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

10 June 2026

## RESPONSE TO YOUR OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT REQUEST

On 18 May, you emailed the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) in which you requested, pursuant to the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

*All post activity reports, and all briefs provided to executive leadership and/or ministers arising from the following activities:*

- *A visit to New Zealand by Chief of Space Operations for the United States Space Force, General B. Chance Saltzman during May 2026.*
- *Exercise Balikatan 2026*
- *Exercise Sea Dragon 2026*
- *Joint Heads of Pacific Security (JHoPS) meeting, during April 2026*
- *Combined Space Operations (CSPO) Initiative Principals' Board Meeting, during April 2026*

*Further, answers to the following questions:*

*What was the New Zealand Defence Force's involvement in the following exercises, if any?*

- *Maritime Big Play 2026*
- *Exercise Bamboo Eagle 2026*
- *Exercise Red Flag 2026*

On 19 May, the NZDF transferred part of your request relating to Ex Balikatan to the Ministry of Defence:

*Part of your request relating to Ex BALIKATAN has been transferred to the Ministry of Defence, as the information you have requested is believed to be held by that agency.*

In scope of this transfer is the following joint Ministerial briefing, which is enclosed:

- *Briefing: Exercise Kauri Bond: New Zealand Army Participation in two Philippines-Based Exercises, 26 March 2026.*

Other information held by the NZDF relating to Ex Balikatan will be addressed by that agency in their response.

Some information is withheld from the briefing in accordance with the following grounds of the Act, where making it available would prejudice:

- the security or defence of New Zealand or the international relations of the Government of New Zealand [section 6(a)]; and
- entrusting of information to the New Zealand Government on a basis of confidence by the Government of any other country or any agency of such a Government [section 6(b)(i)].

It is also necessary to withhold information, in accordance with the following grounds of the Act, to:

- protect the privacy of natural persons [section 9(2)(a)];
- maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions [section 9(2)(g)(i)];
- 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)]; and
- prevent the disclosure or use of official information for improper gain or improper advantage [section 9(2)(k)].

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 that 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

PP

Richard Schmidt  
**Deputy Secretary Policy and Planning**

Enclosed:

- *Briefing: Exercise Kauri Bond: New Zealand Army Participation in two Philippines-Based Exercises, 26 March 2026*



**Briefing to the Minister of Defence**

**BRIEFING: EXERCISE KAURI BOND: NEW ZEALAND ARMY PARTICIPATION IN TWO PHILIPPINES-BASED EXERCISES**

MoD ref: 37-2026

NZDF tracking: 2026-075

<b>Type of briefing:</b>	Submission for noting	<b>For information by:</b>	26 March 2026
<b>Purpose:</b>	This submission seeks to notify the Minister of Defence of the New Zealand Defence Force's intention to undertake Exercise KAURI BOND, which will see members of the New Zealand Army contribute, alongside partners, to two Philippines-US multinational exercises in the Philippines over April-June 2026: Exercises BALIKATAN and SALAKNIB.		
<b>Cost:</b>	Exercise KAURI BOND will be funded from existing NZDF baseline.		
<b>Current status:</b>	Final submission for noting.		
<b>Key risks / Limitations:</b>	Nil.		

- 1) **Note** that the New Zealand Defence Force will undertake Exercise KAURI BOND over April to June 2026, which will see the Army participate in two Philippines-US exercises in the Philippines alongside other close partners: Exercises BALIKATAN and SALAKNIB. Noted
- 2) **Note** that a New Zealand Army platoon group will embed in an Australian Defence Force combat team to participate in Exercise BALIKATAN over 7 April to 5 May 2026. Noted
- 3) **Note** that a New Zealand Army platoon group will embed in an Australian Defence Force combat team to participate in Exercise SALAKNIB over 6 May to 5 June 2026. Noted
- 4) [Redacted] s6(a), s9(2)(f)(iv) Noted

MINISTER OF DEFENCE

Date:

[Redacted] s9(2)(k)

**T DAVIES**  
Air Marshal  
Chief of Defence Force  
Date: 19 Mar 26

[Redacted] s9(2)(k)

**RICHARD SCHMIDT**  
Deputy Secretary Defence  
Policy and Planning  
Date:

<b>NZDF contact:</b>	BRIG Andrew Shaw	<b>Ph:</b>	s9(2)(a)
<b>MOD contact:</b>	Katie Roche	<b>Ph:</b>	

NZDF ref: 2026-075

MoD ref: 37-2026

Minister of Defence

For information by

26 March 2026

## BRIEFING: EXERCISE KAURI BOND: NEW ZEALAND ARMY PARTICIPATION IN TWO PHILIPPINES-BASED EXERCISES

**PURPOSE** To notify you of the New Zealand Defence Force's intention to undertake Exercise KAURI BOND, which will see members of the New Zealand Army contribute, alongside partners, to two Philippines-US multinational exercises in the Philippines over April-June 2026: Exercises BALIKATAN and SALAKNIB.

### Recommended referrals

Minister of Foreign Affairs

For information by

2 April 2026

### Agency contact

NAME	POSITION, ORGANISATION	PHONE
Katie Roche	Head of International Branch, Ministry of Defence	s9(2)(a)
BRIG Andy Shaw	Assistant Chief, Strategic Commitments and Engagements Branch, New Zealand Defence Force	

### Agency consultation

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade was consulted in the drafting of this paper.

# EXERCISE KAURI BOND: NEW ZEALAND ARMY PARTICIPATION IN TWO PHILIPPINES-BASED EXERCISES

## Key points

- The Royal New Zealand Navy and the Royal New Zealand Air Force currently have recurring deployments in the Indo-Pacific region which contribute to New Zealand's Defence policy and help to uphold the international rules-based order in the region.
- [Redacted] s6(a), s9(2)(f)(iv)
- s6(a), s9(2)(f)(iv) the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) intends to undertake Exercise KAURI BOND, which will see the New Zealand Army participate in two Philippines-US exercises in the Philippines over 7 April to 5 June 2026: Exercises BALIKATAN and SALAKNIB.
- An Army platoon group will embed within a larger Australian combat team for both exercises and work alongside key partners including the Philippines and the United States. A total of 69 NZDF personnel will participate in Exercise BALIKATAN, and 45 NZDF personnel will participate in Exercise SALAKNIB.
- Participation in these exercises will provide a platform for constructive engagement with the Philippines, as well as giving the Army practical experience operating closely with Australia [Redacted] s6(a)
- These exercises can be authorised by the Chief of Defence Force, however given these are new activities, and in an area that the NZDF has not recently undertaken land exercises, your early visibility of these future activities is appropriate.
- [Redacted] s6(a), s9(2)(f)(iv), s9(2)(g)(i)

s9(2)(k)

**T DAVIES**  
Air Marshal  
Chief of Defence Force

Date: 19 Mar 26

s9(2)(k)

**RICHARD SCHMIDT**  
Deputy Secretary, Defence Policy and  
Planning Division

Date: 19/3/26

## Recommendations

It is recommended that you:

1. **Note** that the New Zealand Defence Force will undertake Exercise KAURI BOND over April to June 2026, which will see the Army participate in two Philippines-US exercises in the Philippines alongside other close partners: Exercises BALIKATAN and SALAKNIB.

**Noted**

**EXERCISE KAURI BOND: NEW ZEALAND ARMY PARTICIPATION  
IN TWO PHILIPPINES-BASED EXERCISES**

- 2. **Note** that a New Zealand Army platoon group will embed in an Australian Defence Force combat team to participate in Exercise BALIKATAN over 7 April to 5 May 2026. **Noted**
  
- 3. **Note** that a New Zealand Army platoon group will embed in an Australian Defence Force combat team to participate in Exercise SALAKNIB over 6 May to 5 June 2026. **Noted**
  
- 4. **[Redacted]** s6(a), s9(2)(f)(iv), s9(2)(g)(i) **Noted**  
**[Redacted]**  
**[Redacted]**

**HON JUDITH COLLINS KC**  
Minister of Defence

Date:

Released under the Official Information Act 1982

# EXERCISE KAURI BOND: NEW ZEALAND ARMY PARTICIPATION IN TWO PHILIPPINES-BASED EXERCISES

## Report

### Background

1. The New Zealand Defence Force currently has s6(a) operations in the Indo-Pacific region, s6(a) which provide a regular presence for the Air Force and Navy respectively in the region in line with government policy.<sup>1</sup>
2. s6(a), s9(2)(f)(iv) in 2026 the New Zealand Army will undertake Exercise KAURI BOND and participate in two Philippines-based multinational exercises.
3. These exercises can be authorised by the Chief of Defence Force, however given these are new activities, and in an area that the NZDF has not recently undertaken land exercises, your early visibility of these future activities is appropriate.
4. Large-scale multinational exercises are a way states can look to tangibly reinforce the principles and norms upheld by the international rules-based order, such as the rights to territorial sovereignty, freedom of navigation and overflight, and collective self-defence. New Zealand's participation in large-scale exercises strengthens the international rules-based order by signalling our support for, and commitment to, these principles. Moreover, exercises maintain norms that reduce conflict and promote stability: they demonstrate lawful military conduct, build transparency, and enable collective security with our partners through enhanced interoperability which builds a deterrent effect.
5. Participation in exercises in the Indo-Pacific is a way that New Zealand can demonstrate our commitment to collective deterrent efforts in the region, that supports the sovereignty and security of our regional partners.

### Exercise KAURI BOND

6. Exercise KAURI BOND refers to the New Zealand Army's participation in two large-scale multinational exercises held in the Philippines over April-June 2026: Exercise BALIKATAN and Exercise SALAKNIB.
7. The NZDF's participation in Exercises BALIKATAN and SALAKNIB is intended to:
  - a. demonstrate New Zealand's commitment to activities that support the existing international rules-based order;
  - b. reinforce interoperability and integration within a coalition context, with an emphasis on strengthening interoperability with the Australian Defence Force (ADF);
  - c. strengthen New Zealand's relationship with key regional partners; and
  - d. exercise the New Zealand's Army's capability to conduct s6(a) movements into the Indo-Pacific.
8. A New Zealand Army platoon group will be deployed to the Philippines as part of Exercise KAURI BOND. The platoon group will integrate with an ADF Combat Team and work alongside their Australian counterparts, within a broader coalition framework, for the duration of Exercises BALIKATAN and SALAKNIB. Over 7-19 April, prior to their

<sup>1</sup> This policy calls for the Defence Force to "contribute to achieving New Zealand's global interests" though undertaking "activities which reinforce the existing international rules-based order such as exercising our rights under the United Nations Charter and UNCLOS".

# EXERCISE KAURI BOND: NEW ZEALAND ARMY PARTICIPATION IN TWO PHILIPPINES-BASED EXERCISES

deployment to the Philippines, the Platoon Group will undertake readiness and integration activities with the ADF Combat team in Australia. This will be an important opportunity to test our interoperability, prior to start of the Philippines-based exercises.

## Exercise BALIKATAN

9. Exercise BALIKATAN is an annual bilateral Philippines-US exercise hosted in the Philippines, designed to strengthen defence cooperation, enhance readiness, and improve interoperability. [REDACTED] s6(a)  
[REDACTED] The 2026 iteration of BALIKATAN will be held over 20 April – 5 May in the Luzon and Palawan regions (see attached map).
10. BALIKATAN has expanded in recent years to include multinational participation, with Australia and Japan first participating in the exercise in 2014 and 2025, respectively. The 2026 iteration will see the participation of personnel from several key partners, including Australia, Canada, France, Japan, and the United Kingdom.
11. A total of 69 NZDF personnel will participate in the 2026 iteration of the exercise. New Zealand previously participated in BALIKATAN as an observer, including most recently in 2024.

## Exercise SALAKNIB

12. Like BALIKATAN, Exercise SALAKNIB is an annual bilateral Philippines-US exercise focused on enhancing integration, combined arms manoeuvre, and regional defence cooperation. A critical component of SALAKNIB is a focus on building interoperability in complex and challenging Indo-Pacific environments. NZDF's participation in SALAKNIB provides a valuable opportunity to further develop its ability to work effectively with our close partners in a key theatre of operations. It also provides NZDF planners with the opportunity to undertake higher level planning, not available in New Zealand, with the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the US 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.
13. The 2026 iteration of SALAKNIB will be held over 6 May – 19 June in northern Luzon. A total of 45 NZDF personnel will participate in the exercise.

## Benefits

14. The strategic benefits of joining the multinational contingent as part of Exercises BALIKATAN and SALAKNIB are:
  - a. *Demonstrating New Zealand's commitment to the international rules-based order*
    - [REDACTED] s6(a)
    - Participation also furthers Defence's policy objectives, as outlined in the Defence Capability Plan 2025, by demonstrating New Zealand Defence's

## EXERCISE KAURI BOND: NEW ZEALAND ARMY PARTICIPATION IN TWO PHILIPPINES-BASED EXERCISES

commitment to: contributing to collective efforts to promote and protect Indo-Pacific security; ensuring Defence's readiness to respond to events across the spectrum of operations; and contributing globally to upholding and strengthening the existing international rules-based order.

### b. *Bilateral engagement with the Philippines*

- The Philippines is one of New Zealand Defence's most important and fastest growing bilateral relationships in Southeast Asia. s6(a)

[Redacted]

### c. *Operationalising recent bilateral arrangements*

- BALIKATAN and SALAKNIB provide an opportunity to operationalise the Mutual Logistics Support Arrangement (MLSA) signed with the Philippines in 2024. s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)

[Redacted]

### d. *Interoperability with our ally and partners*

- These exercises will provide another opportunity to enhance the New Zealand Army's interoperability with a wide range of partner nations, but especially with Australia. Integrating with the ADF allows the NZDF to practically test the Motorised Infantry Battle Group (MIBG) construct.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, embedding a New Zealand Army platoon group within an Australian unit will allow the NZDF to leverage the Australian Army's previous experience participating in these exercises.
- These exercises provide the NZDF an opportunity to mount and deploy a combat ready Army force element, as well as greater exposure to working alongside partners s6(a)

[Redacted]

- s6(a), s6(b)(i)

## Risks

15. s6(a)

[Redacted]

16. s6(a)

[Redacted]

<sup>2</sup> A key aspect of the construct is the ability for the MIBG to provide elements which can 'plug into' larger Australian counterparts, s6(a)

[Redacted]

## EXERCISE KAURI BOND: NEW ZEALAND ARMY PARTICIPATION IN TWO PHILIPPINES-BASED EXERCISES

17. [REDACTED] s6(a) [REDACTED] Both exercises are regular features in the Indo-Pacific and are undertaken in uncontested domains. New Zealand's proposed contribution is small and will be embedded within a larger Australian contribution, alongside multiple like-minded partners. [REDACTED]

s6(a)

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

### Finance

21. Exercise KAURI BOND will be funded from existing NZDF baseline.

### Media

22. Defence Public Affairs personnel will join the New Zealand contingent participating in Exercise KAURI BOND. They will generate content and coverage of the NZDF's participation in both Philippines-based exercises to inform and educate the public about the NZDF's commitment to Indo-Pacific regional security, and its contributions to operations and exercises that reinforce the international rules-based order. Their messaging will also seek to emphasise the NZDF's proficiency as a combat-ready force.

### Next steps

23. The New Zealand Army platoon group and supporting functions will deploy to Australia on 7 April to begin pre-positioning and integration ahead of the commencement of Exercise BALIKATAN on 20 April.
24. You will be provided with updates on the progress and outcomes of Exercise KAURI BOND through the Defence Weekly Report.

<sup>3</sup> The Strategic Planning Guidance process is an interagency mechanism for determining the strategic objectives of NZDF deployments and major activities. It helps to ensure that these activities are aligned with the New Zealand Government's overall strategic intent and direction.

# EXERCISE KAURI BOND: NEW ZEALAND ARMY PARTICIPATION IN TWO PHILIPPINES-BASED EXERCISES

## Annex A: Current Indo-Pacific recurring deployments

1. [REDACTED] s6(a)  
[REDACTED]
- 1.1. Operation WHIO: Sanctions monitoring of North Korea [REDACTED] s6(a)  
[REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] s6(a)
- 1.3. Visits to other countries to undertake one-off exercises and diplomatic activities.
- 1.4. Multi-Lateral cooperation activities [REDACTED] s6(a)  
[REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] s6(a)  
[REDACTED]

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