

Clark rejects plea for **Cave Creek** inquiry

PRIME MINISTER Helen Clark turned down pleas yesterday for an inquiry into the prosecution of Conservation Department staff over the **Cave Creek** deaths.

Miss Clark said she did not intend getting involved in a re-examination of the West Coast disaster.

She said she had told Christchurch lawyer **Grant Cameron** that any case made by him about re-opening the decision not to prosecute should be directed either to the commissioner of police or the solicitor-general.

"As prime minister, I do not intend to get involved in matters which are properly the province of statutory offices," she said.

Fourteen young people died when a Conservation Department-built viewing platform collapsed north of Punakaiki on April 28, 1995. Detective Inspector Kevin Burrowes later recommended that criminal charges be laid against several conservation staff involved in the platform's building and approval process.

However, the Crown did not prosecute.

Mr Cameron, acting for some of the families who lost children at **Cave Creek**, asked Miss Clark last month for an independent inquiry to see if police action should be taken against conservation staff.

He said it was obvious something was wrong and police never saw justice through to its conclusion.

Mr Cameron said "wrongs of the past" had nothing to do with Labour and the Government had nothing to lose by appointing an independent party to look into the case.

Mr Burrowes's report, now lost, said there was a "definite" case for criminal negligence against several conservation staff members for failing to build the platform safely.

However, former conservation leader Bruce Hamilton has said nothing would be achieved by dusting off the **Cave Creek** file and reviewing liability.

Mr Hamilton, the 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 also want the matter laid to rest, though others wanted an inquiry. -- NZPA

Supplied by New Zealand Press Association

Section: NEWS
Sub-Section: NATIONAL
Topics: ACCIDENTS-GENERAL

© Wellington Newspapers Limited 2002, All rights reserved.