

# 20 ANNUAL 25 REPORT



TE ARAWHITI  
KI TE HAPORI  
DEFENCE EMPLOYER  
SUPPORT COUNCIL



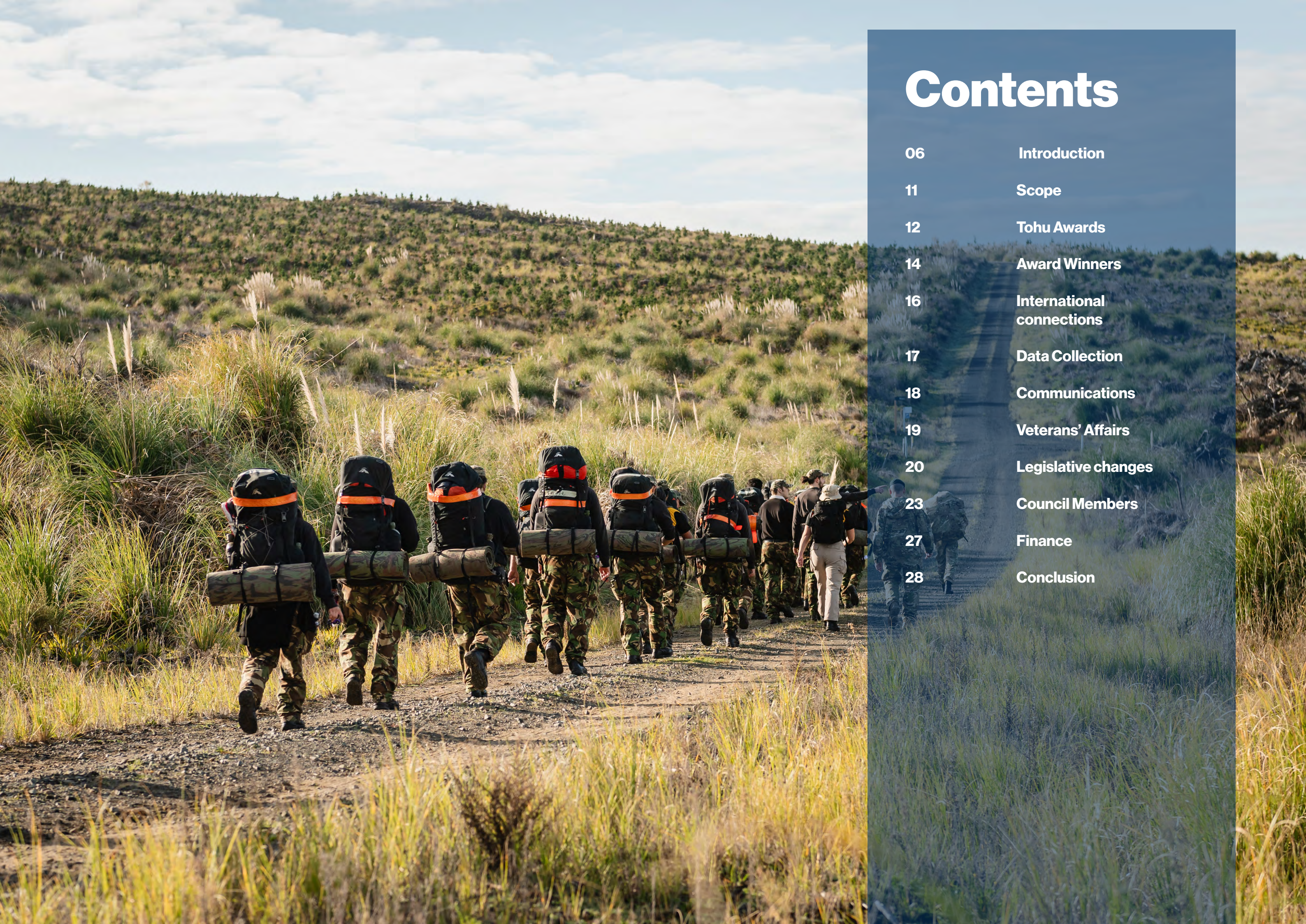
# PŪRONGO Ā TAU

## 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

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# Introduction

The purpose of this report is to inform the Minister of Defence of the work streams and achievements of the Defence Employer Support Council ("DESC") for the year ended 30 June 2025. This report will be also be used to inform broader stakeholders.

With the current backdrop of heightened geopolitical tensions, both regionally and globally and a squeeze on the Defence workforce, our work seems more critical than ever. This gives a heightened importance to the work we do to enable the mobilisation of a Reserve Force to protect New Zealand's interests. While the demand side of our equation is heightened, the supply side also has the tension of the need for prudent use of resources. The Council has applied ourselves as best we can with understandably constrained resources.



*Bevan Killick*

**Bevan Killick**  
Honorary Captain (Navy)  
Chair, DESC

## The need for the Defence Employer Support Council

There have been times in the past when the New Zealand Defence Force has attempted to call up Reservists to serve in deployments and this has been met with resistance from the Employers of those Reservists. This was most noticeable when New Zealand Defence Force personnel were sent to East Timor (Timor-Leste) some years ago. Many Employers of the Reservists called up, were unaware of their staff being Reservists and even less aware of the legislative obligations relating to this. Additionally, those Employers were often unaware of the training being received by their own staff and the skills and

**“ For the sake of Aotearoa New Zealand, these Reservists, their supportive Employers and their training and experiences, need to be celebrated. ”**

experience which those staff members brought back to those businesses. For the sake of our nation, these Reservists, their supportive Employers and their training and experiences, need to be celebrated. Also, those less enthusiastic Employers need to be taken on the journey to learn of the benefits of employing Reservists, rather than seeing those who serve as a burden. Reserve service is good for the individuals concerned, their employers, our nation and often, international impact results from overseas deployments. The Territorial Force Employer Support Council was born. It is now known as the Te Arawhiti ki te Hapori / Defence Employer Support Council ("DESC") and has an expanded scope.





**We help part-time  
people and employers  
build positive, mutually  
beneficial relationships**





# Scope

The Minister of Defence has empowered the DESC to assist with four aspects of the Defence landscape where NZDF meets “civvy street”. In summary, these are:

- Employers of Reservists
- Employers of Cadet Force Officers
- NZDF Youth programmes (such as the Limited Service Volunteers (“LSV”), Cadets and Blue Light Programmes)
- Regular Force personnel transitioning to civilian employment or in some way exiting the NZDF

While not strictly within the scope of our terms of reference, the DESC has also taken an interest in recruitment and retention of personnel. Typically, personnel who leave the Regular Force remain on the Reserve list as part of their transition into civilian employment. The relationship with their new civilian employer is important. A smooth transition at this time helps to increase the likelihood of re-enlistment in the future. Work continues to propose to the Minister of Defence a modest broadening of our scope. This would better align our Terms of Reference to current NZDF’s people strategy.



# Tohu Awards

**The Tohu Awards are our annual flagship event. The Tohu Awards celebrate excellence from members of our Defence Reserve Force, Cadet Force Officers and Limited Service Volunteer Graduates and the commitment from the organisations who support them.**

We have enjoyed an increase in both quantity and quality of applications for the 2025 Awards. The quantity has doubled from the previous year. While additional workload to judge these applications, we are delighted to see this increase.

In comparison to previous years, last year we saw some great examples of better explicit policy for Reserve service leave, including various forms of paid or 'top up' paid leave, protected employment for deployments up to one year, assistance for expenses, as well as greater integration of the skills and experience being leveraged back into the workplace.

This year's nominations have included examples of service specific development goals being included in workplace development plans, tailored solutions for those in reserve force leadership positions, as well as special provisions for support through Basic training. We are seeing examples of company-wide advertisements that acknowledge Reservists on ANZAC and Armistice Day and examples of ongoing job and financial security during extended deployments. These provide us with great case studies of best practice and many organisations have allowed us to share their best practice policies. This clearly demonstrates the value Reserve Service repays to organisations employing Reservists.



The 2024 Awards Event was held at Defence House. We were delighted that the Honourable Chris Penk MP, Minister for Veterans and Associate Minister of Defence was able to attend and represent the Minister of Defence. Ministerial attendance underlines the importance of the awards to the attendees.

The event was well attended and similar to previous years' attendance included the Chief of Defence, Vice Chief of Defence, and all but one of the Service Chiefs. The NZDF Chief People Officer Jacinda Funnell was also in attendance and presented some of the awards.

We have established a three-year cycle of events, with each of the three services hosting in cyclical succession. The Royal New Zealand Navy hosted our 2024 Tohu Awards in Defence House during the year being reported on. Later this year, the Royal New Zealand Air Force will host the 2025 Tohu Awards ceremony, also to be held at Defence House. Prior to 2024, the event had been cycled through the three major metropolitan areas, however, to reduce costs, the Tohu Awards has remained in Wellington. In future years, we would like to return to hosting the event across the three major metropolitan centres. This would have the Royal New Zealand Navy host at Devonport (Auckland), the Army host in Wellington and the Royal New Zealand Air Force host at the Airforce Museum at Wigram (Christchurch). Until such time as financial constraints are relaxed, the awards ceremony will remain in Wellington.

The Tohu awards officially acknowledge how employers of our Reserve Force and Cadet Force Officers are vital to our Defence Force effectiveness, enabling attendance of training, fulfilment of deployment opportunities and supplementation to our Regular Force members.

The awards recognise that employers also benefit in employing and supporting members of our Reserve and Cadet Force Officers, as well as our Limited Service Volunteer Graduates, as the training they receive through the NZDF helps develop and sharpen their skills in leadership, teamwork, communication, discipline, planning, management, and much more.

Positive relationships between Employers and Reservists or Cadet Force Officers in their civilian workplace often results in personnel remaining engaged in their work and are more likely to be motivated and committed to their employer.

In 2024, the Limited Service Volunteer (LSV) of the Year award was established, selected and celebrated. We were pleased to include this award in 2024 and look forward to celebrating successful LSV graduates in future Tohu Awards ceremonies.

Congratulations to our 2024 award winners and thank you to those who nominated organisations that show their support for our people and the role they play in New Zealand's Defence Force.



# 2024 Award Winners

## **Reservist of the year – Winner: Captain Rosemary Fraser**

The Reservist of the Year was Captain Rosemary Fraser, an experienced Nursing Officer who is committed to the nursing corps. She is a strong advocate for others, makes herself available to free up the regular force, and established new networks to plan for future civil defence emergency responses on the West Coast.

## **Reserve Employer of the year (Large Employer Category): Whakaata Māori (Māori TV)**

The Reserve Employer of the Year (Large Employer Category) was Whakaata Māori (Māori TV), who see value in, and support reservists' duties alongside their civilian careers. They have external engagements and professional development policies which allow employees to develop further skills and knowledge and encourage further education.

## **Limited Service Volunteer of the Year: Kayzian Bevan**

The Limited Service Volunteer of the Year was awarded to Kayzian Bevan who graduated at Burnham Military Camp in July 2023. Kayzian saw the LSV programme as an opportunity to challenge himself and make positive changes in his life. Kayzian's confidence grew, he rediscovered his passion for Te Ao Māori and Kapa Haka, which in turn reignited his desire to reconnect with his whakapapa. Since graduating Kayzian was offered and accepted a job with Te Wānanga o Raukawa as a Waste Management Officer, while also enrolling in Poupou Huia Te Reo (level 4) classes. He is an inspiration to any LSV trainee and a fantastic example of the personal growth that can be achieved with hard work and perseverance.

## **Outstanding Contribution to the Limited Service Volunteer Programme: Jenny Pewhairangi**

Jenny Pewhairangi was recognised for an Outstanding Contribution to the Limited Service Volunteer Programme. Jenny has been the Regional Champion for Taranaki since 2011, she understands the vision and purpose of the LSV programme and remains passionate about the difference it can make to the trainees. She offers support to prepare them for the course, ensures they get transport to their location and makes sure they have ongoing support afterwards. With Jenny's help, trainees feel safe, strong and independent throughout the process.

## **Employer Contribution to the Limited Service Volunteer Programme: Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ)**

Employer FENZ received the Employer Recognition to the Limited Service Volunteer Programme award. Mark Elstone and his team from FENZ have been engaging with the programme since 2019. The FENZ team actively participate in each course encouraging trainees during their time in the programme. Their support is continuing to increase and they are a key enabler of the LSV programme.

## **New Zealand Cadet Force Officer Employer of the year Taylored Building Ltd**

The New Zealand Cadet Force Officer Employer of the Year was awarded to Taylored Building Ltd, a construction and marine maintenance business, based in Timaru nominated by Cadet Force Officer, Squadron Leader Mark Morris. Taylored Building Ltd consistently provide support to local cadet units and allow Mark the flexibility to manage and schedule his work, enabling his attendance at recognised activities held over weekends or scheduled at short notice.



## International connections and a search for best practice



In previous years we have reported particularly strong relationships with our Australian counterparts through our bilateral meetings with the Australian team led by Major General Douglas Laidlaw, Head of Joint Support Services Division and Head of ADF Reserves and Employer Support. In 2022 a contingent led by General Laidlaw visited us for our Awards Dinner and a bilateral meeting. In 2023 we had a contingent visit Sydney for bilateral meetings and their National Employer Support Awards, their version of our Tohu Awards. Since then the DESC has had very little contact despite a visit to New Zealand from the Australian counterparts in November 2024.

The NATO National Reserve Force Committee ("NRFC") International Conference on Employer Support for the

Reserves ("ICESR") had previously held meetings every two years. ICESR's primary aim is to share information and experiences on methods of support by (and for) civilian employers of Defence Reservists and to explore future directions for the development and use of Reserves. In 2022 the ICESR was held in Copenhagen and attended virtually by the DESC Chair and the then AC DRYS, Captain Quentin Randall RNZN. There was a suggestion that New Zealand could host the 2024 ICESR Conference, however we have declined as we felt the distance for others to travel would have been prohibitive. It seems that despite our best efforts this conference has been discontinued.

The decline in the dialogue between our kindred organisations internationally is in no way a reflection of our efforts and we remain eager to work collaboratively.

Many other countries have supportive defence employer certification, similar to the one Fire and Emergency New Zealand ("FENZ") uses for employers of volunteer firefighters. Other countries, and clearly FENZ, see value in these initiatives. Given greater resources we would establish a similar certification.

# Data Collection

## Reservist Survey

### Summary

The Reserve Force Survey 2024 was conducted by Defence Reserve, Youth and Sport (DRYS) to gain a deeper understanding of the service experiences within the NZDF Reserve Forces, including both Ready and Standby Reserves. Given their critical role in achieving strategic outputs both domestically and internationally, feedback from this survey will guide future Reserve Force policies, reservist career management, legislative changes, and employer support initiatives, ensuring that reservists' needs are prioritised in these developments. Several core themes stand-out from the survey responses in the context of recent strategic views of the NZDF and these include:

### Improved retention opportunities

The survey respondents refer to items which are causing them to leave full time service such as poor management and lack of deployment opportunities. As well as items that might cause them to leave Reserve service such as limited career management; inadequate training and feeling undervalued by NZDF. These present opportunities for policy and new ways of engaging this talent pool can be explored with high chances of success.

### Mobilisation: The need for improved matching of skills to demand

The survey results highlight that:

- The majority of respondents believe their best service aligns to operational and humanitarian support (domestic and international).
- Respondent availability preferences align to short term tasks, training over long periods of consistent service.
- A significant amount of skills and qualifications exist amongst respondents above and beyond that of their previous military position.

These and other data points below suggest the need for a refined system to better align reservists' skills with diverse job and task demands across the NZDF. Further, the need for greater flexibility in the career management and employment options to allow any reservist to provide multiple skills back to Defence.

### Future skills:

Respondents provided an insight into the skills they have gained since leaving their full time role or while progressing a reservist career. Many of these skills are not trained by the military however remain of strong interest for various roles that Reservists might be employed. Further, it shows that counter to popular belief those members transitioning from full time service have not reached a peak of their skill potential with many going on to gain valuable new skills. The ability to map, align and utilise these skills for NZDF benefit as a capability is an opportunity to explore.

### Reservist motivation:

Of important note is the top three motivations for reservists including, social interaction, personal challenge, and excitement/adventure. The survey respondents show a very strong desire to serve the NZDF, the Country and their communities through these motivations and this is a valuable characteristic of any talent pool. This is an underlying driver for success in any new policies and initiatives tested to improve NZDF Reservist service.

The DESC is enthused to see these results, which offer insights on the Reserve Forces and reveal opportunities for the DESC.

**Note:** Data and individual Reservist commentary from this Report are available by request.



# Communications



One of the best ways to engage with employers and the business community is via the LinkedIn social media platform and to a lesser degree Facebook. However, many of our serving service people are, for good security reasons, a little shy when it comes to social media. When the DESC re-established in mid-2019 there were fewer than 20 LinkedIn followers. An informal target of 1000 LinkedIn followers was set which was achieved during the year. At 30 June 2024 there were approaching 1400 LinkedIn followers on the DESC page, an increase of 16% that year. This has had negligible growth in the year under review. We do not believe we have reached saturation point, but this is more a lack of resource being applied. This in turn has led to a lack of content for our community to engage with.

In previous years significantly more investment of time and resource has gone into growing this audience with posts regularly receiving around 4000 views. During the year under review we have failed to break 1000 impressions with any of our posts. Posts for the Tohu Award nominations and awards only made impressions in the low 600s. A return to the resource levels of the past would assist in promoting our work and grow our profile.

Work continues on our public facing website, which now includes details of previous Tohu Award winners and biographical details of the Council members. Due to financial constraints, our website was taken down during the year and traffic diverted to the NZDF website. This was unhelpful for our stakeholders but has now been resolved. Significantly more resources need to be available for reservists and their employers.

# Veterans' Affairs



DESC keeps in close contact with Veterans' Affairs and the Veterans' Advisory Board. Most recent veterans are reservists by default. This is also an important pillar for the reenlistment strategy of the NZDF. Where appropriate DESC is represented at Veteran Expos and symposiums.

We have worked with our Veteran community to establish greater recognition for Veterans. One of these work streams has been to support a Veteran Employer of the Year Award.

## Networks and soft power

The DESC has developed solid relationships with key contacts within close organisations. We need to continue to build our profile and keep connecting with target organisations to tell our story. Over the coming years we intend on connecting with Chambers of Commerce, the Public Sector Commission, Defence Public Sector Network (run by Corrections) and broader Public Sector, the Iwi Leaders Forum, Human Resource forums and other similar groups. Our efforts to engage with the Public Service Commission have not resulted in a significant traction to date.

The DESC members are some of most supportive and best networked groups available for the NZDF.



# Legislative changes

## Legislative Changes

We continue to monitor and receive briefings from NZDF personnel regarding their work on the Volunteer Employment Protection Act (“VEPA”) and any potential amendments. The Act is administered by the Ministry for Business Innovation and Employment. We are working to gain better understanding of the individuals responsible to the VEPA within MBIE.

Material and resources for Employers continues to be developed and this will all become more visible as the website develops.

The DESC has received various briefings on engagement with Reservists, work force trends, use of Artificial Intelligence and other issues that are top of mind for NZDF leadership.

## Other initiatives

Eventually, when funding is available we would like to reinstitute “BOSS LIFT”. In the past this has taken employers abroad to see their Reservists in the field or on exercise. This is more likely to be a domestic visit to a training ground such as Waiouru or Tekapō, to view an exercise.

DESC members continue to refer suitable industry and community leaders for the role of Limited Service Volunteer (“LSV”) Course Patrons and have also stepped up to fill in when Patrons become unavailable. Most of the DESC Members have been LSV Patrons and are passionate about the work of the Youth Development Units. DESC Member Richard Waggott has recently been a LSV Course Patron.





# Team arrivals and departures

In late 2024 we farewelled our long-standing Staff Officer Marika Trotter. Marika had years of knowledge of the Defence Reserves Youth and Sport (DRYS) area and a great passion for our work. Marika's ability to be nimble with changing plans and manage the Council members arrangements will be missed by us all.

We have also farewelled Lieutenant Colonel Cory Neale, Lieutenant Colonel Mark Ogilvie and thank them for their efforts.

Colonel Roger Margetts ONZM has continued in the role of AC DRYS while also being required on other projects. Major Megan McKenna, Shiloh Dobie and Karl McCabe have continued to assist.



MAJGEN Rose King  
Chief of Army and CDF Rep  
**Welcomed**



Captain David Morgan



Bevan Killick  
Honorary Captain (Navy),  
Chair



Felicity Evans



Brenda Steele



Jules Fulton  
**Farewelled**



Warner Cowin



CAPT Corina Bruce RNZNR,  
Deputy Chair



Kirk Hope  
**Farewelled**



COL Roger Margetts, ONZM  
AC DRYS



Richard Waggott



Our Council members are engaged and enthusiastic about the work of the DESC.

## DESC Council Members

Chief of Defence Force by convention appoints the Chief of Army as their representative on the DESC. As Major General John Boswell DSD retired as Chief of Army, he was replaced by Major General Rose King. We were pleased to see General Boswell recognised in the New Year Honours List by being appointed an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit by the King. Congratulations!

Jules Fulton and Kirk Hope both retired from the DESC during the year. Both Jules and Kirk are phenomenal Captains of Industry and passionate about the work of DESC and those who serve in the Defence Force. While their energy, thoughtful contributions and outstanding networks are missed around the table, they remain in close contact with the team and continue to be great advocates for our work.

In the interests of containing costs we are now carrying two vacancies on the DESC. Should financial constraints be relaxed, we would seek to fill these vacancies.

The individual DESC members all have exceptional careers in their respective fields. The DESC Members have all gone above and beyond during the year in their contribution to DESC matters. The DESC Members and their meeting attendance is as follows:

Council Member	Meeting attendance		
	17 September 2024	14 November 2024	1 April 2025
Hon CAPT (Navy) Bevan Killick, Chair	Present	Present	Present
CAPT Corina Bruce, RNZNR, Deputy Chair	Present	Present	Present
MAJGEN Rose King (CDF Rep)	Present	Present	Present
Felicity Evans	Present	Present	Present
Jules Fulton	Present	Apology	N/A
Kirk Hope	Apology	Present	N/A
Captain David Morgan	Present	Apology	Present
Brenda Steele	Present	Present	Apology
Warner Cowin	Present	Present	Present
Richard Waggott	Present	Present	Present

We have been superbly supported by the DESC Secretariat team, including Marika Trotter, John Harvey and Shiloh Dobie. The DESC Members record their gratitude for the team's hard work, dedication and outstanding achievements during the year.



# Finance

	Financial Year	
ALL VALUES '000	FY 23/24	FY 23/24
Budget	50.0	142.2
Tohu Awards Venue	17.2	41.1
Tohu Awards Communications & Media	7.0	46.7
Council Members' fees	13.5	22.0
Council Members' travel	4.1	13.8
Council Operating costs	4.3	17.0
	46.1	140.6



# Conclusion

Our news feeds detail how essential the work of the New Zealand Defence Force is. The work of DESC is a force multiplier that allows NZDF to flex in times of need.

The year under review has been brutally constrained by budgetary limitations. There are a number of engagements and workstreams that have been paused or not progressed due to either staff departures or lack of budget. Our hope is that in the future conditions may allow better investment into our work. This will assist in ensure the NZDF is best placed to respond to events should it need to flex.





