



Headquarters
New Zealand Defence Force
Defence House
Private Bag 39997
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Lower Hutt 5045
New Zealand

OIA-2025-5336

29th April 2025

Dear [REDACTED]

I refer to your email of 7 April 2025 requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA), a copy of the last two *Capability and Readiness Updates prepared for the Minister of Defence*.

The two most recent *Capability and Readiness Updates* are enclosed. Where indicated, information is withheld in accordance with section 6(a) of the OIA as making this information available would be likely to prejudice the security and defence of New Zealand; section 9(2)(a) of the OIA to protect privacy; and, section 9(2)(g)(i) of the OIA to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinion.

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 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, with your personal information removed.

Yours sincerely

GA Motley
Brigadier
Chief of Staff HQNZDF

Enclosures:

1. Capability and Readiness Update, December 2023
2. Capability and Readiness Update, April – June 2024



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NEW ZEALAND

OMDRFI 2023-135

19 December 2023

Minister of Defence

NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE CAPABILITY AND READINESS UPDATE FOR DECEMBER 2023

Introduction

This letter provides an update on the capability and readiness status of the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF), including response options for the summer 2023-24 High Risk Weather Season (HRWS).¹

Background - Major Factors Affecting the Generation of Military Capability

Further to my briefing to you on the 13th of December, the following major factors are expected to continue to adversely affect the generation of military capabilities for the period ahead:

- **Workforce attrition** – attrition remains unsustainably high despite the Budget 2023 remuneration uplift, further diminishing the NZDF's already depleted collective skill and experience base. Although there was a slight reduction in month-by-month attrition rates over the last five months, the Christmas period traditionally sees a spike in release numbers.
- **Workforce hollowness** – the paucity of personnel in critical trades means that sustaining force generation, delivering operational outputs, introducing new and upgraded capabilities and meeting maintenance demands concurrently is beyond NZDF's capacity in the short to medium term. s. 6(a)
[REDACTED]
- **Materiel** – equipment and platform obsolescence, ageing fleets and cost pressures, combined with problematic global supply chains and decreasing numbers of maintainers and technicians, continue to lengthen repair and maintenance timeframes. This results in longer periods when key equipment and platforms are not available.

¹ The summer 2023-24 HRWS is the period over which tropical cyclones form in the South Pacific and runs from 1 November 2023 to 30 April 2024.
s. 6(a)
[REDACTED]

- **New capability introduction and integration** – introduction into service programmes for new or upgraded capabilities continue eg. P-8A aircraft and Bushmaster armoured vehicles and there are some expected periods of output degradation until they conclude. Prioritising the delivery of these programmes will continue to result in a reduction in capacity to concurrently conduct business-as-usual force generation activity as well as output delivery in some instances.

Outputs Capability Summary as at December 2023

s. 6(a)

agreed domestic emergency responses and options to assist other Government agencies are mostly available. A summary of the capability and readiness status for each Service and Defence sustainment is below.

Navy Capabilities. The Navy is extremely fragile with significant **workforce issues**, particularly within specialist technical trades. As a consequence, three of Navy's nine ships are in commercial care and custody arrangements due to a lack of suitably trained and experienced personnel to operate them safely at sea. While the Navy is generally able to support domestic emergency response requirements including civil defence, border protection tasks, and near-region Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) efforts, s. 6(a)

. These vulnerabilities translate to adverse effects on platform availability as follows:

- **Naval Combat Force (NCF).** The NCF comprises the two ANZAC Class Frigates. Navy is able to meet commitments following the successful completion of the operational test and evaluation of the Frigate Systems Upgrade capabilities. However, certification and material sustainment activities are adversely affected by ongoing workforce challenges. The transition of the NCF active vessel, from HMNZS TE MANA (TEM) to HMNZS TE KAHA (TEK), will be sequenced for early 2024 s. 6(a)

- **The Naval Patrol Force (NPF).** The NPF comprises Navy's offshore and inshore patrol vessels. The Navy has s. 6(a) three ships in commercial care and custody (tied up at Devonport Naval Base). s. 6(a)

. While other non-traditional platforms can provide naval patrol effects, there will possibly be occasions where other government agency resource and border protection support requests are turned down and short gaps in search and rescue coverage.

- **HMNZS CANTERBURY (CAN).** CAN is the Navy's best suited platform for the most probable responses required during the High Risk Weather Season (HRWS), but is unavailable until 1 March 2024 due to unavoidable maintenance and workforce shortages. s. 6(a)

helicopter s. 6(a)

- **HMNZS MANAWANUI (MAN).** MAN is the Navy's dive and hydrographic vessel, and will be the HRWS duty vessel until 1 March 2024. While a capable vessel, MAN does not have an organic aviation capability which means it cannot sail with a helicopter on board. s. 6(a)

- **HMNZS MATATAUA (MAT).** MAT is the key component of the Naval Littoral Warfare Force (including Navy Divers) and is available to meet its responsibilities domestically and regionally for HADR concurrently with its standing commitments to underwater search, recovery and maritime explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) requirements.
- **Seasprite Helicopter.** Seasprite Helicopter fleet serviceability remains a major concern due to airframe obsolescence and spare parts unavailability. s. 6(a)

Army Capabilities. The Army remains fragile with significant sustained **workforce shortfalls** of experienced personnel in the Army remaining at unsustainable levels and recruiting not meeting targets. Some specialist areas including logistics, medical, military policing and signals (computers and radios) are at minimal levels. s. 6(a)

- **Combat operations.** s. 6(a)

- **Special Forces domestic, regional and global responses.** The Army is able to maintain readiness for Special Forces domestic, regional and global responses s. 6(a)

- **Domestic emergency response.** The Army is generally able to support domestic emergency response requirements, including civil defence responses. The Army is also able to support near-region HADR efforts but in both instances there are significant limitations to Army's capacity to respond at scale (depending on task and

s. 6(a)

duration), s. 6(a)

- **Regional HADR response.** For the HRWS, the Army is able to maintain a regional HADR response group with military engineer construction capabilities at high readiness. This response carries some risk due to ongoing high attrition of engineer trade personnel in particular, and the concurrent support required by Operation ANTARCTICA. The major limiting factor for Army's responses into the Pacific is the lack of sealift while HMNZS CANTERBURY is unavailable⁵.
- **Fire response.** Army's emergency fire responses are significantly challenged in maintaining continuous coverage. Emergency response personnel are below 66% of requirement and falling. Negative growth is also anticipated for 2024 which means Army will be unable to sustain all stations for continuous coverage.
- **National Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD).** s. 6(a)

Air Force Capabilities. While the Air Force is able to meet national contingency requirements, other domestic outputs, regional search and rescue and HADR responses, it has a number of **capacity shortfalls** with respect to its ability to produce or sustain concurrent outputs, mostly due to **workforce limitations** resulting from long term attrition of experienced personnel. These vulnerabilities translate to adverse effects on Air Force availability as follows:

- **Fixed Wing Transport (FWT).** The FWT fleet includes the Boeing 757 and C-130H Hercules aircraft. For FWT, two of the remaining three C-130H Hercules aircraft are available noting that the withdrawal from service of another aircraft in December has contributed towards the overall vulnerability of sustaining fixed wing outputs. There will be reduced Boeing 757 aircraft availability for periods due to serviceability checks and scheduled maintenance. Boeing 757 availability continues to be at risk due to spares and defects identified during scheduled servicing.
- **Trained fixed wing maintenance.** Trained fixed wing maintenance staff levels are 80% against establishment. Supervision is the key area of concern with Avionics trade supervisors at 66% of establishment and Aircraft trade supervisors at 85%. s. 9(2)(g)(i)
- **Air surveillance and maritime patrol.** For air surveillance and maritime patrol requirements, an Air Force P-8A Poseidon aircraft is now available at short notice to conduct domestic and regional airborne surveillance tasks. These include supporting resource and border protection outputs and other national contingencies including search and rescue, EEZ surveillance and other maritime responses. Poseidon aircraft

⁴ Army's most utilitarian civil defence response capability, the Mercedes Benz UNIMOG fleet, is 42 years old and 40 percent of its vehicles are unavailable at any one time. Army's PINZGAUER vehicles are also beyond life-of-type and their serviceability rates continues to fall.

⁵ Army's major disaster response capabilities require heavy equipment and mobility support otherwise its response group is of limited utility.

introduction into service work continues with increased capability release to be approved, but ultimately personnel numbers will limit concurrent outputs in 2024.

- **Trained P-8A Poseidon maintenance staff.** Trained P-8A Poseidon maintenance staff are 68 percent against interim establishment but only 50 percent against the final capability release establishment. Supervisors are the key limiting factor, with contracted civilians temporarily in place. Avionics supervisors are critical s. 6(a)
- **Rotary Wing Transport (RWT).** The RWT fleet includes the A109 and NH90 helicopters. RWT helicopters are available at prescribed notice to provide national contingency cover and regional HADR support, despite low crew and maintenance numbers. National contingency requirements and some domestic tasks were not met while two NH90's were deployed to Solomon Islands. The major limiting factor for Air Force rotary wing support to the HRWS is the lack of sealift while HMNZS CANTERBURY is unavailable.
- **Rotary wing maintenance.** Rotary wing maintenance staff are 71 percent against establishment for the NH90 helicopter and 85 percent for the A109 helicopter. NH90 Aircraft trade supervisors are a critical vulnerability at 50 percent against establishment. The maintenance flight has reduced to a single shift with a flight line party supporting flying outside the maintenance shift hours. This means maintenance and scheduled servicing which would have been completed in a day is now completed over consecutive days.

Defence Force Logistics. Defence logistics branches have significant deficiencies in required experienced and qualified staff, predominantly in technical trades and in supervisory ranks. This has resulted in the closure of maintenance areas in order to consolidate staff. Remaining staff, given the workforce hollowness, are under persistent pressure and shouldering significant burden to ensure major equipment and platforms remain serviceable. This has been reflected in Human Resource indicators such as higher sick leave, a growing annual leave liability, and a significant increase in applications for high performance remuneration. A limited budget constrains the option of using civilian staff to close the gaps through fixed term agreements.

Equipment and platform obsolescence. Growing equipment and platform obsolescence increases the demand for maintenance support. Cost pressures and supply chain challenges are resulting in insufficient spares or rotables (repairable parts) being available to meet needs. While there is an intent to move away from a just-in-time supply philosophy to mitigate supply chain issues, there is no funding available to support a move to a just-in-case approach to spares holdings that would provide greater materiel maintenance assurance.

Summary

Notwithstanding the current state of the workforce, and other significant factors affecting the force generation of military capabilities, the NZDF retains options that can be tailored to specific circumstances but with reduced capacity. The limited availability of HMNZS CANTERBURY over the HRWS will restrict the NZDF's HADR response capacity and capability. A lack of helicopter, vehicle support, and heavy equipment would significantly undermine the overall agility and utility of a disaster relief response force. s. 6(a)

The NZDF's reduced workforce, particularly those experienced and qualified personnel essential for effective capability generation and delivery of outputs, represents significant systemic fragility. s. 6(a)

While the NZDF retains forces on standby to respond over the holiday period, I am conscious that our reduced workforce is weary after a busy year and need the opportunity to re-charge before an equally busy 2024 commences. I am therefore carefully balancing our readiness to respond with an intent to provide as many personnel as possible with some overdue rest and respite over the Christmas and New Year break.

Yours sincerely



KR SHORT
Air Marshal
Chief of Defence Force



NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE

SUBMISSION TO MINISTER COVER SHEET

Title	NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE CAPABILITY AND READINESS UPDATE: APRIL-JUNE 2024				
Tracking No	NZDF Tracking # 2024-089		Minister's Tracking #		
Importance of the Issue	High	v	Moderate		Routine
Urgency for Attention/Sign-off	URGENT		Request ministerial response by: Not required.		
Contacts	CDR s. 9(2)(g)(i)		s. 9(2)(a)		s. 9(2)(a)
Purpose	To provide an update on the capability and readiness status of the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) to deliver military response options (NZDF outputs) over the period from April to June 2024.				
Recommendations	<p>It is recommended that the Minister:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Note that the NZDF will be able to meet all agreed domestic emergency response options, and will be mostly available to support other Government agencies. However, the NZDF's ability to deliver concurrent activity or provide support to short notice requirements will be severely limited. b. Note that the NZDF's ability to deliver regional or global military responses will be conditionally limited s. 6(a) c. Note that the NZDF will be able to provide a range of response options over the remainder of the High Risk Weather Season, but with limitations to scope and duration. d. s. 6(a) e. Note that the Army will be able to meet all Special Forces standing domestic commitments, s. 6(a) f. Note that Air Force rotary wing and air surveillance capabilities will be available at prescribed notice, s. 6(a) g. Note that Air Force fixed wing transport will be available, but at reduced capacity due to scheduled maintenance requirements. 				
MoD Consultation	Not required: NZDF matter only.				
Minister's Comments					
Minister's Action	Signed/Noted/Agreed/Approved/Declined/Discussion required				
	Referred to:				
Minister's Signature				Date:	

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Chief of Defence Force

15 April 2024



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NTM 2024-089

15 April 2024

Minister of Defence

NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE CAPABILITY AND READINESS UPDATE: APRIL - JUNE 2024

Purpose

1. This document provides an update on the capability and readiness status of the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) to deliver military response options (NZDF outputs) over the period from April to June 2024.

Outputs Summary

2. All available naval platforms and aircraft types will be either domestically or regionally deployed, or preparing for deployment, over the period¹. Approximately 12% of the Army's workforce will be committed to overseas operations and exercises (generating, deployed or reconstituting), or committed to other military engagement.

3. The NZDF will be able to meet all agreed domestic emergency responses, and will be mostly available to support other Government agencies. Workforce shortages, however, will mean that the ability to commit to concurrent activity, or to support short notice requirements, will be severely limited. The NZDF's ability to deliver and sustain regional or global military response options will also remain either conditionally limited s. 6(a)

4. The primary factor that continues to limit the NZDF's ability to generate and/or sustain concurrent outputs is the reduced workforce and subsequent hollowness, resulting from long term attrition of specialist and experienced personnel. Although latest figures indicate that attrition levels are abating, they are still high, and the loss of personnel up until this point has significantly depleted the NZDF's collective skill and experience base. The shortage of technical and other specialist staff across all three Services and supporting logistics functions, combined with the general loss of fully trained personnel, will continue to place even greater pressure on the remaining workforce.

5. Introduction into service programmes for new or upgraded capabilities will continue as scheduled. However, prioritising the delivery of these programmes against force generation activity and output delivery is largely a zero-sum situation due to the personnel state. As such, the margins within which each of these lines of effort are being balanced has reduced to levels of fragility that threaten output delivery and require the application of high level mitigations. Single points of failure, be that a qualified individual or critical equipment item, have the realistic potential to impact platform availability and/or planned activities.

¹ This does not include vessels in care and custody arrangements, or aircraft that have been retired in accordance with scheduled capability transition plans.

High Risk Weather Season – Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief

6. The current High Risk Weather Season (HRWS) officially ends on 30 April. The NZDF will be able to deliver a light-medium response in support of a domestic or regional Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief (HADR) event, but there are limitations to the full scope and duration of any response options. HMNZS CANTERBURY (amphibious and sealift vessel) is operational again following a scheduled maintenance period, and is the most suitable platform for strategic sealift with a large freight and personnel carriage capacity. However, the ship will not have an organic aviation or amphibious capability² over the remainder of the HRWS. Fixed wing aircraft will be available for HADR, but will require the prioritisation of a limited number of available airframes; and the Army's HADR force will be able to meet the directed response time with some personnel and equipment mitigations applied. The duration of any response will, however, be limited to a single short commitment as personnel shortages will not allow for multiple rotations.

Navy Capabilities

7. The Navy will be able to deliver against most outputs, but naval patrol capability will continue to be degraded due to reduced platform availability, s. 6(a)

The Navy system remains particularly fragile with singular staff losses in specific trades posing an ongoing risk to platform availability.³

8. The transition of the Naval Combat Force active vessel from HMNZS TE MANA to HMNZS TE KAHA is underway. s. 6(a)

It is expected that Navy will be able to meet directed Naval Combat Force readiness requirements on completion of this transition, s. 6(a)

9. HMNZS CANTERBURY has deployed to the Solomon Islands in support of upcoming elections. s. 6(a)

10. HMNZS AOTEAROA (sustainment vessel) will have an organic aviation capability by late April, following first-of-class flight trials with the naval Seasprite helicopter. This is ahead of HMNZS AOTEAROA's participation in the international maritime warfare 'Rim of the Pacific' (RIMPAC) exercise in July.

11. HMNZS TAUPO (inshore patrol vessel) continues to be the only active vessel of the Naval Patrol Force. The two offshore patrol vessels (HMNZS OTAGO and HMNZS WELLINGTON) and second inshore patrol vessel (HMNZS HAWEA) remain in commercial care and custody arrangements due to workforce constraints. While other platforms can provide naval patrol effects from time-to-time, depending on availability and location, s. 6(a) – particularly noting that all available platforms are expected to be deployed overseas in the coming months. Short

² The amphibious capability is referred to as logistics-over-the-shore (LOTS) and is the ability for landing craft to deliver personnel, stores and equipment across a beach where a wharf or jetty may not exist, or is unusable.

³ Marine Technician (Propulsion), Marine Technician (Electrical), and Seaman Combat Specialist.

notice resource and border protection support requests from other Government agencies may therefore be unworkable.

12. The Naval Littoral Warfare Force will be available to meet all domestic and regional responsibilities through the deployable maritime capabilities of HMNZS MATATAUA, which includes underwater search, recovery and maritime explosive ordnance disposal capabilities.

Army Capabilities

13. The Army will generally be able to support domestic emergency response requirements, including civil defence responses, and support to near-region HADR efforts. Special Forces will maintain readiness for a domestic, regional or global response. s. 6(a)

14. Personnel shortages in several specialist areas continue to pose the greatest risk to Army's regeneration plan. Staff numbers across the logistics, health and military policing trades are at, or under, the minimum staffing levels needed for directed capabilities. s. 6(a)

15. Although the Army's ability to conduct and sustain combat operations is not expected to be fully regenerated until at least 2027, in several key exercises over the next two years have been identified as phased regeneration milestones. This is, however, predicated on the success of retention initiatives and net growth, as well as the realisation of several capability modernisation programmes – primarily the Networked Enabled Army and Protected Mobility programmes.

16. Provided these capability programmes remain funded, they will partially resolve some of the Army's obsolescence issues through the replacement of tactical radios and legacy vehicle fleets. An urgent replacement project to replace the obsolete explosive ordnance disposal robot fleet is also underway. s. 6(a)

Air Force Capabilities

17. The Air Force will be able to meet national contingency (NATCON) requirements, other domestic outputs, and support to regional SAR and HADR responses. The Air Force has the ability to produce concurrent deployed outputs of different aircraft fleets, but multiple simultaneous deployments of the same fleet, or sustainment of extended duration deployments, will be limited.

18. The P-8A Poseidon aircraft will be available at short notice to conduct domestic and regional airborne surveillance tasks. These include supporting resource and border protection outputs and other national contingencies including SAR, Exclusive Economic Zone surveillance and other maritime responses. The phased introduction of the P-8A into service remains on track for full operational release in late 2025.⁴ s. 6(a)

s. 6(a)

19. Fixed wing aircraft availability will need to be carefully managed due to B757 and C-130H scheduled maintenance (with only one B757 available for the next two months, and two C-130Hs available until October). The transition to the C-130J fleet is on track, with all five C-130J aircraft scheduled to arrive in country by late October. This will enable a continuation of fixed wing outputs within required response times, s. 6(a)

Pilot and aviation technical trade attrition remains an ongoing risk due to demand in the commercial aviation industry, and anticipated commercial recruitment drives in the near-medium term.

20. Two NH90 helicopters and supporting elements are deployed to the Solomon Islands in HMNZS CANTERBURY. The remaining six NH90 helicopters will be available at prescribed notice to provide NATCON cover and regional HADR support. s. 6(a)

21. The rationalisation of the naval Seasprite helicopter fleet from eight to five aircraft has partially mitigated the impact of significant obsolescence issues. It has also increased aircraft availability such that the first-of-class flight trials and generation of HMNZS AOTEAROA's aviation capability can now occur.

s. 6(a)

Defence Force Logistics

23. Significant deficiencies in technical experience and qualified staff within Defence Logistics Command further exacerbate maintenance challenges. Although most keenly felt within the Air Force, the reduced technical workforce is a shared challenge across the wider Defence Logistics Command, and a limited budget constrains the option of contracting civilian staff.

24. Back-end logistics staff are being reassigned to cover gaps in front-line support to ensure major equipment and platforms remain serviceable. s. 6(a)

These pressures are impacting maintenance timeframes, at a time when the maintenance demand associated with legacy equipment and aging platforms is increasing.

25. Cost pressures and supply chain challenges are also resulting in insufficient spares and rotables (repairable parts) being available to meet that demand. While there remains an intent to move away from a just-in-time supply philosophy to mitigate supply chain issues, there is no funding available to support a move to a just-in-case approach to spares holdings.

Conclusion

26. Despite workforce challenges and other significant factors affecting the generation and availability of military capabilities, the April to June period will be busy for the NZDF. The

heightened level of activity will see valuable operational experience gained by individuals, improved collective competency at the unit level, and the regeneration of some specific capabilities.

27. The NZDF retains options that can be tailored to meet specific circumstances.

s. 6(a)

The trade-offs associated with concurrently delivering outputs, introducing capability, and meeting increasing maintenance demands – whilst also making best efforts towards force regeneration – will continue to constrain the levels to which each of these lines of effort can be effectively achieved.

Recommendations

28. It is recommended that the Minister:

a. **Note** that the NZDF will be able to meet all agreed domestic emergency response options, and will be mostly available to support other Government agencies. However, the NZDF's ability to deliver concurrent activity or provide support to short notice requirements will be severely limited.

NOTED

b. **Note** that the NZDF's ability to deliver regional or global military responses will be conditionally limited s. 6(a)

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c. **Note** that the NZDF will be able to provide a range of response options over the remainder of the High Risk Weather Season, but with limitations to scope and duration.

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d. s. 6(a)

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e. **Note** that the Army will be able to meet all Special Forces standing domestic commitments, s. 6(a)

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f. **Note** that the Air Force rotary wing and air surveillance capabilities will be available at prescribed notice, s. 6(a)

NOTED

g. **Note** that the Air Force fixed wing transport will be available, but at reduced capacity due to scheduled maintenance requirements.

NOTED



KR SHORT
Air Marshal
Chief of Defence Force

Hon Judith Collins KC MP
Minister of Defence