Cabinet to hold first meeting for 2005

By Peter Wilson, of NZPA Wellington: Cabinet will hold its first election year meeting today and ministers will start setting their agendas for the year.

After an unusually short summer recess, Parliament will reconvene today, Prime Minister Helen Clark will make her usual speech before them.

One of the main items on today's agenda is the first government portfolio reshuffle, which will be announced after the meeting.

The Government has asked ministers to trim their portfolios to 20-25 per cent below their previous size. The reshuffle is expected to result in seats becoming available at the next election, and the change in portfolio size is designed to make it easier to manage.

The Government also plans to hold a special Cabinet meeting next month to discuss the potential for a new generation of vaccines.

In an election year, every member of the Cabinet will be expected to perform at a high level, as the Government tries to keep its lead over the opposition.

The reshuffle will also involve the appointment of new ministers to replace those who have moved on, or have been appointed to other roles.

The reshuffle will take place at the end of the month, with the new Cabinet members expected to be announced in early February.

By Maggie Tal, of NZPA Wellington: National Party MP Katherine Richard says a just-released series of stamps should be withdrawn after one shows an anatomically incorrect merino sheep with two lambs.

The stamp — of which about 30,000 were produced — features a ram whose head is elongated with curled horns. While the artist's initial effort would only be found on a ram, but other features of a ram are missing from the picture.

Mrs Richard, who worked in agriculture before becoming an MP, said the stamp was an absolute impossibility.

"I think they would have at least noticed some tell-tale dangly bits," she said. "It sort of looks like the female. That's a ram with two female characteristics, but I don't think they would have at least noticed some tell-tale dangly bits."

Recently also appeared to have had a strange shearing experience. "It sort of looks like the ram's been shorn but they've left all the wool around its head, which is not good for the merino industry."

The stamps were a joke and wouldn't there?" she added. "Basically, anybody knows a ram's been shorn but they've left all the wool around its head, which is not good for the merino industry."

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