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

28 July 2026

RESPONSE TO YOUR OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT REQUEST

On 1 July 2026 the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) transferred your 22 May Official Information Act 1982 request for the following information. This followed on from that agency's response of 22 June.

We have endeavoured to respond to the various parts of your request as they relate to the work of the Ministry of Defence. The elements of your request have been numbered to assist with responding.

- 1)
 - *Copies of the 2026 non-restricted command directives:*
 - *Land component commander*
 - *Chief of Army*
 - *1 NZ brigade commander*
 - *And all directions in army wing/domain to develop drone capability in the last 12 months*
 - *Ditto as above for Air component command [in its various commander parts]*
 - *Ditto as above for Maritime command [in its various commander parts]*
 - *Ditto as above for Joint forces command [in its various commander parts]*
 - *Re Capability branch – any direction to develop drone capability in the last 12 months*
 - *Re DST - any direction to develop drone capability in the last 12 months*

Command directives relate to activities of the NZDF. The Ministry does not issue any such directives. This is also the case for the various Component Commanders, Capability Branch and Defence Science and Technology that are part of the NZDF that you listed above. I therefore refer you to the NZDF response for that information.

- 2) *Has a robotics and autonomous systems concept or doctrine or similar been released to guide any wing/domain (army, air, navy) to develop drone capabilities? YES/NO. In either case, please then provide an up-to-date summary of what has happened (or not), when and why*

The documents relating to this are addressed in the NZDF's response, and are withheld in full under sections 6(a) and 6(b)(i) of the Act.

- 3) *What expenditure on drones has been completed or is planned at unit level under unit command discretion? Please specify amount/s, dates, per unit*
- *and what did that expenditure add to capabilities eg number of drones?*

This element of your request is specific to NZDF units, and so the Ministry holds no such information and your request is declined under section 18(e) of the Act. I refer you to NZDF's response.

- 4) *What Capability branch purchasing is currently underway to equip units with drones? Please detail the scope and budget of that*
- *And what is planned*

NZDF has responded to you regarding projects relating to procurement undertaken by that organisation.

For completeness the Ministry has provided below details on projects that are 'Defence-led' – managed by the Ministry's Capability Delivery division. This involves projects where the financial appropriation and delegation rests predominantly with the Secretary of Defence. These involve joint project personnel from across both the Ministry and NZDF, and with a Ministry lead. These are overseen by both Defence agencies, involving co-Senior Responsible Owners and joint governance.

Procurement underway

One Defence-led project is currently underway: The Ministry's Network Enabled Army (NEA) programme includes the Tranche Two – Reconnaissance and Surveillance Project that has is delivering three types of uncrewed aircraft systems (UAS):

- Small UAS – Quantum-Systems Inc. has delivered a number of Vektor systems for 16 Field Regiment.
- Micro UAS – EPE New Zealand Ltd has supplied a number of Skydio Quadcopter systems for the Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment.
- Nano UAS – Criterion Solutions PTY has supplied a number of Nano Black Hornet systems for the Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment.

These capabilities, along with a suite of Remote Group Sensor systems, are reducing risk to personnel by providing timely and accurate information for operations planning, as well as risk assessment activities. This is delivered under the NEA programme's second tranche of funding. In July 2019, Cabinet approved \$106.48 million in capital funding and \$29.05 million in operating funding over four years. Further details about this project, including the requirements, background on the selection process, and delivery to-date are provided on pages 98–101 of the *Major Projects Report 2024*, which is available from the Ministry's website at: <https://defence.govt.nz/publications/major-projects-report-2024/>.

Planned procurement

As you will be aware, the *2025 Defence Capability Plan* outlines indicative investments on uncrewed and remotely operated systems. The Plan identifies drones and other autonomous systems as key technologies for improving intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, force protection, and maritime domain awareness. It indicates intentions for investments in 2025–2028, with associated indicative costs, as well as noting where additional investments are proposed in future years: <https://defence.govt.nz/publications/2025-defence-capability-plan/>. As business cases are developed for individual projects under the DCP they will look at a range of options, including the potential to use uncrewed systems if relevant.

As part of the DCP, the Maritime Fleet Renewal Programme will analyse a range of options to deliver a modern naval fleet. While crewed ships are expected to comprise most of the investments, complementary investments in uncrewed assets are also being explored. As part of this programme, Budget 2026 has set aside funding for two uncrewed systems:

Uncrewed surface vessels and enabling systems

- The first is for uncrewed surface vessels and enabling systems to provide long-duration intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance over the South-West Pacific.

Polar capable uncrewed systems

- The second is a polar-capable uncrewed aerial system to conduct a range of missions from Royal New Zealand Navy vessels to enhance maritime domain awareness and supplement polar patrol capability.
- Earlier this year Defence launched new market research into this capability. The Request for Information issued via the Government Electronic Tender System aimed to gather information and indicative costs to help inform the next stage of the project. It was not a request for proposals, nor a commitment to acquire systems. Further details are available on this page of the Ministry's website: <https://defence.govt.nz/news/defence-starts-market-research-into-polar-capable-uncrewed-systems/>.

These investments will be the first under the Maritime Fleet Renewal Programme and are subject to Cabinet consideration of the projects' final business case.

- 5) *If there is any other directive or similar that provides direction on autonomous systems please provide the title of each such, the date from when this first was introduced and a copy of the latest such*

As indicated in response to question 1, the Ministry does not issue directives. As such, this element of your request is declined under section 18(e) of the Act – that no such information exists.

- 6) *The 3x most substantive document/s* about the robotics and autonomous systems concept*

- *A summary of the last year of work and ongoing work on the robotics and autonomous systems concept*

I refer you to that NZDF's response for the details of these documents.

You may also be aware of the Ministry's Long-term Insights Briefing includes elements relating to robotics and uncrewed systems, however this document is not Government policy or reflective of future capabilities to be purchased. It is available from the Ministry's website at: <https://defence.govt.nz/publications/long-term-insights-briefing/>.

- 7) *The above queries do not extend the key other party, industry, so please provide a statement summarising any concrete initiatives (eg the Syos tests) taken with industry on drones and counterdrones in 2026.*

I refer you to the response to element 4 above.

For your awareness, in line with the *New Zealand Defence Industry Strategy*, earlier this year Defence issued a *Strategic Industrial Base Statement: Uncrewed Systems and Uncrewed Counter Systems*. Base statements are intended to provide greater granularity on Defence's approach, how Defence will support the relevant sector, and the opportunities for innovation and doing things differently. This base statement is available from the Ministry's website at <https://defence.govt.nz/publications/sibs-uncrewed-systems-and-uncrewed-counter-systems/>.

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

Released under the Official Information Act 1982