

10 April 2026

Amy Ferguson  
fyi-request-33956-e99ff0d8@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Amy

***Request for information***

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) request dated 4 March 2026. You requested:

*Under the Official Information Act 1982 I request updated information relating to Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS), commonly referred to as drones, used by New Zealand Police.*

*This request follows previous Official Information Act responses provided to me regarding Police RPAS capability and pilot training, including responses dated 18 November 2019 (IR-01-19-28946) and 8 July 2021 (IR-01-21-18597).*

*Those responses outlined the number of RPAS held by Police and the number of trained RPAS pilots at that time. I am seeking updated information to maintain an accurate and consistent public record of how this capability has developed since those responses.*

*Please provide the following information as at the most recent date available.*

***1. RPAS fleet***

*The current number of Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) owned, leased, or otherwise operated by New Zealand Police.*

*Please include:*

*the number of RPAS systems available nationally*

*the Police organisational units authorised to deploy RPAS.*

As at 10 March 2026, New Zealand Police (Police) currently owns and maintains a fleet of 152 Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS). The use of these devices is not limited to specific organisational units within Police, instead they are held as a means to increase organisation-wide capability.

***2. RPAS operators***

*The number of individuals currently authorised to operate RPAS for Police purposes.*

**Police National Headquarters**

180 Molesworth Street. PO Box 3017, Wellington 6140, New Zealand.  
Telephone: 04 474 9499. Fax: 04 498 7400. [www.police.govt.nz](http://www.police.govt.nz)

*Please provide the number of operators who are:*

*sworn Police officers*

*non-sworn Police employees*

*contractors or externally engaged operators.*

Police currently has 207 frontline staff qualified to operate the RPAS fleet. No non-sworn Police employees, contractors or external operators are engaged to operate RPAS.

### *3. Aviation certification*

*Documentation confirming the regulatory basis under which Police RPAS operations are conducted, including:*

*whether New Zealand Police currently holds Civil Aviation Authority Part 102 certification, or*

*whether RPAS operations are conducted under another organisation's certification.*

The rules governing the use of RPAS are contained in the Civil Aviation Rules<sup>1</sup>. The two key rules are Part 101 and Part 102.

Part 101 rules are for recreational users and some commercial users who elect not to attain Part 102 certification. Most complaints to Police will involve use under Part 101 rules.

To comply with Part 101<sup>2</sup>, operators must:

- not operate an aircraft 25kg or larger and always ensure that it is safe to operate
- at all times take all practicable steps to minimise hazards to persons, property, and other aircraft
- fly only in daylight - unless shielded operation or indoors (exceptions exist – night rating)
- give way to all crewed aircraft
- be able to always see the aircraft with own eye
- not fly higher than 120 metres above ground level (exceptions exist)
- have knowledge of airspace restrictions in force
- when flying in controlled airspace, obtain air traffic control clearance
- not fly in special use airspace without permission of the controlling authority
- have consent from anyone below the aircraft
- have consent of the property owner or person in charge of the area being flown above
- not operate within 4 km of an aerodrome (exceptions exist).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aviation.govt.nz/drones/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aviation.govt.nz/drones/regulations/part-101-rules-for-drones/#:~:text=Under%20Part%20101%20Gyrogliders%20and,4%20km%20of%20their%20aerodrome>

Part 102 rules enable users who have this certification to operate in accordance with their exposition (the application showing how they will operate). These users may have privileges that allow them to fly over private property without seeking consent from those property owners.

Police holds a Part 102 Unmanned Aircraft Operator Certificate (UAOC). The certificate number is UAOC82795.

Operational use of RPAS are not conducted under any other organisation's certification.

#### *4. RPAS operational deployment*

*Records showing the number of RPAS deployments conducted by New Zealand Police in each calendar year since 2021.*

Records of RPAS deployments were not held prior to 2023. This part of your request is refused under section 18(g) as the information requested is not held.

However, a flight management system was implemented on 1 July 2023, with a migration to the system occurring between January and July of that year.

Flight records for 2023 to 2026 are as follows, and include training flights:

Year	Number of flights
2023	3,812
2024	6,804
2025	9,743
2026 <sup>3</sup>	1,482

#### *5. Imaging sensors and analytical capability*

*Information describing the types of imaging capability attached to RPAS used by Police, including but not limited to:*

*standard visual cameras*

*zoom or long-range optical systems*

*thermal or infrared imaging*

*mapping or scene-reconstruction capability*

*software or systems used to analyse imagery captured by RPAS.*

*Please also provide documentation describing any automated image analysis, object detection, or identification capability used in connection with RPAS imagery.*

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<sup>3</sup> As at 10 March

To provide specific details on the zoom and imaging capabilities of the drones operated by New Zealand Police would reveal operational capability and likely allow alleged offenders to actively counter their detection.

This part of your request is refused under section 6(c) of the OIA, as the making available of that information would be likely to prejudice the maintenance of the law, including the prevention, investigation, and detection of offences, and the right to a fair trial.

#### *6. Image processing and data systems*

*Documents describing the systems or software used to process, store, or analyse imagery captured by RPAS.*

Where imagery is captured, how it is stored is determined by the purpose of the capture.

A number of Police Manual chapters relating to information management have been published externally and will be of interest to you as they relate to digital information. They are the following:

- Information Management: Digital disposal policy<sup>4</sup>
- Information Management: Information management policy<sup>5</sup>
- Information Management: Retention and disposal of Police records<sup>6</sup>

#### *7. Governance and oversight*

*Documents identifying the organisational body or governance group responsible for oversight of RPAS capability and associated data management.*

The Aviation, Maritime and Border Group provides oversight of the New Zealand Police's RPAs capability, including CAA certification. All flight data is recorded on a flight management system.

#### *8. Auditing and compliance*

*Documents describing any audit, review, compliance, or privacy assessment processes relating to:*

*RPAS operations*

*imagery or data collected through RPAS systems.*

*Please provide the information in electronic form where available.*

RPAS flights are audited to confirm certification requirements and identify opportunities to review the certification procedures.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.police.govt.nz/sites/default/files/publications/information-management-digital-disposal-policy-070524.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.police.govt.nz/sites/default/files/publications/information-management-policy-031125.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.police.govt.nz/sites/default/files/publications/im-retention-disposal-police-records-250324.pdf>

As noted in the Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) Police Instructions<sup>7</sup>, the protection of privacy is a key consideration when using the devices. There are a number of statutes that allow for the collection of evidence for court or to resolve emergency situations, and controls the manner in which Police does so. To comply with the Privacy Act 2020, when using RPAS it is important to remember the key Information Privacy Principles which include the following:

- Only collect information you need: take care in the deployment of [RPAS] to avoid viewing or capturing imagery outside the target location.
- Tell people about what you are doing: Where a [RPAS] is used on a pre-planned operation, where practicable, Police should notify people in the area observed of the operation. Where appropriate, after an RPAS operation, Police should consider advising any people who may have been subject to the RPAS scrutiny e.g., neighbouring properties / residences or business premises.
- Control access to personal information: keep the information gathered via the [RPAS] secure by storing all imagery in approved Police storage locations and identified by reference to a valid exhibit number or Police record for the event or incident.
- Once you no longer need the personal information for the reason you collected it dispose of it securely so that no-one can retrieve it: If the use of the visual surveillance device via RPAS is pursuant to the Search and Surveillance Act 2012, deal with evidence in the manner required under that Act. In all other cases, information should be deleted as soon as it is not needed for the purpose it was collected.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or freephone 0800 802 602.

Please note that as part of its commitment to openness and transparency, Police proactively releases some information and documents that may be of interest to the public. An anonymised version of this response may be publicly released on the New Zealand Police website.

Your sincerely



**Detective Superintendent Sean Hansen**  
**A/Director Tactical Operations**  
**New Zealand Police**

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.police.govt.nz/sites/default/files/publications/remotely-piloted-aircraft-systems-redacted-200924.pdf>