

Defence House
34 Bowen Street
Wellington, New Zealand

P +64 (04) 496 0999
E info@defence.govt.nz

PO Box 12703
Molesworth Street
Wellington 6144, New Zealand

www.defence.govt.nz



**MANATŪ KAUPAPA
WAONGA**
NEW ZEALAND
MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

4 March 2026

RESPONSE TO YOUR OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT REQUEST

Thank you for your email of 3 February 2026, in which you requested, pursuant to the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following:

Please supply the following briefings provided to the Minister of Defence during August 2025:

- *Aide Memoire: Joint Commercial Operations Space Domain Awareness Programme, dated 1 August 2025.*
- *Aide Memoire: Maritime Helicopter Replacement Tranche One – Detailed Business Case, dated 5 August 2025.*
- *Joint Ministerial paper – Network Enabled Army – Investment One and Ministerial Briefing, dated 15 August 2025.*

The documents *Aide Memoire: Joint Commercial Operations Space Domain Awareness Programme* and *Aide Memoire: Maritime Helicopter Replacement Tranche One – Detailed Business Case* are enclosed. It has been necessary to withhold certain information in accordance with the following grounds of the Act. Where information is withheld, the relevant sections of the Act are indicated in the body of the document.

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, in accordance with section 6(a) of the Act. Information is also withheld in order to:

- maintain the constitutional conventions for the time being which protect the confidentiality of advice tendered by Ministers of the Crown and officials [section 9(2)(f)(iv) of the Act];
- maintain 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) of the Act];
- maintain legal privilege [section 9(2)(h) of the Act]; and

- enable a Minister of the Crown or any department or organisation holding the information to carry on, without prejudice or disadvantage, negotiations (including commercial and industrial negotiations [section 9(2)(j) of the Act].

The Ministerial briefing *Joint Ministerial paper – Network Enabled Army – Investment One and Ministerial Briefing* is currently being prepared for proactive release, and will be available shortly on the Ministry's website here: <https://www.defence.govt.nz/publications/>. As such, this element of your request is declined, pursuant to section 18(d) of the Act. As usual for investment papers relating to defence capability projects and programmes, certain information will be withheld in accordance with the following sections of the Act:

- where making the information 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) of the Act];
- protect the privacy of natural persons, including that of deceased natural persons [section 9(2)(a) of the Act];
- protect information where the making available of the information would be likely unreasonably to prejudice the commercial position of the person who supplied or who is the subject of the information [section 9(2)(b)(ii) of the Act];
- maintain the constitutional conventions for the time being which protect the confidentiality of advice tendered by Ministers of the Crown and officials [section 9(2)(f)(iv) of the Act];
- enable a Minister of the Crown or any department or organisation holding the information to carry on, without prejudice or disadvantage, negotiations (including commercial and industrial negotiations [section 9(2)(j) of the Act].

Where information is withheld in accordance with section 9(2) of the Act, the public interest is not considered to outweigh the need to protect this information at this time.

Under section 28(3) of the Act you have the right to request the Ombudsman to investigate and review this response.

Yours sincerely

Richard Schmidt
Deputy Secretary Policy and Planning

Enclosed:

- *Aide Memoire: Joint Commercial Operations Space Domain Awareness Programme*, 1 August 2025.
- *Aide Memoire: Maritime Helicopter Replacement Tranche One – Detailed Business Case*, 5 August 2025.

AIDE-MEMOIRE: MARITIME HELICOPTER REPLACEMENT TRANCHE ONE - DETAILED BUSINESS CASE

For EXP on 12 August

Decision sought: I am seeking Cabinet's approval of the preferred option for Tranche One, which would deliver five medium maritime helicopters. The paper also seeks agreement to proceed with sole-source procurement of the preferred helicopter, the MH-60R Seahawk, through the United States Department of Defense Foreign Military Sales program.

Financial implications: This has an indicative capital cost of [redacted s9(2)(j)] and operating costs of [redacted s9(2)(j)]. This is affordable within the established capital and operating tagged contingencies agreed as a pre-commitment against B26.

Key messages

- **The NZDF's Seasprite maritime helicopters are deteriorating rapidly** [redacted s6(a)]
[redacted]
[redacted]
- The maritime helicopter replacement project has been split into three tranches to smooth the expenditure over time.
- The Cabinet paper for Tranche One seeks the following key decisions:
 - Approval of the preferred option, which delivers:
 - **five medium maritime helicopters** and associated spares and equipment;
 - **infrastructure design** in preparation for Tranche Two;
 - initial infrastructure to house the aircraft at RNZAF Base Auckland; and
 - **modifications to the ships** in the existing fleet to allow the helicopters to operate from the ships.
 - **Agreement to sole source procurement** of the preferred helicopter, the **MH-60R Seahawk (the Seahawk)**, through the United States Department of Defense Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program.
 - Agreement to delegate approval of the Implementation Business Case to the Minister of Finance and Minister of Defence (Joint Ministers), should Cabinet agree to procure the Seahawk through the FMS program.

- I will return to Cabinet for Tranches Two and Three in future years.¹

The preferred helicopter

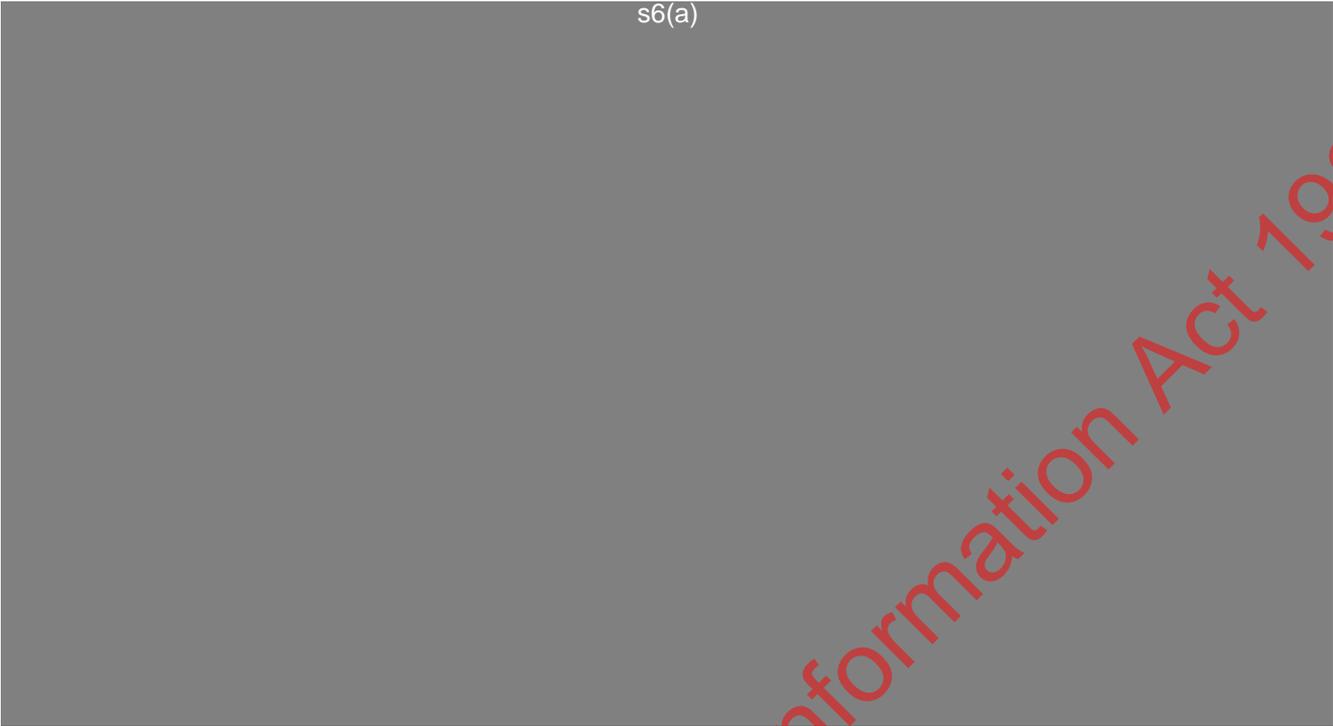
- **The Seahawk helicopter, operated by Australia and the United States**, is the preferred helicopter. The Seahawk **meets the NZDFs requirements to a significantly greater extent than the other options**. New Zealand's aircraft and aircrew would also be interchangeable with their Australian counterparts, enhancing our ability to act together.
- The ability to leverage American and Australian supply chains and through-life support arrangements for the Seahawk makes this the most cost-effective and durable helicopter. It means Defence does not need to fund the integration and certification of essential military equipment and systems needed for the aircraft to operate effectively.
- Defence will identify, with the US, opportunities for local NZ industry to provide through life support in areas such as training delivery and aircraft maintenance and support.

s6(a), s9(2)(h)

¹ Tranche Two covers a long-term infrastructure solution and training systems at an indicative capital cost of [REDACTED] s9(2)(j). Tranche Three covers uncrewed aerial systems at an indicative capital cost of [REDACTED] s9(2)(j).

Background

s6(a)



Financial implications

- In April 2025, Cabinet agreed that capital and operating tagged contingencies for Tranche One of the project be charged as a pre-commitment against Budget 2026.
- Tranche One has an indicative capital cost of s9(2)(j) and operating costs of s9(2)(j). The steady state annual operating costs are s9(2)(j).
- The additional capital cost of the project, for long-term infrastructure, training systems, and uncrewed systems, expected to be sought at Budgets s9(2)(f)(iv).

Next steps

- Should Cabinet agree to sole source the Seahawk, then Defence will:
 - submit a formal letter of request to the US Department of Defence through the Foreign Military Sales process s6(a).
 -
- The Minister of Finance and I will consider the Approval to Deliver s9(2)(f)(iv).



AIDE MEMOIRE: *JOINT COMMERCIAL OPERATIONS SPACE DOMAIN AWARENESS PROGRAMME*

For the Foreign Policy and National Security Cabinet Committee on 12 August 2025

Decision Sought: The Cabinet paper seeks approval to:

- continue the New Zealand Defence Force's (NZDF) participation in the Joint Commercial Operations (JCO) space domain awareness (SDA) programme; and
- transition this activity to an ongoing part of the NZDF's core business.

Financial implications: The operating cost of New Zealand's involvement in space operations, including JCO, is approximately \$180k for the 2025/26 financial year. These operations are funded within the existing baseline for Vote Defence Force: Protection of New Zealand and New Zealanders Multi-Category Allocation

- JCO is a US-led programme that uses unclassified data to 'look up' at space, monitor the movement of satellites, and provide unclassified reports to space operators and researchers to enhance SDA and protect critical space-based infrastructure. New Zealand is one of three coordinating nations, along with the US and UK. [Redacted] s6(a)
- New Zealand's contribution involves four NZDF personnel out of a pool of eight conducting JCO operations from RNZAF Base Auckland in Whenuapai. [Redacted] s6(a)
- Cabinet approved New Zealand's initial two-year participation in JCO on 28 August 2023 and **this mandate expires on 27 August 2025** [CAB-23-MIN-0394].
- New Zealand's involvement in JCO supports New Zealand's national security interests by providing **publicly shareable evidence of irresponsible behaviour** in space, enabling the protection of satellites, demonstrating New Zealand's commitment to protecting space, and enhancing New Zealand's international security partnerships.
- Participation in JCO is a **visible New Zealand contribution** to collective security in the space domain at a modest cost to government [Redacted] s9(2)(g)(i) [Redacted] s6(a)
- This paper asks you to **agree to continue** this contribution and to allow it to **transition** to an ongoing task of the new Space Squadron.

Background

- Should Cabinet decide to make JCO an ongoing activity, authority would be delegated to the Chief of Defence Force for decisions on future contributions to JCO within established policy parameters. [Redacted] s9(2)(g)(i)
- Defence would continue to report to the Minister of Defence in relation to JCO, including on changes to the NZDF's commitment to JCO. [Redacted] s9(2)(f)(iv)

- Cabinet is asked to decide whether to:
 - Option 1A: Continue New Zealand's contribution to JCO and transition this activity to an ongoing part of NZDF's core business (recommended);
 - Option 1B: Continue New Zealand's contribution to JCO and require Defence to return to Cabinet for future authorisation (not recommended); or
 - Option 2: Withdraw New Zealand from JCO (not recommended).
- Defence has prepared a media pack should Cabinet decide to continue New Zealand's participation in JCO.

s6(a)

s6(a)

*Policy Branch, Ministry of Defence
Strategic Commitments and Engagements, NZDF
July 2025*

Released under the Official Information Act 1982