



Headquarters
New Zealand Defence Force
Defence House
Private Bag 39997
Wellington Mail Centre
Lower Hutt 5045
New Zealand

OIA-2023-4872

12 December 2023

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]@gmail.com

Dear [REDACTED]

I refer to your email of 22 November 2023 requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA), as follows:

- 1) I would like to receive a copy of the most recent two capability and readiness updates prepared for the Minister of Defence.*
- 2) I would like a copy of any briefings (including videos, memos, slideshows or notes for verbal presentations) which have prepared for the incoming defense minister regarding NZDF special/covert operations forces capabilities (i.e., regarding SAS or any other non-conventional military capabilities possessed by NZDF).*

The two most recent Capability and Readiness Updates are for May and September 2023. A copy of these updates are enclosed. Where indicated, information has been withheld in accordance with section 6(a) of the OIA, as making this information available would be likely to prejudice the security and defence of New Zealand. Information is also withheld in accordance with section 9(2)(g)(i) of the OIA, to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinion. Personal information is withheld in accordance with 9(2)(a) of the OIA to protect privacy. The public interest in providing this information does not outweigh the reasons to withhold it in this instance.

With respect to briefings for the incoming Minister of Defence concerning New Zealand Defence Force special/covert operations and/or capability, this information is withheld in full in accordance with section 6(a) of the OIA. The Briefing to the Incoming Minister (BIM) is currently being considered by the Minister of Defence and is withheld for the time being in accordance with section 9(2)(f)(iv).

You have the right, under section 28(3) of the OIA, to ask an Ombudsman to review this response to your request. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Please note that responses to official information requests are proactively released where possible. This response to your request will be published shortly on the NZDF website, with your personal information removed.

Yours sincerely

AJ WOODS

Air Commodore

Chief of Staff HQNZDF

Enclosures:

1. Capability and Readiness Update May 2023
2. Capability and Readiness Update September 2023



RELEASED UNDER THE OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT 1982

NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE

SUBMISSION TO MINISTER COVER SHEET

Title	NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE CAPABILITY AND READINESS UPDATE FOR MAY 2023				
Tracking No	NZDF Tracking # 2023-127		Minister's Tracking #		
Importance of the Issue	High	v	Moderate		Routine
Urgency for Attention/Sign-off	URGENT		Request ministerial response by: Not required.		
Contacts	LTCOL s. 9(2)(g)(i)		s. 9(2)(a)	s. 9(2)(a)	
Purpose	The note provides an update on the readiness status of the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF), and associated issues with generating military response options (NZDF outputs) for the Government.				
Recommendations	<p>It is recommended that you:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Note that while the situation with the NZDF workforce remains uncertain, early indications are that the retention payments, budgeted remuneration uplift, and other initiatives, have had a positive effect on retention. Note NZDF force re-generation continues at pace, though it will take a reduction in attrition levels, sustained investment, and improvement in the NZDF's workforce situation to assure full capability recovery. Note s. 6(a) [redacted] domestic emergency responses and support to other Government agencies are mostly available. Note s. 6(a) [redacted]. Note cost pressures in maintenance and operating may slow capability generation (training), readiness, responsiveness, and output delivery. 				
MoD Consultation	Not required: NZDF matter only.				
Minister's Comments					
Minister's Action	Signed/Noted/Agreed/Approved/Declined/Discussion required				
	Referred to:				
Minister's Signature				Date:	

KR SHORT
Air Marshal
Chief of Defence Force

07 June 2023



Headquarters
New Zealand Defence Force
Defence House
Private Bag 39997
Wellington Mail Centre
Lower Hutt 5045
NEW ZEALAND

NTM 2023-127

07 June 2023

Minister of Defence

NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE CAPABILITY AND READINESS UPDATE FOR MAY 2023

Purpose

1. The Note provides an update on the readiness status of the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF), and the issues with generating military response options (NZDF outputs) for the Government.

Workforce

2. The situation with the NZDF workforce remains very uncertain, however early indications are that the retention payments, new Interim Sustainment Allowance (ISA), and the remuneration uplift set in Budget 23 (along with other initiatives) have had a positive retention effect. Some personnel have withdrawn their resignations, or indicated that they may, pending the remuneration uplift in July. The detailed workforce response to these initiatives will be known in the coming months.

3. In the meantime NZDF force re-generation, including planning for the return of some capabilities to operational readiness, continues. It will take a reduction in attrition levels, sustained investment, and improvement in the NZDF's workforce situation to assure the full Services' capability recovery.

Outputs Capability as at May 2023


4. s. 6(a) [redacted] agreed domestic emergency responses and assistance to other Government agencies are mostly available. A summary of the Services' capability and readiness status follows.

Navy

5. The Navy is able to support all immediate domestic emergency response requirements (including civil defence), border protection tasks, and near-region Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) efforts. s. 6(a) [redacted].

6. s. 6(a) [redacted]

7. s. 6(a)



8. The Seasprite helicopter fleet serviceability remains a major concern s. 6(a)




Army

9. The Army's recent remuneration adjustments have targeted a range of trades and ranks to address workforce hollowness, with the last retention payment due on 15 June. The Army is also undergoing an internal consolidation to reduce large 'holes' in units (i.e. consolidating to three Company Groups vice four understaffed Groups) that will provide better supervision, safety and training outcomes. This is likely to come at the expense of breadth, depth, and sustainability of some land-based responses.

10. Whilst the Army's regeneration plan sees a return in capability and associated response options from 2025, the pace of regeneration will be driven by the successful delivery and integration of the Network Enabled Army and the Protected Mobility Capability Programmes. Capability delivery and regeneration will only be achievable if the Army can stem attrition, retain its existing experienced personnel, and obtain net personnel growth through next 18 months.

11. The Army is able to maintain readiness for Special Operations domestic, regional and global responses s. 6(a)



12. The Army is able to provide a reduced level of assistance to the civil power and provision of public service in emergency situations for short durations, limited to small scale, domestic and civil defence response tasks. The Army is also able to provide limited military assistance to the civil authorities in non-emergency situations on a case-by-case basis dependant on the capabilities requested, scale and duration.

13. s. 6(a)



¹ Three Navy patrol vessels are currently under a commercial care and custody arrangement due to a lack of suitably trained and experienced personnel to operate them safely at sea.

14. While the Army is currently able to provide medium or small scale responses for s. 6(a) weather events including an HADR response group, it remains vulnerable to ongoing high attrition of trade personnel. Support to Operation ANTARCTICA over the summer seasons also competes for the same limited group of trade personnel.

Air Force

15. Ongoing high personnel attrition has resulted in the premature retirement² of the P-3K2 Orion fleet due to the resultant organisational safety and airworthiness risk (including reduced supervision and maintenance capabilities). The accelerated withdrawal from service of the P-3K2 fleet has reduced the NZDF's search and rescue, HADR, EEZ surveillance s. 6(a) response capability. Mitigation for this output risk is in place with C-130H Hercules and KA-350 King Air aircraft, but platform availability limitations and capability shortfalls will remain until the introduction of the P-8A Poseidon.

16. The P-8A project remains on track to deliver Initial Operational Release Stage 1 (IOR1) in July 2023.

17. Reduced workforce capacity combined with the P-3K2 fleet withdrawal and project overheads (C-130J Hercules and P-8A introduction activities) limit output s. 6(a) available for short notice national contingency responses. These responses include domestic outputs: search and rescue, counter-terrorism and other threats to public safety, and specialist evacuation. s. 6(a)

18. Air Force helicopters are available at prescribed notice to provide national contingency cover, although it is normal that NH90 helicopter maintenance and crew availability issues may reduce rotary-wing capacity for some responses. s. 6(a)

Capabilities

19. s. 6(a)

20. Delivery of outputs will become more difficult as equipment and platforms continue towards obsolescence, and demand on technicians and maintainers increases. This, combined with cost pressures in maintenance and operating, and supply chain difficulties, means output delivery will be challenging.

² P-3K2 fleet withdrawal was brought forward to 31 January from the planned date of 30 June 2023 resulting in a period of five months during which some airborne surveillance and response outputs will be unavailable.

Conclusion

21. Although the future state of the workforce remains very uncertain, recent remuneration and workforce initiatives are anticipated to considerably improve the NZDF's personnel retention rates. Nonetheless, output delivery will remain very vulnerable to critical trade personnel resignations. With attrition at a sustainable level, it will take a considerable period of time (five to 10 years) for the NZDF to regenerate the critical mass of suitably trained and experienced personnel necessary to deliver the full range of military options for Government.

22. s. 6(a)

Recommendations

23. It is recommended that the Minister:

a. **Note** that while the situation with the NZDF workforce remains uncertain, early indications are that the retention payments, budgeted remuneration uplift, and other initiatives, have had a positive effect on retention.

NOTED

b. **Note** NZDF force re-generation continues at pace, though it will take a reduction in attrition levels, sustained investment, and improvement in the NZDF's workforce situation to assure full capability recovery.

NOTED

c. **Note** s. 6(a) domestic emergency responses and support to other Government agencies are mostly available.

NOTED

d. **Note** s. 6(a)

NOTED

e. **Note** cost pressures in maintenance and operating may slow capability generation (training), readiness, responsiveness, and output delivery.

NOTED



KR SHORT
Air Marshal
Chief of Defence Force

Hon Andrew Little MP
Minister of Defence



NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE

SUBMISSION TO MINISTER COVER SHEET

Title	NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE CAPABILITY AND READINESS UPDATE FOR SEPTEMBER 2023				
Tracking No	NZDF Tracking # 2023-277		Minister's Tracking #		
Importance of the Issue	High	✓	Moderate		Routine
Urgency for Attention/Sign-off	NOT URGENT		Request ministerial response by: Not required		
Contacts	LTCOL s. 9(2)(g)(i)		s. 9(2)(a)	s. 9(2)(a)	
Purpose	This Note provides an update on the capability and readiness status of the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF), including response options for the 2023-24 High Risk Weather Season.				
Recommendations	<p>It is recommended that the Minister:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Note s. 6(a) domestic emergency responses and options to support other Government agencies are mostly available. b. Note that the NZDF is able to provide a range of responses over the 2023-24 High Risk Weather Season, but at reduced capacity. c. Note that HMNZS MANAWANUI will provide a limited Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief capability until HMNZS CANTERBURY force generates to be the primary response for the High Risk Weather Season by 1 March 2024. d. Note that Army is able to meet all Special Forces standing domestic commitments, s. 6(a). e. Note that Army will, s. 6(a) be able to provide short duration medium scale regional forces in response to security events or in support of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief requirements. f. Note that the Air Force rotary wing capabilities are available at prescribed notice. g. Note that the Air Force fixed wing transport and air surveillance capabilities are available, although in a reduced capacity. 				
MoD Consultation	Not required: NZDF matter only.				
Minister's Comments					
Minister's Action	Signed/Noted/Agreed/Approved/Declined/Discussion required				
	Referred to:				
Minister's Signature				Date:	


KR SHORT
 Air Marshal
 Chief of Defence Force
 08 September 2023



Headquarters
New Zealand Defence Force
Defence House
Private Bag 39997
Wellington Mail Centre
Lower Hutt 5045
NEW ZEALAND

NTM 2023-277

8 September 2023

Minister of Defence

NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE CAPABILITY AND READINESS UPDATE FOR SEPTEMBER 2023

Purpose

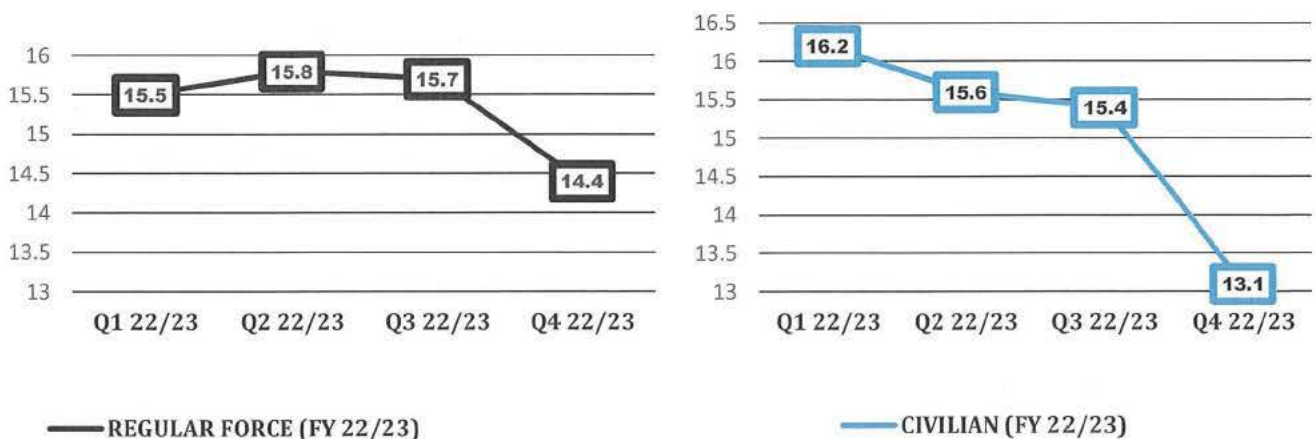
1. This Note provides an update on the capability and readiness status of the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF), including response options for the 2023-24 High Risk Weather Season (HRWS).¹

Major Factors Affecting the Generation of Military Capability

2. While these issues have been briefed to your office previously,² the following major factors are expected to continue to adversely affect the generation of military capabilities for the period ahead:

- a. Workforce attrition – although still too early to assess the long term consequences of the Budget 2023 remuneration uplift on attrition, it remains high, further diminishing the NZDF’s already depleted collective skill and experience base. There has been a slight reduction in month-by-month attrition rates over the last three months, likely due to some personnel deferring submission of release documentation as they assessed the effect of their individual remuneration uplift.

NZDF ATTRITION RATES PAST YEAR (%)



¹ The 2023-24 HRWS is the period over which tropical cyclones form in the South Pacific and runs from 1 November 2023 to 30 April 2024.

² Notes to Minister NZDF 2022-168 dated 30 June 2022, NZDF 2022-284 dated 18 October 2022, and NZDF 2023-127 dated 7 June 2023.

- b. Workforce hollowness – the paucity of personnel in critical trades means that sustaining force generation, delivering operational outputs, introducing new and upgraded capabilities and meeting maintenance demands concurrently would still be beyond NZDF’s capacity in the short to medium term.
- c. Materiel – equipment and platform obsolescence, ageing fleets and cost pressures, combined with problematic global supply chains and decreasing numbers of maintainers and technicians, continue to lengthen repair and maintenance timeframes. This results in greater mean-times between key equipment and platform availability or no availability at all.
- d. New capability – introduction into service programmes for new or upgraded capabilities continue and there are some expected periods of output degradation until they conclude. Prioritising the delivery of these programmes will continue to result in a reduction in capacity to concurrently conduct business-as-usual force generation activity as well as output delivery in some instances.

Outputs Capability as at September 2023

3. s. 6(a) [redacted] agreed domestic emergency responses and options to assist other Government agencies are mostly available. A summary of the Services’ capability and readiness status follows.

Navy Capabilities

4. The Navy is generally able to support domestic emergency response requirements including civil defence, border protection tasks, and near-region Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) efforts. s. 6(a) [redacted].

5. The Navy’s best suited platform for the most probable responses required during the HRWS is HMNZS CANTERBURY. However, due to workforce shortages, HMNZS CANTERBURY is unable to be ‘worked up’ in time for the start of the season following a period of maintenance and upgrades. HMNZS MANAWANUI (Navy’s dive and hydrographic vessel) will be the designated duty vessel for the period 1 October 2023 until the end of February 2024. HMNZS CANTERBURY will assume response duty from 1 March 2024 for the remainder of the season.

6. While a capable vessel in its own right, HMNZS MANAWANUI does not have an organic aviation capability which means it cannot sail with a helicopter on board. s. 6(a) [redacted]

7. s. 6(a) [redacted]

s. 6(a)

8. s. 6(a)

9. The Seasprite helicopter fleet serviceability remains a major concern (NTM 2023-272 refers). s. 6(a).

s. 6(a)

Army Capabilities

10. The Army is generally able to support domestic emergency response requirements, including civil defence responses. The Army is also able to support near-region HADR efforts but in both instances there are significant limitations to Army's capacity to respond at scale (depending on capabilities required and duration), and almost no capacity to support concurrent regional and domestic responses beyond the most basic of capabilities.

11. For the HRWS, the Army is able to maintain a regional HADR response group with military engineer construction capabilities at high readiness. This response carries some risk due to ongoing high attrition of engineer trade personnel in particular, and the concurrent support required by Operation ANTARCTICA. In addition to the concurrency issue in paragraph 10 above, the major limiting factor for Army's responses is the lack of sealift while HMNZS CANTERBURY is unavailable. Army's major disaster response capabilities require heavy equipment and mobility support otherwise its response group is of limited utility.

12. s. 6(a)

³ Three Navy patrol vessels are currently under a commercial care and custody arrangement due to a lack of suitably trained and experienced personnel to operate them safely at sea.

s. 6(a)

13. The Army is able to maintain readiness for Special Forces domestic, regional and global responses s. 6(a)

Air Force Capabilities

14. The Air Force is able to meet domestic outputs and maintain the required platforms and capacity to meet regional Search and Rescue (SAR) and HADR responses. As with the Navy and Army, Air Force has a number of capacity shortfalls with respect to its ability to produce or sustain concurrent outputs.

15. C-130H Hercules aircraft are available at prescribed notice for national and regional contingencies, noting the concurrent demands of planned tasking in support of Operation ANTARCTICA, and the withdrawal from service of the next C-130H will contribute towards the overall vulnerability of sustaining fixed wing outputs. The C-130H fleet will reduce to three aircraft after the planned retirement of one aircraft in December 2023 and there will be reduced Boeing 757 aircraft availability for periods due to serviceability checks and scheduled maintenance. The concurrent activities required to sustain C-130H Hercules operations while also supporting the C-130J transition is an emerging challenge. The first C-130J aircraft arrives in New Zealand in mid-2024.

16. Following Initial Operational Release Stage 1 of the P-8A project in July 2023, an Air Force P-8A Poseidon aircraft is now available at short notice to conduct domestic and regional airborne surveillance tasks in support of resource and border protection outputs and other national contingencies including SAR, EEZ surveillance and other maritime responses. Initial Operational Release Stage 2 capability introduction into service work continues s. 6(a).

17. Air Force helicopters are available at prescribed notice to provide national contingency cover and regional HADR support, although low crew numbers present risks to sustained deployments. s. 6(a)

The major limiting factor for Air Force rotary wing support to the HRWS is the lack of sealift while HMNZS CANTERBURY is unavailable. Alternatives to deploy helicopters may include commercial sealift, Australian C-17 air transport, and self-deployment. While all of these options are currently under consideration, they each come with major limitations.

Conclusion

18. Notwithstanding the current state of the workforce, and other significant factors affecting the force generation of military capabilities, the NZDF retains a number of options that can be tailored to specific circumstances. The limited availability of HMNZS CANTERBURY over the HRWS and the Air Force C-130H Hercules aircraft will reduce HADR response capacity and capability. A lack of helicopter and vehicle support and heavy equipment would significantly undermine the overall agility and utility of the disaster relief response forces. s. 6(a)

Recommendations

19. It is recommended that the Minister:

- a. **Note** s. 6(a) [redacted] domestic emergency responses and options to support other Government agencies are mostly available.

NOTED
- b. **Note** that the NZDF is able to provide a range of responses over the 2023-24 High Risk Weather Season, but at reduced capacity.

NOTED
- c. **Note** that HMNZS MANAWANUI will provide a limited Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief capability until HMNZS CANTERBURY force generates to be the primary response for the High Risk Weather Season by 1 March 2024.

NOTED
- d. **Note** that Army is able to meet all Special Forces standing domestic commitments, s. 6(a) [redacted].

NOTED
- e. **Note** that Army will, s. 6(a) [redacted] be able to provide short duration medium scale regional forces in response to security events or in support of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief requirements.

NOTED
- f. **Note** that the Air Force rotary wing capabilities are available at prescribed notice.

NOTED
- g. **Note** that the Air Force fixed wing transport and air surveillance capabilities are available, although in a reduced capacity.

NOTED



KR SHORT
Air Marshal
Chief of Defence Force

Hon Andrew Little MP
Minister of Defence