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OIA-2026-5715  
OIA-2026-5723  
OIA-2026-5739  
OIA-2026-5740  
OIA-2026-5752

16<sup>th</sup> April 2026

Spencer Jones

[fyi-request-34113-9fcc0ab@requests.fyi.org.nz](mailto:fyi-request-34113-9fcc0ab@requests.fyi.org.nz)

Dear Spencer Jones

I refer to your recent requests for information, under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA), relating to the Veterans' Advisory Board (VAB) and its recommendations, as follows:

- 17 March 2026 – seeking documents and correspondence responding to or recording implementation of VAB recommendations (ref OIA-2026-5715);
- 17 March 2026 – transferred from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, seeking a list of briefings prepared for the Minister for Veterans discussing advice from the VAB (ref OIA-2026-5739);
- 18 March 2026 – transferred in part from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, seeking Cabinet-level consideration of matters informed by advice from the VAB (ref OIA-2026-5740);
- 21 March 2026 – seeking confirmation of systems to record VAB advice and implementation of recommendations, as well as any system for monitoring performance across government's support for veterans (Ref OIA-2026-5723); and
- 1 April 2026 – seeking specific records relating to VAB advice held by the secretariat of veterans' boards (ref OIA-2026-5752).

As your various requests substantively concern the same, or similar, information they have been considered together. There is no responsibility within the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) or Veterans' Affairs (VA) to consider, implement, or monitor advice or recommendations from the VAB beyond requests or direction from the Minister. In order to respond efficiently to your requests, and avoid unreasonable impairment of the operational functions of the NZDF and VA, the scope is limited to information provided to the current Minister for Veterans, who was formally appointed in November 2023.

The secretariat of veterans' boards is not a separate agency or organisation. It is a small team within VA that works to assist the VAB, Veterans' Health Advisory Panel, Veterans' Entitlements Appeal Board and Veterans' Service Review Panel to run efficiently while remaining independent. The secretariat maintains its own records resulting from this support. As the secretariat is part of VA, and therefore the NZDF, any such records are reviewed where appropriate in response to requests made to the NZDF.

There is no single, centralised system used to monitor or coordinate veterans' support activity across all government agencies. Veterans' support is delivered through a range of legislative frameworks and agencies, each with its own accountability and reporting arrangements. Coordination across the broader veterans' system is supported through policy frameworks, inter-agency engagement, and collaborative mechanisms, including Te Arataki: the Veterans' Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy, which provides a shared strategic direction rather than an operational monitoring tool.

The VAB is an independent statutory board that provides advice, on request, directly to the Minister for Veterans. The VAB and its functions are established under section 247 of the Veterans' Support Act 2014. While the NZDF and VA provide administrative and logistic support for the VAB (via the secretariat), and provide advice or information to the VAB on request, there is no centralised implementation register for VAB recommendations, as there is no statutory or administration requirement to create such a record. Where advice from the VAB results in a ministerial request for further analysis or action, standard policy and briefing processes apply.

The following list provides relevant information on advice that was provided to the current Minister for Veterans:

**1. 24 November 2023 – Briefing to the Incoming Minister for Veterans**

This briefing includes reference to some matters raised by the VAB. It is publically available on the VA website<sup>1</sup>.

**16 February 2024 – Background Notes for Visit to Minister for Veterans of Veterans' Advisory Board Members**

A copy is provided at Enclosure 1.

**2. 19 April 2024 – Background on Potential Priorities for the Veterans Portfolio**

The NZDF and VA provided background context of potential priority areas within the Veterans portfolio for consideration. One item raised was with regard to the potential widening of the definition of the term veteran within legislation. The VAB has previously provided a report on this matter:

***Priorities - Establishing a Wider Definition of Veteran - General***

*4. This is a complex issue and has been the subject of work in the past - we would be happy to provide a full briefing to the Minister which would set out the background to the issue and the practicalities that would need to be considered and worked through.*

*5. If the Minister's priority is to make a decision on whether work should be done that would enable him to make a decision on this matter, that briefing, including a possible pathway forward, could be provided by May/June 2024.*

***Establishing a Wider Definition of Veteran – Without Access to Entitlements***

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz/assets/Documents/Briefing-to-the-Incoming-Minister-for-Veterans-November-2023.pdf>.

6. We are not certain how a wider definition to include veterans without access to entitlements would be established, but the comments below are offered with respect to a possible change to the legal definition used in New Zealand:

a. That definition is contained in the Veterans' Support Act 2014. An extension through the Act would require a third part to be added to the definition of a veteran, so that it would cover those with Qualifying Operational Service, those with Qualifying Routine Service, and those who have served in the NZDF but have no entitlements.

7. This option has been explored in the past with the following points noted:

a. While numbers are not firm, the usual estimate is that, of the approximately 120,000 thought to have served in the NZDF, only around 40,000 are currently eligible for support and services from VA.

b. Given that the role of Veterans' Affairs is to administer the Veterans' Support Act 2014, a legal change that could bring another 80,000 or so former personnel into

its purview would increase the number of "potential clients" for VA. The change would make quite a stark point that there are still "two classes of veterans" – rather than those covered by the Act and those not, it would become those with entitlements and those without.

c. While the intention (at present) would be that the broader group would have no entitlements, there is a high risk that those concerned would expect something to accompany their change of status. Any additional pressure from clients to deliver any services, including non-financial recognition, could not be managed by VA without a significant boost to resources.

d. Although it would seem a simple thing to change the legislation to insert a broader definition, this would in fact require major changes to the Act. The Act's purpose would change - the purpose clause currently specifies that it is intended to provide for the rehabilitation and support of veterans who, as a result of being placed in harm's way, have been injured or become ill. Changing the purpose to include recognition of all who have ever served is a major policy change that would require consultation.

e. The work involved in embedding such a change into the legislation would be complex. The term "veteran" is an integral and fundamental part of the Veterans' Support Act 2014. Should the term be redefined, without any change being made to eligibility for entitlements, the Act's title would become a misnomer and would have to be changed so as not to mislead. A new term would need to be identified, other than veteran, with which to refer in the legislation to those with entitlements; and any form of circumlocution to replace the single word now used could make it more difficult to deal with what Professor Ron Paterson described in his 2018 review of the operation of the Act as legislation which is already cumbersome and complex.

f. Every reference in the Act to a "veteran" in association with entitlements,

would need to be changed; and there would be other changes needed where the term is used in other pieces of legislation or involving agencies other than Veterans' Affairs (for example, it might be necessary to rename the Veteran's Pension, and the Veteran SuperGold card so as not to raise expectations that cannot be met). The detailed policy work that would be required to ensure accurate drafting instructions, and the time required to allow for feedback and consultation on what is produced, would be significant and not without cost.

g. Drafting the changes would be the responsibility of the Parliamentary Counsel Office (PCO), so consideration would need to be given to whether this work could be accommodated in the PCO work programme.

8. With respect to a non-legislative change to the way in which this term is used by the Government when referring to those who have served, the following points are noted.

**A Non-Legislated Change to the Way the Term "Veteran" is used by Government**

9. This was the option taken by a previous Minister for Veterans and Minister of Defence, Hon Ron Mark.

10. He noted that there were a number of implications that would need to be worked through regarding any possible extension of the legal definition of "veteran" in New Zealand that would involve an extension of entitlements. These would include what should be the basis of veteran legislation and the costing of various scenarios, as discussed in the previous section.

11. In a public statement, therefore, he said that, in the meantime, he would be using the term "veteran" in line with a broader inclusive definition (covering all those who have served in the NZDF) - with the proviso that this would only be done "where this does not impact on the use of this term as otherwise defined in legislation".

**International comparisons**

12. Definitions vary across countries, with criteria including length of service, participation in specified operations, and method of discharge (dishonourable discharges disqualifying one from being considered a veteran in Canada and the US).

13. The following are some general comments on international veteran support provisions:

a. Overseas countries provide health care and social welfare support in varied ways that can differ markedly from New Zealand.

b. The systems governing support of servicepersons overseas are designed around the unique health and welfare environments of each country.

c. It is common for the provision of support to be governed by multiple pieces of legislation/regulation with complex eligibility criteria, variation in coverage and entitlements under different Acts.

d. Coverage may be broader overseas and include all service in the forces as well as others, including civilians, at particular times and specified circumstances.

e. Systems overseas integrate a wider umbrella of support across government and non-government agencies.

*f. Coverage of larger population groups may impact on individuals' access to services and support as all systems have resource constraints.*

*14. Because the health and welfare environment and veterans' systems in each country are so different from New Zealand's own health and welfare environment and veteran system, there is limited value in comparisons. They demonstrate, however, that the greater the population that is covered, and the wider the range of support that is offered, the more complex a system will be; and the more challenges there will be to ensure that resources reach those who need them the most.*

### **3. 8 July 2024 – Recognition of Service People Through Burial and Memorialisation – Veterans Advisory Board Report 18 December 2023**

This briefing is publically available on the VA website<sup>2</sup>.

### **22 August 2024 – The Definition of “Veteran” in New Zealand: Options for Moving Forward**

A copy is provided at Enclosure 2. This does not reference VAB recommendations directly, but the VAB has provided advice on this matter.

### **4. 17 October 2024 – Veterans’ Affairs: 2024 Work Programme**

The following is an excerpt of relevant advice within a briefing to the Minister’s office on VA’s 2024 work programme:

#### ***Definition***

- *The current definition of “veteran” in the Veterans’ Support Act 2014 is limited, because the Act is targeted legislation, recognising and supporting those who are specifically sent by the Government into areas and situations that put them at significant risk of harm.*
- *Consideration is being given to whether and how a legal definition of veteran could be broadened to cover more of those who have served.*
- *What if any entitlements could be made available to the broader group is one of the issues being considered:*
  - *Approximately 40-45,000 individuals are currently eligible for entitlements under the Veterans’ Support Act 2014 (with less than half this number currently claiming).*
  - *NZ’s total service population could number upwards of 140,000.*
- *Services to veterans are costed on a liability basis - the sum involved is currently around \$3 billion.*
- *If the definition were to be changed to provide similar entitlements to all who have served, the substantial increase in the number of veterans who would be eligible for support or services could significantly increase the size of the liability.*
- *Consideration is being given to entitlements that could be made available to the broader group which would have little if any cost.*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz/news-events/articles/vab-report-recognition-of-service-people-through-burial-and-memorialisation/>.

***Covenant (Kawenata)***

- *If established, a Covenant would have at its core an undertaking by the government and people of New Zealand that those who have served should not be disadvantaged by their service.*
- *Likely to be broader than the Veterans portfolio as the call is for it to cover all who have served including serving personnel.*
- *Currently under early consideration as to the form it could take (e.g. statement of principles, legislation, treaty), any associated entitlements, and who could administer it.*
- *Other countries have such covenants (UK and Australia).*

The Veterans' Recognition Bill, introduced on 14 August 2025, embodies in part a response to the above advice. Its purpose is to introduce a broader definition, recognising more former soldiers, sailors and aviators as veterans, without altering the existing definitions or related entitlements.

Further material directly relating to the drafting of this Bill and its introduction is withheld, for the time being, in accordance with section 9(2)(f)(iv) of the OIA, to maintain the constitutional conventions which protect the confidentiality of advice tendered by Ministers of the Crown and officials.

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](http://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

**Enclosures:**

1. Background Notes
2. The Definition of "Veteran" in New Zealand: Options for Moving Forward