

MINISTER FOR VETERANS

Veterans' Recognition Bill: Approval for Introduction

December 2025

This paper seeks approval to introduce the Veterans' Recognition Bill.

The pack comprises the following documents:

- July 2025 Cabinet Legislation Committee Minute of Decision: *Veterans' Recognition Bill: Approval for Introduction* [LEG-25-MIN-0150];
- The associated Cabinet Paper *Veterans' Recognition Bill: Approval for Introduction*; and
- The Veterans' Recognition Bill.

This pack has been released on the New Zealand Defence Force website, available at:

www.nzdf.mil.nz/nzdf/search-our-libraries/documents/?document-type=Official+information&sort=relevance.

Information has been withheld in accordance with:

- section 9(2)(g)(i) of the OIA: *to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions by or between or to Ministers of the Crown or members of an organisation or officers and employees of any public service agency or organisation in the course of their duty.*



Cabinet Legislation Committee

Minute of Decision

This document contains information for the New Zealand Cabinet. It must be treated in confidence and handled in accordance with any security classification, or other endorsement. The information can only be released, including under the Official Information Act 1982, by persons with the appropriate authority.

Veterans' Recognition Bill: Approval for Introduction

Portfolio **Veterans**

On 31 July 2025, the Cabinet Legislation Committee:

- 1 **noted** that the Veterans' Recognition Bill (the Bill) holds a category 4 priority on the 2025 Legislation Programme (to be passed by the end of 2025 if possible);
- 2 **noted** that the Bill would provide intangible recognition for those former members of the New Zealand Defence Force whose service has entitled them to the award of a medal;
- 3 **approved** the Veterans' Recognition Bill [PCO 27067/14.0] for introduction;
- 4 **agreed** that the Bill be introduced by September 2025;
- 5 **agreed** that the Government propose that the Bill be:
 - 5.1 referred to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee for consideration;
 - 5.2 enacted by July 2026.

Tom Kelly
Committee Secretary

Present:

Hon David Seymour
Rt Hon Winston Peters
Hon Chris Bishop (Chair)
Hon Paul Goldsmith
Hon Louise Upston
Hon Brooke van Velden
Hon Tama Potaka
Hon Simon Watts
Hon Nicole McKee
Hon Chris Penk
Stuart Smith, MP
Todd Stephenson, MP
Jamie Arbuckle, MP

Officials present from:

Officials Committee for LEG
Office of the Leader of the House

Veterans' Recognition Bill: Approval for Introduction

Proposal

1. This paper seeks Cabinet approval to introduce a new Bill – the Veterans' Recognition Bill.

Policy

2. The Bill would provide intangible recognition for those former members of the New Zealand Defence Force whose service has entitled them to the award of a medal. Policy approval for this Bill was granted by the Cabinet Social Outcomes Committee on 5 March 2025 (SOU-25-MIN-0016) and confirmed by Cabinet on 10 March 2024 (CAB-25-MIN-0063).
3. The definition of "veteran" in section 7 of the Veterans' Support Act 2014 does not cover everyone who has served in the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF). This is appropriate in terms of support available in that legislation. It is based on the premise that that Act should support those who are specifically sent by the Government into situations that put them at significant risk of harm. Only those who meet the terms of the "veteran" definition in that Act, as a result of having undertaking qualifying service, can receive the associated entitlements.
4. Many who have served in the NZDF, however, tend to see the term "veteran" itself as a positive form of recognition for what is often long and honourable service, albeit service which does not meet the criteria in the Veterans' Support Act. They understandably resent feeling that they are being denied the intangible recognition of being considered veterans in any official way.
5. Cabinet agreed to deal with this concern through a legislative response that would recognise a greater number of those who have served as "veterans". That response would be a Veterans' Recognition Bill that would define veterans as those service personnel whose service qualified them to receive a medal and who have since left the NZDF; and a statement that a covenant relationship exists between those who served in the NZDF and the New Zealand people.
6. The Bill would introduce a new definition of veteran, rather than extending the definition already in place under the Veterans' Support Act. While this may be somewhat contentious to some of those who have served in the military, and who consider military service per se should enable access to all entitlements which those with qualifying service are eligible for through the Veterans' Support Act it will meet an often expressed desire from those who have served to have the mana of being considered veterans by their peers and their fellow citizens. This Bill would afford them that recognition.

Impact analysis

7. The Ministry for Regulation has advised that a RIS is not required as the impact of the new legislation will be minimal.

Compliance

8. the best of my knowledge, nothing proposed in this paper is inconsistent with:
 - 28.1 the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi;
 - 28.2 the rights and freedoms contained in the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 or the Human Rights Act 1993; an assessment of the Bill's consistency with the Bill of Rights Act is in progress.
 - 28.3 the principles and guidelines set out in the Privacy Act 2020; or
 - 28.4 the relevant international standards and obligations.
9. The Legislation Design and Advisory Committee (LDAC) was offered an opportunity to consider the proposal in light of the 2021 Guidelines. LDAC noted a potential risk that the Bill could have unintended outcomes, for example that arguments could be made that, through the Covenant, a duty of care could be created between those who meet the definition of "veteran" in the Bill, and the Crown. While they noted that the Covenant was closely modelled on that in Australian legislation, and there has been no history of litigation in relation to this in Australia, they felt it was important to consider the long-term litigation risk associated with importing such a Covenant within a new piece of legislation.
10. The Covenant that has been drafted as Schedule 1 of the Bill is clear in stating what the commitment of the Crown is to those who have served and qualified to receive a medal. It is to respect and thank them; to treat them with respect and dignity that preserves and enhances their mana; to acknowledge their personal sacrifices and experiences; to celebrate them, welcome and embrace them and support them as respected and valued members of the community. It is considered that the wording of the Covenant is strongly focused on recognition and does not create a new duty of care.

Consultation

11. This paper has been consulted with relevant Ministers.

Binding on the Crown

12. The Act is binding on the Crown.

Creating new agencies or amending law relating to existing agencies

13. The Bill would not create any new agencies, and would not amend the existing coverage of the Ombudsman Act 1975, the Official Information Act 1982, or the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987.

Allocation of decision-making powers

14. The Bill does not create or amend decision-making powers.

Associated regulation

15. Regulations will not be needed to bring the Bill into operation.

Definition of Minister

16. The Bill does not contain a definition of Minister, department (or equivalent government agency) or chief executive of a department (or equivalent position).

Commencement of legislation

17. It is proposed that the Bill will come into force on the day after the date of Royal Assent.

Parliamentary stages

18. The Government has indicated that, as timing allows, the Bill will be introduced by September and that it will be passed by July 2026

19. It is proposed that the Bill be referred to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee (FADT) for consideration.

Proactive release

20. I propose to release this paper and the associated minute in whole when the Bill is introduced into the House.

Recommendations

I recommend that the Cabinet Legislation Committee:

1. note that the Veterans' Recognition Bill holds a category 5 priority on the 2025 Legislation programme;
2. note that the Bill would provide intangible recognition for those former members of the New Zealand Defence Force whose service has entitled them to the award of a medal;
3. approve the Veterans' Recognition Bill for introduction subject to the final approval of the Government caucus and sufficient support in the House of representatives;
4. agree that the Bill be introduced by September.

5. Agree that the Government propose that the bill be:

5.1 Referred to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee (FADT) for consideration;

5.2 Enacted by July 2026.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Chris Penk

Minister for Veterans

Proactively Released by the Minister for Veterans

Veterans' Recognition Bill

Government Bill

Explanatory note

General policy statement

The Veterans' Recognition Bill (the **Bill**)—

- offers symbolic recognition of the service of members of the New Zealand Defence Force (regular forces and territorial forces, as defined in the Defence Act 1990), who have left the New Zealand Defence Force and whose service has qualified them for medallic recognition, by officially recognising them as veterans; and
- provides further recognition to those veterans in the form of a military Covenant established between the Crown, the people of New Zealand, and the veterans.

The current legal definition of veteran in New Zealand is more limited than the use of the term in everyday language. The definition in section 7 of the Veterans' Support Act 2014 does not cover everyone who has served in the New Zealand Defence Force. This is appropriate in terms of the targeting of the support available in that legislation. It is based on the premise that that Act should support those who are specifically sent by the Government into situations that put them at significant risk of harm. Only those who meet the terms of the definition of veteran in that Act can receive the associated entitlements.

However, many who have served in the New Zealand Defence Force tend to see the term veteran as a positive form of recognition for what is often long and honourable service, albeit service which does not meet the criteria in the Veterans' Support Act 2014.

The recognition conferred by the Bill does not affect any other Act, including the Veterans' Support Act 2014 or entitlements under that Act.

The Covenant follows existing covenants that are in place in Australia and the United Kingdom. It acknowledges the Crown's responsibility for the defence of New Zealand.

land that is performed by members of the New Zealand Defence Force and the unique nature of military life—that it involves curtailment of freedoms and sacrifice made by both service personnel and their families. It obliges the Crown and the people of New Zealand, consistent with existing law, to—

- respect and thank all those who have served in the New Zealand Defence Force as veterans:
- acknowledge the unique nature of military service and the sacrifices demanded of all who commit to defend New Zealand:
- treat them with the respect and dignity that preserves and enhances their mana:
- recognise them by acknowledging their personal sacrifices and the experiences their service entailed:
- celebrate them:
- preserve their memory and deeds:
- welcome, embrace, and support them as respected and valued members of our community.

The Bill makes it clear that there is no intention to create legal relations or legal rights or obligations, and that the Covenant is a moral commitment by the parties.

Departmental disclosure statement

The New Zealand Defence Force is required to prepare a disclosure statement to assist with the scrutiny of this Bill. The disclosure statement provides access to information about the policy development of the Bill and identifies any significant or unusual legislative features of the Bill.

A copy of the statement can be found at [PPU to insert URL and link].

Clause by clause analysis

Clause 1 is the Title clause.

Clause 2 is the commencement clause. It provides that this Bill comes into force on the day after Royal assent.

Part 1

Preliminary provisions

Clause 3 sets out the purpose of this Bill, which is—

- to acknowledge and recognise the military service of veterans; and
- to confirm that those persons described as veterans in this Bill are to be known as veterans and may refer to themselves as veterans; and
- to establish the Covenant.

Clause 4 defines terms used in the Bill, including veteran. A veteran for the purposes of the Bill is a former member of the regular forces or the territorial forces who has been awarded or is eligible for the New Zealand Defence Service Medal, or a former member of the regular forces or the territorial forces who is awarded, in relation to their service,—

- a campaign medal, whether or not the campaign medal relates to a deployment that would constitute qualifying operational service as defined in section 8(2) of the Veterans' Support Act 2014; or
- an honour or a decoration awarded through the New Zealand Royal Honours system; or
- a medal for bravery or excellence awarded by the New Zealand Government.

Clause 5 provides that the Bill does not create or give rise to rights or obligations, including under the Veterans' Support Act 2014. This means that the entitlements, support, and services available under the Veterans' Support Act 2014 are unaffected.

Clause 6 provides that the Act will bind the Crown.

Part 2

Recognition of veterans

Clause 7 provides that the Crown acknowledges and recognises the military service of veterans. The recognition provided in this Bill builds on existing forms of recognition, including commemorative events and activities under other Acts such as the Anzac Day events and activities under the Anzac Day Act 1966, medallion recognition by the New Zealand Government, and honours or decorations awarded through the New Zealand Royal Honours system.

Clause 8 confirms that the persons described as veterans in this Bill are to be known as veterans and may refer to themselves as veterans.

Clause 9 establishes the Covenant and indicates that it is set out in the *Schedule*.

The *Schedule* contains the Covenant.

Proactively Released by the Minister for Veterans

Hon Chris Penk

Veterans' Recognition Bill

Government Bill

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The Parliament of New Zealand enacts as follows:

1 Title

This Act is the Veterans' Recognition Act **2025**.

2 Commencement

This Act comes into force on the day after Royal assent.

Part 1

Preliminary provisions

3 Purpose

The purpose of this Act is—

- (a) to acknowledge and recognise the military service of veterans; and
- (b) to confirm that those persons described as veterans in this Act are to be known as veterans and may refer to themselves as veterans; and
- (c) to establish the Covenant.

4 Interpretation

In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires,—

New Zealand Defence Service Medal means the medal awarded under the Royal Warrant (SR 2011/88) dated 6 April 2011 and the New Zealand Defence Service Medal Regulations 2011

regular forces has the meaning given in section 2(1) of the Defence Act 1990

territorial forces has the meaning given in section 2(1) of the Defence Act 1990

veteran means—

- (a) a person who has served, but is not currently serving, as a member of the regular forces or the territorial forces and who has been awarded or whose service makes them eligible for the New Zealand Defence Service Medal; or
- (b) a person who has served, but is not currently serving, as a member of the regular forces or the territorial forces and who has been awarded, in relation to their service,—
 - (i) a campaign medal, whether or not the campaign medal relates to a deployment that would constitute qualifying operational service as defined in section 8(2) of the Veterans' Support Act 2014; or
 - (ii) an honour or a decoration awarded through the New Zealand Royal Honours system; or
 - (iii) a medal for bravery or excellence awarded by the New Zealand Government.

5 Act does not create rights or obligations

- (1) This Act does not extend, limit, or affect the Veterans' Support Act 2014 or any reference to a veteran in any other legislation.
- (2) This Act does not, by its terms or operation, create or give rise to any rights or obligations that are legally enforceable in judicial or other proceedings.

6 Act binds the Crown

This Act binds the Crown.

**Part 2
Recognition of veterans****7 Crown acknowledgement and recognition of veterans**

The Crown acknowledges and recognises the military service of veterans.

8 Confirmation of veteran status

The persons described as veterans in this Act are to be known as veterans and may refer to themselves as veterans.

9 Covenant established

The Covenant set out in the **Schedule** is established.

Schedule Covenant

s 9

An enduring covenant between

His Majesty's Government of New Zealand on behalf of the Crown and the people of New Zealand

and

All those who have served in the New Zealand Defence Force whose service qualified them to receive a medal, and their families

Background

The defence of New Zealand is a fundamental duty of the New Zealand Government.

Those who serve in the New Zealand Defence Force fulfil that responsibility on behalf of the Government, sacrificing some civilian freedoms, facing danger, and sometimes suffering serious injury or death as a result of their duty. Families also play a vital role in supporting the operational effectiveness of our Defence Force.

In return, we express through this covenant our acknowledgement and recognition of the military service of former members of the New Zealand Defence Force, and their families.

Covenant

- (1) We respect and thank all who have served in the New Zealand Defence Force whose service qualified them to receive a medal, and their families. We acknowledge the unique nature of military service and the sacrifice demanded of all who commit to defending our nation.
- (2) For those who have served in the New Zealand Defence Force, whether in the regular forces or the territorial forces, whose service qualified them to receive a medal, and their families, we will—
 - (a) treat them with the respect and dignity that preserves and enhances their mana:
 - (b) recognise them by acknowledging their personal sacrifices and the experiences their service entailed:
 - (c) celebrate them by preserving their memory and deeds and by welcoming, embracing, and supporting them as respected and valued members of our community.
- (3) This is the Crown's acknowledgement of those who have served in the New Zealand Defence Force who qualified to receive a medal, and of their families. The Crown, on behalf of the people of New Zealand, recognises their mana and standing and their sacrifices and service for our country.

Departmental Disclosure Statement

Veterans Recognition Bill

The departmental disclosure statement for a government Bill seeks to bring together in one place a range of information to support and enhance the Parliamentary and public scrutiny of that Bill.

It identifies:

- the general policy intent of the Bill and other background policy material;
- some of the key quality assurance products and processes used to develop and test the content of the Bill;
- the presence of certain significant powers or features in the Bill that might be of particular Parliamentary or public interest and warrant an explanation.

This disclosure statement was prepared by Veterans' Affairs.

Veterans' Affairs certifies that, to the best of their knowledge and understanding, the information provided is complete and accurate at the date of finalisation.

23 July 2025

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Proactively Released by the Minister for Veterans

Part One: General Policy Statement

The Veterans' Recognition Bill (the **Bill**)—

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The current legal definition of veteran in New Zealand is more limited than the use of the term in everyday language. The definition in section 7 of the Veterans' Support Act 2014 does not cover everyone who has served in the New Zealand Defence Force. This is appropriate in terms of the targeting of the support available in that legislation. It is based on the premise that that Act should support those who are specifically sent by the Government into situations that put them at significant risk of harm. Only those who meet the terms of the definition of veteran in that Act can receive the associated entitlements.

However, many who have served in the New Zealand Defence Force tend to see the term veteran as a positive form of recognition for what is often long and honourable service, albeit service which does not meet the criteria in the Veterans' Support Act 2014.

The recognition conferred by the Bill does not affect any other Act, including the Veterans' Support Act 2014, or entitlements under that Act.

The Covenant follows existing covenants that are in place in Australia and the United Kingdom. It acknowledges the Crown's responsibility for the defence of New Zealand that is performed by members of the New Zealand Defence Force and the unique nature of military life—that it involves curtailment of freedoms and sacrifice made by both service personnel and their families. It obliges the Crown and the people of New Zealand, consistent with existing law, to—

- respect and thank all those who have served in the New Zealand Defence Force as veterans:
- acknowledge the unique nature of military service and the sacrifices demanded of all who commit to defend New Zealand:
- treat them with the respect and dignity that preserves and enhances their mana:
- recognise them by acknowledging their personal sacrifices and the experiences their service entailed:
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- preserve their memory and deeds:
- welcome, embrace, and support them as respected and valued members of our community.

The Bill makes it clear that there is no intention to create legal relations or legal rights or obligations, and that the Covenant is a moral commitment by the parties.

Part Two: Background Material and Policy Information

Published reviews or evaluations

2.1. Are there any publicly available inquiry, review or evaluation reports that have informed, or are relevant to, the policy to be given effect by this Bill?	NO
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Relevant international treaties

2.2. Does this Bill seek to give effect to New Zealand action in relation to an international treaty?	NO
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Regulatory impact analysis

2.3. Were any regulatory impact statements provided to inform the policy decisions that led to this Bill?	NO
The Ministry for Regulation has determined that this proposal is exempt from the requirement to provide a Regulatory Impact Statement on the grounds that the impact of the new legislation will be minimal.	

Extent of impact analysis available

2.4. Has further impact analysis become available for any aspects of the policy to be given effect by this Bill?	NO
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2.5. For the policy to be given effect by this Bill, is there analysis available on:	
(a) the size of the potential costs and benefits?	NO
(b) the potential for any group of persons to suffer a substantial unavoidable loss of income or wealth?	NO
It is assessed that a population of approximately 140,000 have served in the New Zealand Defence Force. The proposed legislation would define a significant number of those as veterans for the purpose of this Act. There are no financial implications associated with the bill.	

2.6. For the policy to be given effect by this Bill, are the potential costs or benefits likely to be impacted by:	
(a) the level of effective compliance or non-compliance with applicable obligations or standards?	NO
(b) the nature and level of regulator effort put into encouraging or securing compliance?	NO
The legislation does not create new obligations or standards, or impact on existing obligations or standards.	

Part Three: Testing of Legislative Content

Consistency with New Zealand's international obligations

3.1. What steps have been taken to determine whether the policy to be given effect by this Bill is consistent with New Zealand's international obligations?

Consultation has not taken place as there are no implications for New Zealand's international obligations.

Consistency with the government's Treaty of Waitangi obligations

3.2. What steps have been taken to determine whether the policy to be given effect by this Bill is consistent with the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi?

There has been no specific consultation, but the WAI 2500 Military Veterans' Kaupapa Inquiry is aware of it.

Consistency with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990

3.3. Has advice been provided to the Attorney-General on whether any provisions of this Bill appear to limit any of the rights and freedoms affirmed in the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990?

TBC

Offences, penalties and court jurisdictions

3.4. Does this Bill create, amend, or remove:

(a) offences or penalties (including infringement offences or penalties and civil pecuniary penalty regimes)?

NO

(b) the jurisdiction of a court or tribunal (including rights to judicial review or rights of appeal)?

NO

Privacy issues

3.5. Does this Bill create, amend or remove any provisions relating to the collection, storage, access to, correction of, use or disclosure of personal information?

NO

External consultation

3.6. Has there been any external consultation on the policy to be given effect by this Bill, or on a draft of this Bill?

YES

There was consultation on the policy with government agencies – the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Ministry of Defence, the New Zealand Defence Force, the Parliamentary Council Office, and the Treasury.

Other testing of proposals

3.7. Have the policy details to be given effect by this Bill been otherwise tested or assessed in any way to ensure the Bill's provisions are workable and complete?

NO

Part Four: Significant Legislative Features

Compulsory acquisition of private property

4.1. Does this Bill contain any provisions that could result in the compulsory acquisition of private property?	NO
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Charges in the nature of a tax

4.2. Does this Bill create or amend a power to impose a fee, levy or charge in the nature of a tax?	NO
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Retrospective effect

4.3. Does this Bill affect rights, freedoms, or impose obligations, retrospectively?	NO
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Strict liability or reversal of the usual burden of proof for offences

4.4. Does this Bill:	
(a) create or amend a strict or absolute liability offence?	NO
(b) reverse or modify the usual burden of proof for an offence or a civil pecuniary penalty proceeding?	NO

Civil or criminal immunity

4.5. Does this Bill create or amend a civil or criminal immunity for any person?	NO
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Significant decision-making powers

4.6. Does this Bill create or amend a decision-making power to make a determination about a person's rights, obligations, or interests protected or recognised by law, and that could have a significant impact on those rights, obligations, or interests?	NO
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Powers to make delegated legislation

4.7. Does this Bill create or amend a power to make delegated legislation that could amend an Act, define the meaning of a term in an Act, or grant an exemption from an Act or delegated legislation?	NO
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4.8. Does this Bill create or amend any other powers to make delegated legislation?	NO
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Any other unusual provisions or features

4.9. Does this Bill contain any provisions (other than those noted above) that are unusual or call for special comment?	NO
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