

2 July 2026

Nigel Gray

By email: fyi-request-34864-316396c2@requests.fyi.org.nz
Ref: H2026083819

Tēnā koe Nigel

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) to the Ministry of Health – Manatū Hauora (the Ministry) on 5 June 2026. Each part of your request is responded to in turn:

Under the Official Information Act 1982, I request the following information relating to the meaning, origin, and governance basis of the name “Medsafe – New Zealand Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Authority.”

This request is made in light of Medsafe’s recent statement that it “does not use the terms ‘safe’, ‘effective’, or ‘safe and effective’, and instead uses ‘acceptably safe’ or ‘benefits outweigh the risks’.”

This raises significant questions about the meaning and accuracy of the term “Safety Authority” in Medsafe’s own name.

1. Origin and intended meaning of the name “Medsafe”

Please provide all documents, correspondence, Cabinet papers, branding decisions, internal discussions, or policy material that relate to:

the origin of the name “Medsafe”

the decision to include the word “safe” in the name

the intended meaning of “safe” at the time the name was adopted

any definitions, criteria, or conceptual frameworks associated with the term “Safety Authority”

I have identified 3 documents within scope of your request. All documents are itemised in Appendix 1 and copies of the documents are enclosed. Where information is 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.

No documents have been identified that define the intended meaning of the word “safe” at the time the name was adopted, or that establishes a formal conceptual framework for the term “Safety Authority”. Therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(g)(i) of the Act, as the information requested is not held by the Ministry and there are no grounds for believing this is connected more closely with the functions of another agency subject to the Act.

2. Internal interpretation of “Safety Authority”

Please provide all documents, guidance, internal communications, or policy material that describe:

how Medsafe internally interprets the term “Safety Authority”

how Medsafe defines or operationalises “safety” in relation to its statutory functions

any internal discussion about whether the term “Safety Authority” implies the use of the word “safe”

any internal discussion about whether the term “Safety Authority” is accurate given Medsafe’s stated avoidance of the word “safe”

There are no documents regarding the internal interpretation of “safety authority.” Therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(g)(i) of the Act.

3. Alignment between Medsafe’s name and its stated terminology

Please provide all documents, emails, or internal discussions that address:

the relationship between the term “safe” in Medsafe’s name and Medsafe’s stated position that it does not use the word “safe”

any analysis of whether the name “Medsafe” may be misleading, ambiguous, or inconsistent with Medsafe’s terminology (“acceptably safe”, “benefits outweigh the risks”)

any consideration of whether the name should be updated, clarified, or reviewed

any risk communication or public-trust analysis relating to this naming inconsistency

There are no documents regarding the alignment between Medsafe’s name and its stated terminology. Therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(g)(i) of the Act.

4. Public-facing implications of the name “Medsafe”

Please provide any documents, risk assessments, communication advice, or internal analysis that relate to:

how the public is expected to interpret the term “Safety Authority”

whether Medsafe considers the name to imply a guarantee, threshold, or definition of “safety”

whether Medsafe has ever assessed the risk of public misunderstanding arising from the name

any advice to Ministers or other agencies about the meaning or implications of the name “Medsafe”

There are no documents regarding any public-facing implications of the name “Medsafe,” so this part of your request is refused under section 18(g)(i) of the Act.

5. Records of cross-agency discussion about Medsafe’s name

Please provide any documents, emails, or discussions between Medsafe and:

Health NZ

Ministry of Health

EPA

Pharmac

any other agency

that relate to the meaning, accuracy, or implications of the name “Medsafe”.

There was no cross-agency discussion before, or during, the adoption and launching of Medsafe's name. Therefore, this part of your request is also refused under section 18(g)(i) of the Act.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of your request with us, including this decision, please feel free to contact the OIA Services Team on: 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 Ministry website at: www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/responses-official-information-act-requests.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris James', is positioned above the printed name.

Chris James
Group Manager
Medsafe

Appendix 1: List of documents for release

#	Date	Document details	Decision on release
1	11 June 1998	Internal Memo: Approval for Medsafe branding	Released in full.
2	13 July 1998	Health Report: Medsafe branding for therapeutics business unit	Some information withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act, to protect the privacy of natural persons.
3	14 August 1998	Medsafe letter	