

20 October 2021

Harold  
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OIA 27499

Tēnā koe Harold

I refer to your email of 4 May 2021 in which you request the following under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA):

*...For the second time, I request copies of all analysis of the WHO Covid-19 origins report, produced by MFAT or on MFAT's behalf.*

*On April 1st, MFAT told Reuters:*

*"New Zealand acknowledges that member states have expressed a number of concerns. New Zealand wants to make sure we conduct an independent analysis to ensure we understand the science before making any comment"*

*and:*

*"Our scientific experts, who have been fully engaged with the wider COVID response, are analysing the report. When they have done so, we will decide on the most appropriate way to comment on the mission"*

*For the avoidance of doubt, this is the analysis I'm referring to. The Ministry of Health have told me they hold no such documents, so please don't refer me to them again.*

On 1 June 2021, the deadline to respond to your request was extended to 14 July 2021, on which date you were advised that a decision had been made on your request, provided with a first tranche of information, and advised that the remainder was being prepared for release to you. We appreciate your patience while this process was completed.

For your information, during COVID-19 lockdowns, Ministry staff are working remotely; in addition, a large number of Ministry staff are currently working on the Government's response to the situation in Afghanistan. This means that we have reduced capacity to process some OIA requests. For your information, the Chief Ombudsman has published updated guidance on OIA requests during the COVID-19 emergency:

- [Chief Ombudsman's statement on official information response times during COVID-19 lockdown](#)
- [FAQs about official information requests during COVID-19](#)

Please find attached the second and final tranche of material relevant to your request. We have withheld some information under the following sections of the OIA:

- 6(a): to avoid prejudicing the security or defence of New Zealand or the international relations of the New Zealand Government;
- 9(2)(a): to protect individuals' privacy;
- 9(2)(d): to protect the economic interests of New Zealand; and
- 9(2)(g)(i): to protect the free and frank expression of opinions by departments.

Where the information has been withheld under section 9 of the OIA, we have identified no public interest in releasing the information that would override the reasons for withholding it.

Please note that we may publish this letter (with your personal details redacted) and enclosed documents on the Ministry's website.

If you have any questions about this decision, you can contact us by email at: [DM-ESD@mfat.govt.nz](mailto:DM-ESD@mfat.govt.nz). You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision by contacting [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or freephone 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā



Julie-Anne Lee  
for Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade