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OIA-2026-5687

30th March 2026

Mr Richards
fyi-request-33924-e50258b5@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Mr Richards

I refer to your email of 2 March 2026 requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA), further information to the response of 15 January 2026. The parts of your request are addressed below:

The full outcome, findings, recommendations, and final decision from the routine review of the NZDF baseline vaccination schedule completed by 5 February 2026.

Any reports, minutes, briefing papers, risk assessments, or other documents created for, considered in, or resulting from that review.

Confirmation of whether COVID-19 vaccination remains in (or has been removed from) the NZDF baseline vaccination schedule for serving members and new recruits.

If any changes were decided, the implementation date and how the change will be communicated and applied.

All documents and analysis setting out the justification for keeping (or removing) COVID-19 from the baseline schedule, including: Current and projected COVID-19 disease prevalence, severity, and transmission risk in New Zealand and likely deployment areas; Vaccine effectiveness data (against infection, hospitalisation, or transmission) relevant to 2025–2026; Any NZDF-specific data on adverse events, myocarditis/pericarditis, or other side effects in serving personnel; Comparison of COVID-19 risk versus other vaccines already in the baseline schedule; Assessment of operational effectiveness impact if COVID-19 were removed.

Whether the review considered: Decisions by other militaries (e.g. US DoD removing the requirement in January 2023 and reinstating personnel); Current New Zealand Ministry of Health immunisation schedule advice on COVID-19; Any modelling or data on recruitment/retention impacts of the requirement.

Whether the review took into account that the New Zealand Defence Force is the only Five Eyes nation that retains COVID-19 vaccination as a mandatory requirement in its baseline schedule for all personnel (while the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia have removed or significantly relaxed theirs), and any analysis of the implications for interoperability, alliance commitments, recruitment competitiveness, or operational effectiveness.

The New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) Vaccination Treatment Protocols were re-issued on 4 February 2026 (version 5.00) without change to the COVID-19 vaccination requirement. This is under further review because of the change in the New Zealand Ministry of Health immunisation handbook dated 11 March 2026. COVID-19 vaccine (primary course) remains a baseline requirement. Booster doses are included in the enhanced programme.

The total number of NZDF personnel discharged, separated, or who left service specifically due to refusal or non-compliance with COVID-19 vaccination requirements from 2021 to present (broken down by year, Regular Force vs Territorial Force, and service branch if available). Reference is made to the approximately 164 discharged personnel noted in request 33203.

The number of personnel who were not fully vaccinated against COVID-19 but were retained in service (via exemptions, waivers, medical/operational reasons, or otherwise) during the same period, including the criteria applied and any assessment of consistency in decision-making.

The involuntary release data from 2021 to date shows various categories of reasons for discharge. There is no specific category for 'refusal or non-compliance with COVID-19 vaccination requirements'. The above aspects of your request are declined in accordance with section 18(e) of the OIA because the requested information does not exist.

Any current or planned pathway for reinstatement or re-enlistment of personnel discharged for COVID-19 vaccine refusal/non-compliance, including eligibility criteria, application process, timelines, and any internal analysis or documents considering reinstatement of the approximately 164 discharged personnel (or similar cohorts).

The NZDF does not have a current or planned pathway for reinstatement or re-enlistment of previous military personnel that is separate to the normal re-enlistment process through NZDF Defence Recruiting. Any applications for enlistment or re-enlistment to the NZDF are considered on an individual basis and assessed on the information provided by the candidate during the application process.

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.

Yours sincerely

GA Motley
Brigadier
Chief of Staff HQNZDF