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NEW ZEALAND



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Minister for Veterans

## **POSSIBLE QUESTION ON MILITARY SERVICE FOR NEW ZEALAND CENSUS**

### **Purpose**

1. This note responds to your request for background on, and the current status of, a matter that has been considered several times in the past regarding the possibility of including a question about military service in the New Zealand Census.

### **Background**

2. There has been no question relating to military service in the New Zealand census since 1971. The possibility of reinstating such a question has, however, been raised a number of times.
3. In 2008, the National Party made a pre-election commitment to restore a question about war service in the New Zealand Census. This matter was explored in 2009, in relation to the upcoming 2011 census. When that census was delayed by the Christchurch earthquakes, attempts were made to seek inclusion in the 2013 and 2016 censuses.
4. Statistics New Zealand did not support these approaches for a variety of reasons. They did not consider such a question to be a cost-effective way to obtain the information that was being sought (which was a comprehensive population-based assessment of living veterans in the general population and their social and economic status). The cost at the time of adding such a question to the census was assessed at \$300,000, and this would have required a Budget bid.
5. The matter came before a Cabinet committee in September 2012, and the decision was taken that such a question would not be included.
6. The matter was raised again by Ministers for Veterans in 2018 and 2021. It has not been progressed further.

### **The Census in Other Countries**

7. The UK, Canada, and Australia added a question about military service to their 2021 Census. The aim in all cases has been to gain a better understanding of the circumstances of those who have served and their families, which in turn will support better provision of services.
8. The questions being added to their censuses by other countries are brief and simple:
  - a. In Australia: has the person ever served in the Australian Defence Force?

- b. In Canada: the question asks people to self-identify as a veteran or as a currently serving Canadian Armed Forces member.
- c. In the UK: Have you previously served in the UK Armed Forces?

**Comment**

- 9. Any change to a census is costly, requires a long lead-time, and needs to be justified.
- 10. The justification for adding such a question is that the sort of information that it could generate is not easily available elsewhere, and it could assist service providers and others who support veterans and their families. It would provide an accurate estimate of the community of those who have previously served in the armed forces, and could provide data on such things as their housing situation, general health indicators and activity in the labour market.
- 11. In the case of a question in New Zealand about veteran status, however, there would be complications given the disparity between the term as used in common parlance, and the term as used legally to define eligibility for entitlements and services under the Veterans' Support Act 2014. In the interests of simplicity, such a question would need to focus on military service generally, rather than on identifying those who are eligible for support from Veterans' Affairs. While it would be of assistance should New Zealand wish to have a better understanding of its overall population with service experience, it is unlikely to be of specific assistance to Veterans' Affairs.
- 12. Given the cost, the difficulty of obtaining a "slot" in the census where so many Ministers and agencies are seeking to have information needs addressed, and the doubtful benefit of what would have to be a very general question, recent work to develop better information on veterans has focused instead on other areas.
- 13. We are working with the Ministry of Health, for example, to have a service marker added to the information which is held in New Zealand's health system so that GPs and others will be aware that a person with such a marker against their name could have specific experiences and specific needs. As part of the Te Arataki work plan, we are also seeking to provide better education for healthcare professionals on the needs of veterans. Another strand of the Te Arataki work plan is looking to ensure that information about veterans is added to the Integrated Data Infrastructure – this will facilitate research, and also enable the linking up of information about service-related experiences across a variety of indicators, including health, housing, and the labour market.

**Recommendations**

- 14. It is recommended that you:
  - a. **Note** that Australia, Canada, and the UK have added questions about military service to their respective censuses.
- b. **Note** that the New Zealand Census has not had a question about military service since 1971.

**NOTED**

**NOTED**

Zealand would not be of direct value to Veterans' Affairs in its work to support eligible veterans with qualifying service.


NOTED

- d. **Note** that attempts since 2008 to add a question about military service to the New Zealand Census have been unsuccessful.

NOTED

- e. **Note** that alternative avenues to obtain information that would develop understanding about New Zealand veterans are now being explored.

NOTED



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