

HON JUDITH COLLINS KC, MINISTER OF DEFENCE

DEFENCE CAPABILITY PLAN 2024: STRATEGIC CONTEXT AND FRAMEWORK

May 2025

This publication provides the Cabinet paper and associated minute of November 2024, in which Cabinet agreed to defence policy settings, including three new strategic defence policy objectives:

- protect and promote the security of New Zealand and the immediate region;
- enhance the ANZUS alliance with Australia and New Zealand's most important security partnerships;
- contribute to achieving New Zealand's global interests.

The pack comprises the following documents:

- the November 2024 Cabinet paper and associated minute of decision *Defence Capability Plan 2024: Strategic Context and Framework* [CAB-24-SUB-0420 and CAB-24-MIN-0420].

This pack has been released on the Ministry of Defence website, available at: www.defence.govt.nz/publications/defence-capability-plan-2024-strategic-context-and-framework

Information is withheld where making it available would be likely to prejudice:

- the security or defence of New Zealand or the international relations of the Government of New Zealand [section 6(a)].

Information is also withheld in order to maintain:

- the confidentiality of advice tendered by Ministers of the Crown and officials [section 9(2)(f)(iv)]
- the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions by or between or to Ministers of the Crown or members of an organisation or officers and employees of any department or organisation in the course of their duty [section 9(2)(g)(i)].

Where information is withheld under section 9(2) of the Act it is not considered that the public interest outweighs the need to protect it.



Cabinet

Minute of Decision

This document contains information for the New Zealand Cabinet. It must be treated in confidence and handled in accordance with any security classification, or other endorsement. The information can only be released, including under the Official Information Act 1982, by persons with the appropriate authority.

Defence Capability Plan 2024: Strategic Context and Framework

Portfolio Defence

On 4 November 2024, Cabinet:

- 1 **noted** that New Zealand is facing a more dangerous world than there has been for decades, with conflict becoming more widespread, the international rules-based system being deliberately challenged, strategic competition intensifying in the Pacific, and natural disasters increasing in frequency and impact;
- 2 **noted** that the defence of New Zealand and the protection of national interests is delivered both through sovereign capabilities and collective security s6(a)
[REDACTED] and supported by a network of likeminded partnerships;
- 3 s6(a)
[REDACTED]
- 4 **noted** that an update to defence policy settings has been undertaken, to reflect the priorities of this Government and developments in the strategic environment;
- 5 **agreed** to the defence policy settings outlined in Annex A to the paper under CAB-24-SUB-0420, which includes three new strategic defence policy objectives:
 - 5.1 protect and promote the security of New Zealand and the immediate region;
 - 5.2 enhance the ANZUS alliance with Australia and New Zealand’s most important security partnerships;
 - 5.3 contribute to achieving New Zealand’s global interests.

Rachel Hayward
Secretary of the Cabinet

Defence Capability Plan 2024 – Paper One – Strategic Context and Framework

Proposal

- 1 This paper details the strategic context for decisions on the *Defence Capability Plan 2024* (DCP (24)), including: the geostrategic environment and the core effects and capabilities of the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) and the analytical framework applied by Defence¹ officials to generate force structure options. This paper also asks Cabinet to agree to refreshed defence policy settings, reflecting recent shifts in the strategic environment and the priorities of this Government.

Relation to government priorities

- 2 Continued investment in the NZDF is necessary to achieve the Government's foreign, defence and trade policy priorities, particularly that New Zealand has an active defence policy agenda that enhances our security and underpins prosperity, and that the Government will be vigilant in the protection of the values of democracy, freedom and security.²
- 3 The *National Security Strategy* sets out an imperative for acting early to prevent national security threats and build our collective resilience. Defence capability underpins the span of core national security issues identified in the *Strategy*, contributing on issues such as domestic disaster response; transnational organised crime; border security; Pacific security; and broader geostrategic challenges such as strategic competition.

Executive Summary

- 4

s6(a)
- 5 The core role of the NZDF is to protect New Zealand and advance New Zealand's interests through military operations at sea, on land and in the air. The NZDF has the professionally trained people and military equipment to respond to a range of security and humanitarian tasks.
- 6 The NZDF plays a key role in the national security system, supports national resilience and is the only arm of state mandated to apply military force. No other state entity has a similar scale of trained personnel and equipment available for

¹ When 'Defence' is referred to in this set of papers, it refers to both the New Zealand Defence Force and the Ministry of Defence.

² *Speech From the Throne* 6 December 2023 <https://gazette.govt.nz/notice/id/2023-vr5697>
<https://gazette.govt.nz/notice/id/2023-vr5697>

- 11.2 **The Indo-Pacific remains the primary theatre of strategic competition and there is an increasing risk of conflict.** s6(a)

[Redacted text block]

- 11.3 **Conflict is becoming more widespread globally, with asymmetric approaches having an increased impact.** Global military spending is surging in all regions, including by our closest security partners. Large-scale war has returned to continental Europe, and serious tensions have reignited across the Middle East.

- 11.4 **Strategic competition is playing out in New Zealand's immediate region.** s6(a)

[Redacted text block]

- 11.5

s6(a)

[Redacted text block]

- 11.6 **Distance is no longer a protection.** New Zealand's geographic isolation does not shelter us from threats to the extent it has in the past. Threats are increasingly borderless, with cyber incursions an ever-present threat, the range of weaponry increasing, maritime and air trade routes stretched, and our connections to the world dependent on a small number of undersea cables and space-based services.

- 11.7 **Natural disasters are increasing in frequency and intensity,** both in New Zealand (such as Cyclone Gabrielle) and the Pacific region, increasing the need for government-led responses to concurrent events. Defence assets may also be needed in a consular response to natural disasters.

- 11.8 **The nature of warfare is changing,** including the increasing availability of advanced technologies, rising cost and technical sophistication of major military platforms, increased use of commercial drones to provide innovative military effects, reliance on space-based military systems, more frequent cyber and electronic warfare attacks, and the growth of artificial intelligence.

- 11.9 **An increasing likelihood of the NZDF needing to be self-sufficient** in our near region, s6(a)

s6(a)
[redacted] and as the international rules-based system continues to degrade.

12 [redacted] s6(a)

13 We are now in a period where rules are more contested and relative power between states assumes a greater role in shaping international affairs; economic relationships are reassessed in light of military competition; and states are focused on increasing resilience.⁴ Ultimately these trends, and our response to them, will have an impact on New Zealand's security and prosperity.

Government's national security and defence priorities

14 Ministers have set a high ambition for New Zealand's national security sector, with a more energetic approach to international engagement and increased contributions to collective security efforts globally. New Zealand's national security capabilities must be directed and driven to deliver most effectively for our security and prosperity.

15 A primary element is investing more deliberately in our most important international security partnerships, particularly our alliance with Australia and our Five Eyes partnership. Defence cooperation is an important component across these security relationships. Such cooperation is fundamental to our security, to our national interests, and to our international standing and influence. We must contribute – and be seen to be contributing s6(a)

16 This Government also recognises the non-discretionary importance of the Pacific. In addition to continuing to contribute to regional stability and security, we must now act more deliberately s6(a)

Supporting our security partners

17 [redacted] s6(a)

[redacted] s6(a)

⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Navigating a Shifting World 2023*.

s6(a)

18

s6(a)

New defence policy settings

- 19 Given the rapid deterioration of our strategic environment and in-line with the *National Security Strategy* and the foreign policy reset, defence policy settings⁵ need to be updated and expressed more sharply – including in public – to signal New Zealand’s recognition of the challenges we face and our commitment to action.

20

s6(a)

- 21 This should seek to achieve two broad missions:

21.1

s6(a)

- 21.2 ensure capabilities are available to respond to a wide range of contingencies, including natural disasters, instances of civil disorder, maritime security threats and higher end military contingencies.

22

s6(a)

- 23 Officials have developed refreshed policy settings that reflect the considerations described above. Defence will continue to act early and

⁵ Defence policy settings were last updated in 2023 with the release of the *Defence Policy and Strategy Statement 2023* (DPSS) and the *Future Force Design Principles 2023* (FFDP) [CAB-23-MIN-0264 and CAB-23-MIN-0265 refers].

deliberately in pursuing and protecting New Zealand's security, but this will be based around three new strategic defence policy objectives:

23.1 **Protect and promote the security of New Zealand and our immediate region.**

23.2 **Enhance our ANZUS alliance with Australia and our most important security partnerships.**

23.3 **Contribute to achieving New Zealand's global interests.**

24 I am asking Cabinet to agree to these refreshed defence policy settings, which are described in detail at Annex A.

The irreducible core of the New Zealand Defence Force

25 To meet these policy settings, the NZDF must have as its irreducible core a set of effects that the force must be able to deliver, and a set of capabilities to provide those effects. These represent the foundation of any investment option.

Core effects that the NZDF must be able to deliver

26 In order to meet the expectations of Government, our ally Australia, close partners and the New Zealand public, the following effects must be delivered by the NZDF:

26.1 **Projecting force:** The NZDF needs to be able to project force to deter adversaries and respond to crises in our region, and defend the Realm countries.

26.2 **Maintaining persistent situational awareness in our Exclusive Economic Zone, the South Pacific and Southern Ocean:** A range of capabilities must be available to ensure that NZDF has persistent awareness of New Zealand's EEZ, the South Pacific [REDACTED] s6(a) [REDACTED] the Southern Ocean and the Ross Dependency.

26.3 **Deterrence through denial of opportunity:** The NZDF, alongside our international partners and as part of a whole-of-government approach,

[REDACTED] s6(a) [REDACTED]

26.4 **Sustaining combat operations concurrently:** For example, the NZDF should be able to sustain land combat operations [REDACTED] s6(a) [REDACTED]

26.5 **Be interoperable with our ally Australia and key partners:** Defence requires requisite capabilities that are interoperable. Interoperability, and the related idea of interchangeability, does not require New Zealand to have exactly the same military equipment as partners, but it does mean

[REDACTED] s6(a) [REDACTED]

that the NZDF will need to be able to seamlessly join and “plug in” to other militaries.

26.6 **Contribute to national defence and resilience, and help deliver whole-of-government security objectives:** This includes assisting other agencies to detect and respond to transnational organised crime in our immediate region, including the Realm countries; responding to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, narcotics and people smuggling; undertaking search and rescue; and providing other domestic support, including in response to disaster relief, counter-terrorism, and explosives disposal.

27 These effects vary in the extent to which they involve operations with partners or are delivered independently by New Zealand.

Core capabilities - the price of entry for any investment option

28 These effects require an expeditionary defence force that can operate offshore. For such a force to also have utility at home, and be valued by our partners abroad, it must have at its core a set of foundational capabilities. These provide the baseline utility of any future force.

29 I consider the following core capabilities of a Defence Force are required in order meaningfully to contribute to delivering our current defence policy settings, meet Government expectations, and generate the effects listed above. There are a range of choices within each capability set on the level of investment, scale and depth, technological solution and pace of delivery:

29.1 **Maritime patrol:** The ability to identify, locate and track potential maritime threats from air and sea;

29.2 **Maritime interdiction:** The ability to respond to maritime threats, once identified, providing a level of deterrence to potential adversaries and maintaining the security of our maritime trade routes;

29.3 **Maritime sustainment:** The ability to supply vessels with fuel and supplies at sea;

29.4 **Sealift:** The ability to move sufficient personnel and supplies by sea, over long distances to reach or resupply operational theatres;

29.5 **Surveillance and reconnaissance:** The ability to have broad and, where necessary, persistent awareness of the domains in which our forces are operating;

29.6 **Land combat and support:** Sufficient numbers of multi-role, combat-trained and equipped personnel, for deployment into conflict zones, the Pacific, and for disaster relief tasks regionally and at home;

29.7 **Special operations:** Personnel and capabilities held at a world class, peer-comparable trained state and at high readiness;

- 29.8 **Airlift:** The ability to move personnel and supplies with planes by air, over both long and short distances, and to provide helicopter support to operations;
- 29.9 **Command and control:** Headquarters elements able to raise, train, sustain, coordinate, develop, plan, deploy and communicate with forces; and
- 29.10 **Intelligence:** The ability to provide military analysis of the global strategic environment, and the operational and tactical environment our forces are operating in.
- 29.11 **Reserves:** The ability to rapidly scale responses with trained personnel, particularly in the land environment, to supplement deployments and assist with disaster response at home.
- 30 Supported by the following pacing functions⁷:
- 30.1 **Personnel:** A sustainable, engaged workforce, held at different degrees of readiness and training;
- 30.2 **Estate:** The physical infrastructure required to generate trained personnel, accommodate and enable the maintenance of equipment;
- 30.3 **Logistics:** The sustainment pipeline and supply chains required to support training and deployed operations;
- 30.4 **Digital:** The digital and information technology required to support training, deployments, headquarters functions, able to interact with our partners' systems and be protected from cyber threats; and
- 30.5 **Innovation, Science & Technology (IS&T):** The sustainable IS&T capability, strongly linked to wider national and international ecosystems, required to support the NZDF to maintain combat advantage against the accelerating pace of technology.

The cornerstone of our collective security: the New Zealand – Australia defence Alliance

- 31 Through the DCP (24) process, officials have considered alignment to the Australian force structure and future capability mix, where logical for New Zealand. Australia is our only military ally. s6(a)

- 32 Given Australia's size, location, select common capabilities, doctrine and training, and strategic alignment with our national interests, no credible strategy for the defence of New Zealand can exist that does not have the New Zealand-

⁷ Also termed 'enablers' or 'enabling functions'

Australia Alliance as its cornerstone. s6(a), s9(2)(f)(iv)

We must act as a force multiplier within the Alliance

33 s6(a)

34 Strengthening interoperability with Australia is a central principle of the design of the options for the DCP (24). More than interoperability, the future force must be increasingly interchangeable with that of Australia, and our people and assets must act as force multipliers within the alliance, able to operate as a joint "ANZAC" force when required. s6(a)

Joint procurement opportunities with Australia

35 Our military alliance with Australia, coupled with our single economic market under Closer Economic Relations, including mutual recognition for our domestic defence industries, provides a wide range of opportunities for joint capability procurement. New Zealand and Australia committed to prioritising combined defence procurement as an enabler of interoperability at the Australia-New Zealand Leaders Meeting in August 2024.

s6(a)

Current state of the New Zealand Defence Force

The foundations of the force are under increasing pressure

38 s6(a)

38.1 A hollow workforce, maintenance challenges, and rising costs mean NZDF is now unable to deliver against existing Government

policy: Long term attrition of specialist and experienced personnel is severely limiting the NZDF's ability to meet outputs. This is compounded by aging assets, which need more maintenance. The NZDF is actively working to operate within its baseline, including to deliver savings. While the NZDF's baseline funding has increased since 2020, the bulk of this increase related to funding associated with new capital projects. Cost pressures on the NZDF are higher than general inflation, including the cost of ammunition and maintenance of an aging asset base.

- 38.2 **The pressing need for generational replacement of some of the NZDF's current equipment risks the NZDF failing to meet outputs in the future:** Military platforms – ships, aircraft, helicopters, vehicles – cannot be purchased quickly. Ships can take 10 years to deliver from the start of a project to being fully operational. Much of the NZDF's current equipment needs to be replaced either immediately or during the life of the Plan. [REDACTED] s9(2)(g)(i)

- 38.3 **Underinvestment in the Defence Estate and digital infrastructure creates risk to people and operations:** Estate and digital infrastructure enable military capabilities, support operations, and are critical to the retention of key personnel.

- 39 The NZDF is already a slimmed-down force by international standards. For example, [REDACTED] s6(a) the Australian Defence Force has a range of capabilities that the NZDF does not possess, including main battle tanks, submarines, destroyers, amphibious assault ships, combat aircraft, airborne early warning aircraft, tanker aircraft, heavy transport aircraft, attack helicopters and heavy transport helicopters. Since 1990 the NZDF has substantially reduced in size and range of capabilities [REDACTED] s6(a). This has gone too far and needs to be addressed.

Targeted Investment Framework

- 40 In order to prepare a Defence Capability Plan that responds to the strategic environment described in this paper, officials developed an analytical framework that reflects Government priorities, and takes into account the fiscal environment. This framework was used to develop force structure options and indicative funding pathways. The Framework includes four criteria for assessing options:

- 40.1 **Valued by partners:** Is the force interoperable with and a force multiplier for Australia, and integrated where needed with other partners; does it meaningfully contribute to collective security, including in the South Pacific; and does it avoid the situation of capabilities being too capable for our needs but not capable enough for those of our partners?
- 40.2 **Innovative:** Is the force innovative but not bleeding edge, in both technology and new ways of operating; and is it able continuously to innovate, adapt and evolve?

- 40.3 **Utility:** Do the core capabilities of the force have utility at home, in defence of the Realm, in the South Pacific, in the Indo-Pacific and globally; and are they able to contribute to the range of military and civil tasks expected of them by government, from combat to disaster relief?
- 40.4 **Integration:** Is the force internally integrated between capabilities and pacing functions, so that platforms and their procurement are linked with and optimised to planning for the workforce, and digital and physical infrastructure?
- 41 The framework has two baseline principles that a force structure option must meet:
- 41.1 **Coherency:** A force that is greater than the sum of its parts, which makes sense when compared to the strategic environment and Government policy settings.
- 41.2 **Affordability:** A force that require levels of new capital and operating funding over the next 15 years that are realistic, proportional to our size, and that can be implemented by successive governments, s9(2)(f)(iv)

42 s6(a)

s6(a)

Other Implications

- 44 There are no cost of living, human rights, legislative, regulatory, gender, or disability implications resulting from this paper. Individual investment decisions under the plan may have some implications.

s6(a)

Consultation

- 46 This paper has been prepared by the Ministry of Defence and New Zealand Defence Force. The Department of Internal Affairs, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (National Security Group), Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Ministry for Primary Industries, Ministry of Transport, National Emergency Management Agency, New Zealand Customs Service, New Zealand Security Intelligence Service and Government Communications Security Bureau, New Zealand

Police, Public Service Commission, and The Treasury were consulted during the preparation of this paper. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (Policy Advisory Group) was informed. The consultation process included involvement in workshops, which allowed proposals to be tested with the agencies that make use of NZDF capabilities as part of their operations.

s6(a)

Proactive Release

- 48 I intend to proactively release this paper and associated minute, following public release of the Defence Capability Plan 2024, with redactions in line with the Official Information Act 1982.

Recommendations

The Minister of Defence recommends that the Committee:



- 1 **note** that New Zealand is facing a more dangerous world than we have for decades, with conflict becoming more widespread, the international rules-based system being deliberately challenged, strategic competition intensifying in the Pacific and natural disasters increasing in frequency and impact;
- 2 **note** the defence of New Zealand and the protection of our national interests is delivered both through sovereign capabilities and collective security s6(a)
[redacted], and supported by a network of likeminded partnerships;
- 3 s6(a)
[redacted]
[redacted]
- 4 **note** that an update to defence policy settings has been undertaken, to reflect the priorities of this Government and developments in the strategic environment; and
- 5 **agree** to the proposed defence policy settings included at Annex A, which includes three new strategic defence policy objectives:
 - 5.1 Protect and promote the security of New Zealand and our immediate region;
 - 5.2 Enhance our ANZUS alliance with Australia and our most important security partnerships; and

5.3 Contribute to achieving New Zealand's global interests.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Judith Collins KC
MINISTER OF DEFENCE

Paper One Annexes:

- A. Proposed policy settings for *Defence Capability Plan 2024*
- B.  s6(a)
- C. 
- D. Asset comparison over time - divestments since 1990

Annex A: Proposed policy settings for *Defence Capability Plan 2024*

In acting early and deliberately in pursuing and protecting New Zealand's security, our strategic defence objectives are to:

- Protect and promote the security of New Zealand and our immediate region
- Enhance our ANZUS alliance with Australia and our most important security partnerships
- Contribute to achieving New Zealand's global interests

s6(a)



s6(a)

Proactively released by the Minister of Defence

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Annex D – Asset comparison over time - divestments since 1990

Year	
1990	2024
4 x Frigate	2 x Frigate
8 x Wasp Helicopters	5 Seasprite
1 x Tanker	1 x Tanker
4 x Inshore Patrol Vessels	2 x Inshore Patrol Vessels
1 x Hydrographic Ship	1 x Diving/Hydrographic
	1 x Logistics
	2 x Offshore Patrol Vessels
7 x Inshore Survey Ship	—
1 x Diving Ship	—
1 x Oceanographic Research Ship	—
54 x M133 Armoured Personnel Carriers	82 x Light Armoured Vehicles
346 x Land Rovers/ 321 x Unimog	290 x Pinzgauer → 43 x Bushmaster
	Medium/Heavy Operational Vehicle (194)
Mistral Air Defence Missile System	—
10,601 Total Army Personnel	6299 Total Army Personnel (including reserves)
19 x CT4 Basic Pilot training	11 x T-6C Texan Training aircraft
3 x Cessna 421 Golden Eagle VIP/Short range transport	5 x Kingair training short range transport
6 x P3 Orion	4 x P8 Poseidon
2 x Boeing 727	2 x Boeing 757
5 x C-130H Hercules	5 x C130J Super Hercules
14 x Iroquois Helicopters	8 x NH90 Helicopters
5 x Bell 47G Sioux Helicopters	5 x A109 Helicopters
3 x Fokker Friendship Maritime reconnaissance	—
10 x Andover medium range transport	—
21 x Skyhawk Air/Land Attack	—
18 Aermacchi Training Jets (post Strikemaster)	—
20,911 total people (including Ready Reserves)	13424 Total people (including Ready Reserves)
16 Core Military Bases	10 Core Military Bases
	Reduction of approximately 800 hectares

s6(a), s9(2)(f)(iv)