuse cases, as well as the workloads of those staff, was also recommended.

"Police should review how improvements can be made in the selection, training and guidance offered for child abuse investigators and supervisors, and consider setting a maximum number of files to be held at any one time by a single investigator."

In Whangarei, the number of trained staff within a specialist unit was found to be very low, and the report noted staff were often required to attend to other investigative work, including directions to assist in meeting road policing targets.

While this was not the case in all districts, the IPCA recommended each looked at the training investigators



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received, and suggested child abuse teams should be exclusively focused on child abuse cases.

Justice Goddard said police had already taken action to fix some of the shortcomings identified in the report, and that she had full confidence in Police Commissioner Howard Broad's commitment to addressing the remaining problems.

In a statement earlier today, Mr Broad said while the delays in the Wairarapa were unacceptable, a national audit of child abuse cases since had found most were being dealt with in a proper and timely manner.

"I don't want people to think our system is broken when it is not. We have a desire to do our absolute best for at risk children and ensuring that we have the best practices, policies and procedures in place is extremely important in achieving this goal," Mr Broad said.

"On receiving this report I am motivated to get as many of the recommendations implemented in as short a time as possible and will be taking a taskforce approach to this."

Police Minister Judith Collins said the Wairarapa situation was a very sad story.

"I have to say it's a pretty sorry story for what happened during that time," Ms Collins said.

"It's extremely worrying; it was, however, between 1999 and 2006 and the audit that police have undertaken, I think, does give some comfort in relation to the nationwide situation.

"However, there are improvements that can be made and police are already making those, in particular to case management and other ways in which child abuse teams work together, particularly between Child Youth and Family and police."

Ms Collins said she was distressed for the victims in the Wairarapa cases, but was reassured by the progress that was now being made.

"I am confident in the way in which matters are being handled now, and the changes that are being made, but nothing can excuse what happened in the Wairarapa during that time."

– NZPA

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