



New Zealander fired for checking background information on girlfriends December 4, 2006

Les Neilson is no longer a New Zealand emergency call operator on 111 in Wellington as he checked up on the background of his potential girlfriends. Mr Neilson said that he will take his case to the Employment Relations Authority as he claims that everyone is doing it and he is being made a scapegoat.

Mr. Nielson was fired in April of this year because of "inappropriate accessing and disclosure of police information."

Mr. Neilson said: "Many police regularly look up acquaintances and friends on the database. I've basically been screwed for doing something that's a common practice. I've used the information the same as everyone else has. If I'm socialising with people and I'm meeting new partners then I need to know the background of those partners because I don't want to put myself or the department in a compromising position." He did it "to protect himself and the organisation."

Mr. Neilson had worked with the New Zealand police for 20 years and has used the background checker "...for the last 20 years."

However he never sold the information to third parties and never used it for personal gain. "I have not disclosed the information to anyone. I've given an

explanation. If they investigate it they'll find out it's a very legitimate explanation."

"There's nothing that says I can't do that..."

Howard Broad, Police Commissioner, said: "Staff knew it was wrong to access the database for personal use. If they do, it's wrong and they would know that it's wrong. It's quite a clear breach."

Police can be sued for accessing police information which contain addresses, vehicle details, family, gang links, etc., according to Scott Optican, associate law professor at Auckland University, as it is private information. "The revelation was a significant breach of privacy and police could face lawsuits as well as formal complaints. Police had a duty to investigate how many people had accessed the database for personal use, and what they did with that information. If it looks like there were consequences [for the person who was looked up], they need to contact that person and find out what happened."

The information regarding name and address is said to be worth between NZ\$100 and \$200 alone to private investigators and debt collectors.

Mr. Nielson is working as a private investigator in Wellington, the capital of New Zealand.

"How many of the general public would be upset that the local policeman or someone working for the

police checks up on them, or who's in the street, or checks up on potential tenants for flats or aunts' and uncles' criminal histories?" Mr. Neilson said.

A spokeswoman for the police headquarters said: "The police organisation is intolerant of any abuses of information that is held. As this case illustrates, action will be taken against any staff member who seeks to use police information for purposes unrelated to their duties." She would not comment any further due to the case being before the Employment Relations Authority.

Greg O'Conner, president of the Police Association, said that their union had reminded members to be aware of their use of police information and facilities. "Operation Insider, which investigated the distribution of pornographic e-mails among police, had highlighted the importance of using such facilities appropriately."

"Quite frankly, I think the police should explain to members of the public exactly what happened here and what they'll do to make sure it doesn't happen again," Mr. Optican said.

New Zealand runs low on 20 cent coins December 5, 2006

The Reserve Bank of New Zealand wrote to retail banks warning them that there will be a shortage on 20 cent coins (NZ\$0.20) leading up to Christmas. They have now announced

that they have distributed 4.75 million new twenty cent coins in the past week alone "...close to the number issued in a typical year."

Ten million new coins are expected to arrive in the next few days.

The Reserve Bank is wondering where all the new coins went, just five weeks after the new design was first introduced. Brian Lang, currency manager for the Reserve Bank, said: "The pattern of demand for new coins has been markedly different to that for the old coins." He suggests that people are keeping them in jars, like the old design coins.

Some stores are already unable to give out twenty cent coins as they don't have any according to the Newmarket Business Association.

Mr Lang said: "To put this into perspective, by 30 November, the Bank had issued almost as many 20c coins (49.6m) as 10c coins (53.0m). In the past issue of 20 cent coins would normally have been about half the amount of 10 cent coins."

The head of Newmarket Business Association, Cameron Brewer, said: "...the Reserve Bank told us that they'd done a lot of work and that everything was going to be just fine. Well here we are just five weeks into the new coins and only days away from the Christmas rush, and the country's running out of its own currency."

Mr Lang said: "The Bank has sufficient supplies of 10c and 50c coins for several years' normal issues."

"...tens of millions of the old 20 cent pieces sit idle because they are no longer legal tender," Mr Brewer said referring to the old 'silver' coins that were used before the introduction of new coins.

The Reserve Bank still doesn't know

why the pattern of demand of twenty cent coins has changed.

"... such a staggering miscalculation by the Reserve Bank should never have happened," Mr Brewer said.

Apple launches iTunes in New Zealand December 6, 2006

Apple Computers announced today that it's long awaited iTunes store is available to New Zealanders. They also launched the online Apple Store New Zealand which provides Apple products, such as iPods, Mac minis, etc. New Zealand is number 22 on the number of countries who have the iTunes store and the tenth music download store in New Zealand.

The launch means that New Zealanders can now download music to transfer to their iPods, legally. However the music is only available to iPod's as converting the music to the MP3 standard for other MP3 players is illegal in New Zealand. Some music download sites in New Zealand support MP3 formats, like Digirama which sell their music tracks for \$1.75.

The New Zealand iTunes store provides the most digital music tracks in New Zealand at around two million and each song costs NZ\$1.79 or a music video costs \$3.59 of which there around thousands, an album will usually cost about \$17.99 and a game will cost \$7.99. The music tracks also include New Zealand artists such as Brooke Fraser, Tim Finn, Fat Freddy's Drop, etc and also includes international exclusive albums such as Red Hot Chili Peppers, Ben Harper, etc.

Eddy Cue, vice president of Apple, said: "We're thrilled to bring the iTunes Store and the online Apple Store to our customers in New

Zealand just in time for the holidays."

There were rumours surrounding the launch of a New Zealand iTunes store this week.

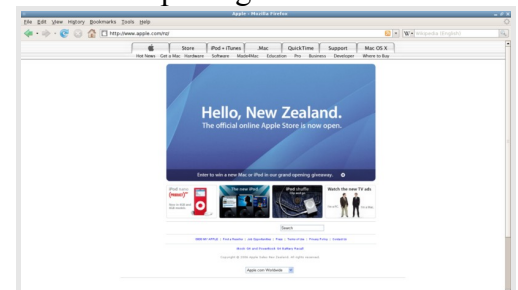
The podcast section on iTunes also covers a wide range of podcasts, equalling over 65,000. The New Zealand podcasts include such companies as TVNZ (Television New Zealand), Radio New Zealand and The Voice Booth.

It is commonly believed that the reason the store was halted until now was because Apple has to make separate contracts with each recording company in each country.

iTunes is likely to become the dominant music download store in New Zealand, following the trend of other countries.

The special edition iPod nano has also been released in New Zealand. The special edition is red in colour instead of the normal white and black colours. The special iPod is available only on the online store at the same price as the normal iPod nanos but some of the profit goes to help fight HIV/AIDS in Africa.

Renaissance is New Zealand's distributor of Apple goods and will still keep its contract despite Renaissance not being directly involved in both of the new online stores. Renaissance said: "New Zealand will now come under Apple's worldwide pricing model."



Screenshot of Apple welcoming New Zealand to its online stores.

Australian MPs suggest Australia and New Zealand unification

December 6, 2006

A committee of Australian MPs have suggested that Australia and New Zealand become a single nation in the future. The suggestion follows an investigation into harmonising the countries' legal systems.

The two countries are separated by 1900 Km (1200 miles) of sea. Australia has a population of 20 million, while New Zealand has a population of 4 million.

Prior to 1901, New Zealand was considered one of the seven British colonies of Australasia, six of which united to form Australia in 1901.

The committee, which had representatives from both sides of Australian politics found that there were close ties between the two countries. People are free to move between the two countries without visas and there is a high-degree of co-operation between governments. The committee's report said "While New Zealand ultimately chose not to join the federation, it is still included in the definition of the states in the Australian constitution.

"This historical context forms a backdrop to the closeness and breadth of the relationship between Australia and New Zealand today.

"While Australia and New Zealand are, of course, two sovereign nations, it seems to the committee that the strong ties between the two countries - the economic, cultural, migration, defence, governmental, and people to people linkages - suggest that an even closer relationship, including the possibility of union, is both desirable and realistic."

Chairman of the committee, Peter Slipper said Australia now wished for another committee to be established to look at integration between the two nations in the future. Such a committee would be poised to look at monetary and national union.

The committee acknowledged that despite legal harmonisation being relatively easy, the merger of the two countries could be difficult. "The committee is also mindful that the harmonisation of laws is very much the art of the possible. Thus the merger of Australia and New Zealand or the progression to a unitary system of government in Australia, however desirable, might not be easy to achieve," the committee's report said.

The suggestion has received a cold reception in New Zealand. New Zealand's citizens have regularly rejected suggestions that their country be part of Australia, a sentiment echoed by Prime Minister Helen Clark. Mrs Clark said she had no intention of placing the proposal on the government's agenda.

"It won't be on our agenda 105 years later", she said.

New Zealand's Foreign Minister, Winston Peters dismissed the proposal calling it a case of "parliamentary adventurism". He said despite the two countries close relationship, the two countries were too geographically separated. "New Zealand is 1200 miles (1900 km) away from Australia and that's 1200 reasons why I don't go along with that committee, nor will New Zealanders," Mr Peters said.

Two prisoners fall unconscious while being transported in New Zealand

December 7, 2006

Two out of three prisoners fell

unconscious while being transported in a prison van from Wellington District Court to Upper Hutt, New Zealand's Rimutaka prison, the third remained conscious for the entire duration. It was said by the third prisoner that there was a strong gas leak that was entering their van.

An investigation has been launched by the New Zealand Department of Corrections in regards to where the leak originated from. The van has been removed from service until the cause has been determined.

The third prisoner said: "Shortly after the van left Wellington gas started seeping into the back of the van." Once the prisoner became aware of the leak he tried to grab the attention of the staff to stop the van by banging on the walls. The van did not stop. The staff followed correct procedure during the transport.

Dave East, Department of Corrections regional manager for Wellington, last night, said: "Two prisoners were found unconscious on their arrival at Rimutaka Prison... The prisoners quickly regained consciousness."

All three were checked by both a prison medical team and then later hospital staff as a precaution. It has not yet been determined why the prisoners were overcome and what by. They have been returned to prison.

Opponents: New Zealand government sneaks bill into House to avoid public backlash

December 7, 2006

The New Zealand Government has tabled the Therapeutic Products and Medicines Bill, despite unprecedented political opposition.

In 2003 the Hon Annette King signed a Treaty with Australia agreeing to hand control of the natural health

products sector over to an Australian regulatory body, however she needs to pass enabling legislation in New Zealand. "This will be a world-class joint scheme designed to regulate the safety, quality, effectiveness and promotion of therapeutic products in both New Zealand and Australia. That includes the regulation of complementary and alternative medicines, over-the-counter and prescription medicines, medical devices, blood and blood products and tissues and cellular therapies," Ms King said.

Twice the Bill has been thrown out by select committees, but the Government is determined to ram it through Parliament, according to the New Zealand Health Trust.

"Late tonight the Bill was finally tabled, with no announcement from the Minister," said Amy Adams, spokesperson for the Trust, "Clearly the Minister is keen to sneak it into Parliament under cover of the silly season, in the hope that she can keep it under the public's radar."

"I welcome the support of a majority of the House who want to see the Bill go to Select Committee where New Zealanders can have their say," Ms King said.

The NZ Health Trust conducted research earlier this year which showed 62% of New Zealanders used natural health products. "This Bill represents a massive and irreparable change to the way we make rules for New Zealand dietary supplements," Mrs Adams said.

"Under the proposed regime, well over a million New Zealand consumers would find the choice of products adversely affected, and experience cost increases. So you can see why the Government is trying to sneak this into the House without any fuss - they don't

want the public to know."

All the political parties except Labour have pledged their opposition the proposal, despite some intense lobbying by Australian and New Zealand officials.

"It is a very serious thing to hand sovereignty over your country over to another nation," Mrs Adams said. "And all the other political parties see the sense in making sure the sector is regulated from New Zealand - not as a minor state of Australia."

Ms King said: "The Bill... ensures that New Zealand will have an equal say in the setting up and running of the new Authority and joint scheme." The new authority will be like a crown-owned entity and will have to provide an annual report and a statement of intent to parliament each year.

New Zealand National party: "TVNZ must explain coup threat coverage" December 8, 2006

The New Zealand National party is asking state owned entity TVNZ (Television New Zealand), why they broadcast the coup threats the military commander, Commodore Frank Bainimarama, made live to the world.

"The question that TVNZ must answer is was this a legitimate media conference, or were they acting under the instruction of Frank Bainimarama. Be it inadvertent or not, the New Zealand public broadcaster has become a tool of the coup leader," Gerry Brownlee, state owned enterprises spokesman for the National party, said.

"Television New Zealand news is run by professional journalists and has a duty to cover news of major significance," Andrew Little, national secretary of Engineering, Printing and

Manufacturing Union which represents journalists, said.

During question and answer time in Parliament on Thursday 8 December, Mr Brownlee asked Dr Michael Cullen if the broadcasting was consistent with government public services policies. Dr Cullen did not answer the question as he said that there was no evidence or reports and Dr Cullen does not trust Mr Brownlee's word.

"This is not a question about whether the Commodore's threats were news. They were. This is a question about whether, without TVNZ's satellite assistance, the Commodore would have been as effective in his campaign of fear," Mr Brownlee said.

"[The journalists] and they alone should decide what should be covered. The day that a politician decides what the state broadcaster covers will be a sad day for the integrity of New Zealand democracy," Mr Little said. The union seeking insurances "The union is seeking an assurance from the National Party that media censorship is not National Party policy."

Mr Brownlee commented: "I for one don't want to see TVNZ becoming the Al Jazeera of the South Pacific..."



Logo of TVNZ.

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