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MANATŪ KAUPAPA WAONGA
NEW ZEALAND MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

26 September 2025

RESPONSE TO YOUR OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT REQUEST

Thank you for your email of 8 September 2025, in which you sought, pursuant to the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), responses to ten questions relating to the impact of COVID-19 and recommendations from Phase One of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19 (the Royal Commission).

The Ministry of Defence (the Ministry) is a civilian agency responsible for the development of defence policy, international defence engagements and the delivery of major defence equipment.

The Ministry is not a frontline agency and does not deliver public-facing services. As such, it was not a core responsible agency during the COVID-19 response. The Ministry did, however, have a number of employees seconded to other agencies to support the All-of-Government response efforts.

Please see below the Ministry's responses to your specific questions:

1. *Has any work been undertaken by the MOD or NZDF to review the impact of Operation Protect, including what impact this operation had on NZDF's ability to respond to other major crises?*

2. *Has there been a review of the total financial costs of Operation Protect? If yes, can you provide us with a copy of that review?*

3. *Was Operation Protect funded wholly by the Treasury's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund (CRRF)? If not, how much did Operation Protect cost the MOD and NZDF? We note that Treasury's CRRF data release includes that the overall fiscal impact of funding for the Defence Force was $3.37 million.*

The Ministry had no role in Operation Protect. The New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) is a separate entity that was tasked with supporting the MIQs, as part of a multi-agency effort led by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE). As the COVID-19 response evolved into hotels being used as isolation centres, Operation Protect became the name of

the Defence Force response. Noting that the Ministry's role does not extend to operational decision-making, the NZDF is best placed to respond to this part of your request.

As part of the joint Ministry and NZDF *2023 Briefing to the Incoming Minister*, the ongoing effects of responding to COVID-19 were addressed. Details can be found on the Ministry's website at: https://defence.govt.nz/publications/briefing-to-the-incoming-minister-of-defence-2023/

4. *Would MOD and NZDF prefer a separate agency to be established to manage MIQ requirements in the future? Why / why not?*

5. *Has there been any discussion on designing a MIQ system, ready for implementation when New Zealand is faced with of the next pandemic?*

MIQ is outside the scope of the Ministry's responsibilities. We understand that you have submitted an OIA request to the Ministry of Health on the Pandemic Plan and follow up on recommendations. We believe that agency is best placed to respond to these elements of your request.

6. *Has MOD and NZDF read and contributed to the upcoming reform being proposed under the Emergency Management Bill?*

The Ministry and the NZDF were consulted on the Emergency Management Bill and have provided feedback on the parts of the Bill that relate to Defence. The NZDF also submitted on the Bill during public consultation, and this feedback can be found on the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) website at: https://civildefence.govt.nz/cdem-sector/legislation/emergency-management-bill.

7. *What is the role of MOD and NZDF in terms of major disasters (e.g. earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, extreme weather events, etc)? See Figure 1 below from DPMC cabinet material. We suggest you refer to the recommendation in Discussion Paper 2025/02 – How to Tell the Difference Between an Emergency and a Crisis and Why it Matters that New Zealand's emergency legislation should become a Crisis and Emergency Bill.*

The Ministry may provide support to the Government's overall response, if required. But it is the NZDF that provides direct support during major disasters, in coordination with lead agencies such as NEMA or the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC). We consider that NEMA, DPMC, and NZDF are best placed to respond to this question.

8. *Complete the attached excel, in particular Columns E-H of Sheet 2, and Columns C-F of Sheet 3.*

9. *Provide the report of progress against the recommendations of Phase One of the Royal Commission (mentioned in Recommendation 39b of the Royal Commission).*

10. *Advise whether MOD will be producing a report on progress against the Phase One recommendations for tabling in Parliament (mentioned in Recommendation 39c of the Royal Commission).*

The Ministry has not been specifically identified as a responsible agency for implementing the recommendations. Therefore, questions eight to ten of your request have been declined pursuant to section 18(g)(i) of the Act, that the information requested is not held by the department, Minister of the Crown or organisation, and that the person dealing with the request has no grounds to believe that the information is held by another department, Minister of the Crown or organisation.

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

Yours sincerely

Hamish Rogers
Deputy Secretary, Governance, People and Executive Services Division