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20 January 2023

Cam Slater

By email: fyi-request-21344-77358012@requests.fyi.org.nz
Ref: H2022018178

Tēnā koe Cam

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) to Manatū Hauora (the Ministry of Health) on 5 December 2022 for Disinformation Assessment and Response Team (DART) correspondence. You requested:

“All communications between any member of the Disinformation Assessment and Response Team (DART) and any other organisation including internal communications/reports/memoranda/emails etc that references/mentions/reports on The BFD news website.”

The COVID-19 Disinformation Assessment and Response Team (DART) was initially established as part of the Manatū Hauora National Immunisation Programme. DART transferred into the Communications and Engagement Group on 1 June 2022. Following that transfer, the work was rescoped to fit with the communications focus. The team itself no longer exists: the two contractors and the Senior Advisor finished working at the Ministry within the last two months of 2022.

When it was in operation, DART acted as a clearinghouse for reporting on disinformation. DART received reports of disinformation through a variety of forms, including leaflets, digital items, weblinks and reports from social media. While most instances were brought to the attention of Manatū Hauora by members of the public or external parties, some were generated internally through monitoring by the Ministry’s Social Media team. For example, if the Social Media team noted disinformation on a post on our channels, this was reported to DART.

DART did not collect personal information and used only open-source data to assess information. It could not assess items that were private. During its operation, the team made referrals to the Medical Council, the Department of Internal Affairs, Netsafe, Worksafe and the New Zealand Police. Referrals were also made to other parts of Manatū Hauora, as well as to Te Whatu Ora Health New Zealand (formerly the district health boards). DART also worked with Netsafe to bring to its attention examples of sites and other social media sources where disinformation was reported on platforms like Facebook.

We have identified 12 documents that contain information within scope of your request. These documents are itemised in Appendix 1 and copies of the documents are enclosed. Where information has been withheld under section 9 of the Act, I have considered the countervailing public interest in release in making this decision and consider that it does not outweigh the need to withhold at this time. Please note that information unrelated to BFD has been withheld.

If you require clarification or further information, please contact the Ministry at oiagr@health.govt.nz. Under section 28(3) of the Act, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request. The Ombudsman may be contacted by email at: info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or by calling 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Manatū Hauora website at: www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/responses-official-information-act-requests.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Megan McCoy', written in a cursive style.

Megan McCoy
Acting Deputy Director-General
Government and Executive Services | Te Pou Whakatere Kāwanatanga

Appendix 1: List of documents for release

#	Date	Document details	Decision on release
1	5 January 2022	Email: Summary and additional platform-level analysis 05/22	<p>Some information has been withheld under the following sections of the Act:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • section 9(2)(ba)(i) to protect information that is subject to an obligation of confidence and making it available would likely prejudice the supply of similar information, or information from the same source • section 9(2)(g)(ii) to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the protection of Ministers, members of organisations, officers, and employees from improper pressure or harassment. <p>Information deemed out of scope of your request has been withheld.</p>
2	11 January 2022	Email: Landscape reports 28 Dec-3 Jan – SENSITIVE	<p>Some information has been withheld under the following sections of the Act:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • section 9(2)(ba)(i) • section 9(2)(g)(ii).
3	12 April 2022 – 20 April 2022	Email: COVID-19 disinformation	<p>Some information has been withheld under the following sections of the Act:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • section 6(c) as its release would likely prejudice the maintenance of the law, including the prevention, investigation, and detection of offences, and the right to a fair trial; • section 9(2)(a) to protect the privacy of natural persons; • section 9(2)(g)(i) to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions by or between or to Ministers and officers and employees of any public service agency; and • section 9(2)(g)(ii). <p>Information deemed out of scope of your request has been withheld.</p>
4	26 April 2022	Email: Daily Telegraph	Some information has been withheld under section 9(2)(g)(ii).
5	7 July 2022	Email: Recent Media relating to MOH and Health	

#	Date	Document details	Decision on release
6	8 July 2022	Email: Letter to Medsafe	Information deemed out of scope of your request has been withheld.
7	29 August 2022	Email: Article online: Leaked: Police Begging Interpol for Intel on Avi Yemini	
8	13 September 2022	Email: Updated report	
9		Email Attachment: Voices For Freedom Monthly Report Updated	Information deemed out of scope of your request has been withheld.
10	19 September 2022	Email: Patient Safety Day post feedback	Some information has been withheld under the following sections of the Act: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • section 9(2)(a) • section 9(2)(g)(ii). Information deemed out of scope of your request has been withheld
11		Spreadsheet: COVID Disinformation	Information deemed out of scope of your request has been withheld.
12		Spreadsheet: 4409194 Summary of Potential mis Disinformation Reports	