

Cave Creek families feel 'fobbed off'

Aggrieved **Cave Creek** families believe Prime Minister Helen Clark has fobbed them off days out from the launch of her election campaign.

Miss Clark was asked early last month to step into the **Cave Creek** case and appoint a retired high court judge to finally see if any police action should be taken against Conservation Department staff.

Fourteen young people were killed when a Doc-built viewing platform collapsed at **Cave Creek** north of Punakaiki on the West Coast on April 28, 1995.

Detective Inspector Kevin Burrowes recommended criminal charges be laid against several Doc staff involved in the platform's building and approval process.

The 1995 Burrowes' report disappeared and police now are trying to find out why the investigation report has gone missing.

Christchurch lawyer **Grant Cameron**, acting for the **Cave Creek** families, wrote to Miss Clark last month asking her to launch an independent inquiry.

Miss Clark's office has replied to Mr Cameron, saying it will take some time to investigate.

But Mr Cameron said yesterday that the families felt they had been "fobbed off" until after the election.

"We have asked her to reopen the file and look into it. We want it sorted out once and for all. To me it is obvious something is wrong and police never saw justice through to its conclusion.

"The question now is, does Miss Clark have the courage to address it for what it is?

"The wrongs of the past had nothing to do with their administration. They have nothing to lose by appointing an independent party to look into the case."

Mr Cameron said he had been surprised by Miss Clark's reaction to date, but hoped it would be acted on shortly.

He said it would only take a few weeks for a retired judge to read through the Burrowes' interviews, file and papers to gain an opinion on whether charges should still be laid.

"We have had years of delays and any further delay is inexcusable.

"Even if they commenced the process now a judge would not need to report back until after the election anyway."

Labour and National launch their election campaigns on Sunday. Mr Cameron hopes Miss Clark will make her move on the **Cave Creek** case within the next week.

Mr Burrowes said there was a "definite" case for criminal negligence against several Doc staff for failing to safely build the viewing platform, which overlooked a national park chasm.

A former conservation leader Bruce Hamilton has said nothing would be achieved by dusting off the file and reviewing liability.

Mr Hamilton, who was chairman of the West Coast Conservation Board when the platform collapsed, said it would be unfair to put those involved under stress again.

Some **Cave Creek** families want the matter laid to rest but others feel that, by doing nothing, Miss Clark could effectively be accused of perpetuating the injustice. -- NZPA

CAPTION:

HELEN CLARK

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