



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

OIA-2025-5541

10th November 2025

[redacted]@nzme.co.nz

Dear [redacted]

I refer to your email of 12 September 2025 requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA), the following information *relating to the hunt for Tom Phillips*:

...whether any consideration was given to this [that the NZSAS could have been used to track Phillips or otherwise assist] and asks for all information held since September 2021 regarding any requests, approaches, consultations, discussions, briefings, or internal correspondence relating to possible Special Operations Command (SOCOM) involvement in efforts to locate Tom Phillips in the Waitomo district or surrounding bush areas.

...any information held by the CDF, which would include any responses to questions from the Executive or other agencies, or any queries raised with or to the Chief of Army.

New Zealand Police requested New Zealand Special Air Service (NZSAS) support in the search for Mr Tom Phillips and his children on three occasions. The following NZSAS support was provided:

- 10-13 June 2024 – Up to four personnel to provide operational advice and special reconnaissance support;
- 4-6 October 2024 – Up to four personnel to provide operational and special reconnaissance advice and tracking support;
- 24-27 April 2025 – Up to four personnel to provide liaison and tracking support.

While the NZSAS attempted to locate Mr Phillips and his children, the delay between sightings and deployment, combined with adverse weather conditions, proved challenging. On some occasions, deployed NZSAS personnel were authorised to carry weapons for the purpose of self-defence only.

Enclosed is a copy of email correspondence, and copies of the NZ Police Requests for Support. Where indicated: operational staff information is withheld in accordance with section 6(a) of the OIA; information connected to the Police investigation is withheld in accordance with section 6(c); and personal information is withheld to protect privacy in accordance with section 9(2)(a).

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. Emails
2. NZ Police Requests for Support

Ministerial Services

From: HQNZDF s. 6(a)
Sent: Thursday, 6 June 2024 5:05 p.m.
To: 'GRACE, Freda'; HQNZDF s. 6(a)
Subject: RE: [SEEMAIL] RESTRICTED: REQUEST FOR NZDF 1NZSAS REGIMENT SUPPORT TO NZ POLICE STG - OPERATION CURLY 10 - 13 JUNE 2024

Hi Freda,
Apologies for the delay, yes this is approved.
Best
s. 6(a)

LTCOL s. 6(a)
DD Strat Commitments - Domestic - SCEBR, Strategic Commitments Engagements Br
Te Ope Kātua o Aotearoa | New Zealand Defence Force
s. 6(a)
www.nzdf.mil.nz



From: GRACE, Freda [mailto:Freda.Grace@police.govt.nz]
Sent: Wednesday, 5 June 2024 12:27 p.m.
To: HQNZDF s. 6(a)
Subject: FW: RESTRICTED: REQUEST FOR NZDF 1NZSAS REGIMENT SUPPORT TO NZ POLICE STG - OPERATION CURLY 10 - 13 JUNE 2024

Good afternoon,

Just wondering how we are going with this please, is it approved?

Thank you.

Freda

Freda Grace
Manager Operations Support
Tactical Operations
Security and International, Police National Headquarters, Wellington

M s. 9(2)(a)
E freda.grace@police.govt.nz



From: GRACE, Freda

Sent: Friday, 31 May 2024 2:53 pm

To: HQNZDF s. 6(a)

Subject: FW: RESTRICTED: REQUEST FOR NZDF 1NZSAS REGIMENT SUPPORT TO NZ POLICE STG - OPERATION CURLY 10 - 13 JUNE 2024

Good afternoon,

To keep you in the loop, it is Op Sec please.

Many thanks.

Freda.

Freda Grace

Manager Operations Support

Tactical Operations

Security and International, Police National Headquarters, Wellington

M +64 21 1911086

E freda.grace@police.govt.nz



From: RAKENA, Gary <Gary.Rakena@police.govt.nz>

Sent: Friday, 31 May 2024 2:27 pm

To: s. 6(a)

Cc: GRACE, Freda <Freda.Grace@police.govt.nz>; s. 6(a)

s. 6(a)

Subject: RESTRICTED: REQUEST FOR NZDF 1NZSAS REGIMENT SUPPORT TO NZ POLICE STG - OPERATION CURLY 10 - 13 JUNE 2024

s. 6(a)

1NZSAS Regiment

Rennie Lines

Kia ora s. 6(a)

As discussed, attached is the request from NZ Police for support Operation Curly per s9.1 of the Defence Act 1990.

Northern STG Acting Sergeant s. 9(2)(a) will be the STG Forward Commander for the deployment and can be the POC for any appreciation/ planning.

I have cc'd Inspector Freda Grace who will forward this request formally through SCE.

I understand that your leads are talking with s. 9(2)(a) in advance of any planned reconnaissance next week.

Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any queries.

Nga mihi kia koutou.

Gary Rakena
Inspector: Tactical Commander
Special Tactics Group (Northern)

Security and International, PNHQ

s. 6(c)

AUCKLAND

[SEEmail]

P s. 9(2)(a)

M

E gary.rakena@police.govt.nz



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Ministerial Services

From: HQNZDF s. 6(a)
Sent: Thursday, 3 October 2024 10:53 p.m.
To: Shaw, Andrew, BRIG; HQNZDF s. 6(a)
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: RESTRICTED: REQUEST FOR NZDF 1NZSAS REGIMENT SUPPORT TO NZ POLICE STG - OPERATION CURLY 4 October

Ack sir.

LTCOL s. 6(a)
DD Strat Commitments - Domestic - SCEBR, Strategic Commitments Engagements Br
Te Ope Kātua o Aotearoa | New Zealand Defence Force
s. 6(a)
www.nzdf.mil.nz



From: Shaw, Andrew, BRIG
Sent: Thursday, October 3, 2024 10:52 PM
To: s. 6(a)
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: RESTRICTED: REQUEST FOR NZDF 1NZSAS REGIMENT SUPPORT TO NZ POLICE STG - OPERATION CURLY 4 October

On further consideration.

Arming of NZDF personnel is authorised, subject to NZPOL concurrence. This is to be informed to SCE s. 6(a) prior to commencing task.

SOCC, s. 6(a) to Ack.

AC SCE

From: HQNZDF s. 6(a)
Date: Thursday, 03 Oct 2024 at 10:42 PM
To: s. 6(a)
Cc: Shaw, Andrew, BRIG s. 6(a)
Subject: FW: RESTRICTED: REQUEST FOR NZDF 1NZSAS REGIMENT SUPPORT TO NZ POLICE STG - OPERATION CURLY 4 October

Kia ora koutou,

SCE BR received the formal request to support NZPOL / OP CURLY.

Approval details below.

Best

s. 6(a)

LTCOL s. 6(a)

DD Strat Commitments - Domestic - SCEBR, Strategic Commitments Engagements Br
Te Ope Kātua o Aotearoa | New Zealand Defence Force

s. 6(a)

www.nzdf.mil.nz



From: Shaw, Andrew, BRIG

Sent: Thursday, October 3, 2024 10:37 PM

To: HQNZDF s. 6(a)

Cc: s. 6(a)

Subject: RE: RESTRICTED: REQUEST FOR NZDF 1NZSAS REGIMENT SUPPORT TO NZ POLICE STG - OPERATION CURLY 4 October

Approved.

NZDF pers may forward stage weapons. Carriage on task will be subject to further confirmation.

AC SCE

From: HQNZDF s. 6(a)

Date: Thursday, 03 Oct 2024 at 10:32 PM

To: Shaw, Andrew, BRIG s. 6(a)

Cc: s. 6(a)

Subject: RESTRICTED: REQUEST FOR NZDF 1NZSAS REGIMENT SUPPORT TO NZ POLICE STG - OPERATION CURLY 4 October

Sir,

NZ Police have requested NZ SAS tracking support to assist with the location and arrest of Thomas Phillips and the safe recovery of his three children. A recent sighting of Mr Phillips has identified a start point and specialist tracking skills are required to conduct this task.

NZDF will provide tracking support only and will not take part in the arrest.

Due to the time sensitivity of the last sighting, Police are requesting support from 4 October for an unspecified period of time, likely two days.

NZDF previously supported a Police task to arrest Mr Phillips and provided specialist covert green role surveillance in June.

Attached is the previous Police request for support, little has changed since this request was submitted.

At this point in time National Police Headquarters have not requested that NZDF personnel be armed.

SHOULD WE: Yes. This task can be conducted under s9(1) of the Defence Act.

CAN WE: Yes. NZDF can support this request and it aligns with NZ Government best interests.

WILL WE: I recommend you APPROVE this request in support of NZ Police and approve DIRLAUTH between SOCC and STG to facilitate detailed planning and execution.

For your consideration and approval.

Best

s. 6(a)

LTCOL s. 6(a)

DD Strat Commitments - Domestic - SCEBR, Strategic Commitments Engagements Br

Te Ope Kātua o Aotearoa | New Zealand Defence Force

s. 6(a)

www.nzdf.mil.nz



From: [GRACE, Freda](#)
To: s. 6(a)
Cc: [RAKENA, Gary](#)
Subject: Fw: RESTRICTED: REQUEST FOR NZDF 1NZSAS REGIMENT SUPPORT TO NZ POLICE STG - OPERATION CURLY 10 - 13 JUNE 2024
Date: Thursday, 3 October 2024 10:05:46 pm
Attachments: [image001.png](#)
[image002.png](#)
[image003.png](#)
[image004.png](#)
[image005.png](#)
[image006.png](#)
[image007.png](#)
[image008.png](#)
[image009.png](#)
[REQUEST FOR NZDF 1NZSAS REGIMENT SUPPORT TO NZ POLICE STG.pdf](#)

Good evening,

The attached request refers from June 2024.

The same request is being made again - urgently - same as attached but with dates being from tomorrow, 4 October 2024 for an unspecified period, likely two days initially.

Initial conversations have been held between Inspector Rakena and s. 6(a) and there has been an in principle agreement this can occur on a 'no notice to move'.

Apologies for the same document - tastings remain the same - it is a date change only.

Many thanks.

Freda.

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From: GRACE, Freda
Sent: Friday, May 31, 2024 2:52 PM
To: s. 6(a)
Subject: FW: RESTRICTED: REQUEST FOR NZDF 1NZSAS REGIMENT SUPPORT TO NZ POLICE STG - OPERATION CURLY 10 - 13 JUNE 2024

Good afternoon,

To keep you in the loop, it is Op Sec please.

Many thanks.

Freda.

Freda Grace

Manager Operations Support

Tactical Operations

Security and International, Police National Headquarters, Wellington

SEP 2024

M s. 9(2)(a)

E freda.grace@police.govt.nz



Ministerial Services

From: GRACE, Freda <Freda.Grace@police.govt.nz>
Sent: Thursday, 24 April 2025 11:16 p.m.
To: s. 6(a) LTCOL; HQNZDFS. 6(a)
Cc: JOHNSON, Michael (Mike); RAKENA, Gary
Subject: RE: [EXTERNAL] RE: [SEEMAIL] RESTRICTED - Request for Support

Many thanks s. 6(a) your continued assistance is appreciated.
Freda

Freda Grace MNZM
Manager Operations Support
Tactical Operations
National Security and International, Police National Headquarters, Wellington

M s. 9(2)(a)
E freda.grace@police.govt.nz



From: s. 6(a) LTCOL
Sent: Thursday, April 24, 2025 2:48 PM
To: GRACE, Freda ; HQNZDF.SCE.COMMITMENTS.DOMESTIC
Cc: JOHNSON, Michael (Mike) ; RAKENA, Gary
Subject: RE: [EXTERNAL] RE: [SEEMAIL] RESTRICTED - Request for Support

*** [SEEMAIL] This message may contain classified information ***

Hi Freda,

Extension through to 27 April approved under the control measures in the existing conop.

Best

s. 6(a)

From: GRACE, Freda <Freda.Grace@police.govt.nz>
Date: Thursday, 24 Apr 2025 at 9:50 AM
To: s. 6(a) LTCOL s. 6(a) HQNZDFS. 6(a)
s. 6(a)
Cc: JOHNSON, Michael (Mike) <Michael.Johnson@police.govt.nz>, RAKENA, Gary <Gary.Rakena@police.govt.nz>

Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] RE: [SEEMAIL] RESTRICTED - Request for Support

Good morning s. 6(a)

In relation to the below approval, my understanding is that approval was granted with an end time being 24th April 2025.

Due to the operational environment and the way information and opportunities are presenting, we would ask that there be a reconsideration of the time period and seek your approval to extend the request to 27th April 2025.

For your consideration and seeking approval please.

Nga mihi nui

Freda

Freda Grace MNZM
Manager Operations Support
Tactical Operations
National Security and International, Police National Headquarters, Wellington

M s. 9(2)(a)

E freda.grace@police.govt.nz



From: s. 6(a) LTCOL s. 6(a)

Sent: Friday, April 11, 2025 10:38 AM

To: GRACE, Freda <Freda.Grace@police.govt.nz>; RAKENA, Gary <Gary.Rakena@police.govt.nz>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] RE: [SEEMAIL] RESTRICTED - Request for Support

CAUTION: This email originated from outside the New Zealand Police Network. DO NOT click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and are assured that the content is safe.

*** [SEEMAIL] This message may contain classified information ***

Kia ora Freda,

AC SCE has approved this request for support and has approved DIRLAUTH with the respective Defence POC to finalise planning.

Can you please work with s. 6(a) to confirm RW support.

Can you please keep SCE Br informed if the tracking team and or the NH 90 are requested to forward deploy.

Best

s. 6(a)

LTCOL s. 6(a)

DD Strat Commitments - Domestic - SCEBR, Strategic Commitments Engagements Br

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s. 6(a)

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From: GRACE, Freda <Freda.Grace@police.govt.nz>

Sent: Wednesday, 9 April 2025 15:20

To: HQNZDF s. 6(a)

Cc: RAKENA, Gary <Gary.Rakena@police.govt.nz>

Subject: RESTRICTED - Request for Support

Good afternoon s. 6(a)

The attached documents are requests from Police (STG) for support from defence for Operation Curly 10.

The requests are outlined in detail in the two attached documents, one request for LO support from 1NZSAS and a tracking capability, should the right conditions arise. The second request is for a LO from 3 Squadron, or on their behalf, with a NH90 capability available, again if the circumstances dictate.

Request is for the LO to be situated with other Command elements at the command base, details can be advised, Operation Curly is taking place in Waikato District.

Could the attached information and the actual operation details please be kept – it is a covert operation – and for best results details and activity needs to be kept covert.

Operation likely to start 14th April 2025, Monday.

Any queries, please ask, I trust it is clear.

Many thanks for your consideration of the two requests in support of the operation.

Nga mihi nui

Freda.

Freda Grace MNZM

Manager Operations Support

Tactical Operations

National Security and International, Police National Headquarters, Wellington

M s. 9(2)(a)

E freda.grace@police.govt.nz



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REQUEST FOR NZDF 1NZSAS REGIMENT SUPPORT TO NZ POLICE STG

S. 9.1 DEFENCE ACT 1990

PREAMBLE

Thomas PHILLIPS s. 6(c), s. 9(2)(a) and his three children s. 9(2)(a) have been missing since December 2021 s. 9(2)(a)

He and a co-offender, s. 9(2)(a), are suspect in an aggravated robbery at the Te Kuiti ANZ Bank where a firearm was discharged (Op RORA, May 2023). A warrant has been issued for his arrest.

It is believed he is hiding himself and the children in a remote location.

Despite his ability to live rough, it is *almost certain* he has access to hard shelter and supplies.

On Tuesday the 11th of June 2024 Police intend to conduct overt local enquiries and make a media release regarding Phillips and his children.

s. 6(c)

STG have been requested to provide High Risk Covert Surveillance Operation (HRC SO) support to the wider Police operation in addition to overt activities in the area.

A secondary tasking is for STG teams to support any AOS response to confirmed sightings and provide a tracking capability if required.

WHAT IS REQUESTED:

Direct discreet Tracking and Special Reconnaissance support to pending Northern STG operation OTP 10 – 13 June 2024 in the Waikato West Area, Waikato District.

TASK – GENERAL OUTLINE:

STG Northern tasked with conducting a ground reconnaissance OTP 4 – 5 June 2024. This would involve minimal signature and be unsupported in the field. Task to identify suitable OP/ ambush points as well as test established tactical communications support. NZDF support to this phase is optional, but a representative would be preferred.

Subsequent deployment planning and integration training could then take place 6 – 7 June 2024 in Auckland between NZDF and STG.

Teams would then look to covertly deploy Monday 10 June 2024 by road to the forward base in Marokopa.

Teams to infill by road to the DOP NLT s. 6(c) Tuesday 11 June 2024 and move to LUP/ O.P positions.

HRC SO to be stood up for 24/7 coverage over the ensuing period ending NLT 2100hrs Thursday 13 June 2024 unless teams are re tasked.

Additional information:

- From Tuesday morning Police intend to saturate the area with staff to conduct activities over the week.
- Waikato AOS will provide a 24/7 QRF capability IOT respond to any sighting.
- Air Support will be provided by Eagle over the 72-hour period from Tuesday 11 June primarily to provide ISR and support any response to any sightings.
- s. 6(c)
- CIB investigators and district frontline staff intend to stop all vehicles moving in the area over the same period.

RISK

- s. 6(c) however he is believed to have been involved in an armed robbery of a Te Kuiti bank during this period of hiding.
- PHILLIPS has been captured on CCTV carrying a rifle while moving around at night.
- PHILLIPS is very familiar with the area and is considered to be well versed moving and hiding in the nearby bush.
- Police hold concerns about the children's welfare s. 6(c)
This will therefore be front of mind for any response in the event that they are located.

WEAPONS/ OTHER TASKS

- NZDF are not requested to be armed for this task.
- All STG deployed will be armed.
- All teams deployed will have medics embedded.
- All teams deployed will have communications with a forward base.

GROUPS INVOLVED

- Northern STG
- NZ Police Air Support (Eagle)
- Waikato AOS
- Waikato District Investigators
- Waikato District Frontline Staff

s. 6(c)

GROUND/LOCATION

Reference Operation Curly Ground Brief previously shared with NZDF.

WHEN

- Travel as indicated above Phase 1 (4-5 June) s. 6(c)

- Travel as indicated above Phase 2 (10 – 13 June)
- Accommodation - with STG – s. 6(c)
- Method of travel – s. 6(c)
- Messing – met by NZ Police

WARRANTS/CHAIN OF EVIDENCE

- 1NZSAS Tracking/ SR support sought per S9.1 of the defence Act 1990
- A search warrant per S6 Search and Surveillance Act 2012 will be sought for the target property.
- A S53 Search and Surveillance Act 2012 Warrant will also be sought.

Direct liaison once authorised can be with Inspector Gary Rakena on s. 9(2)(a) to address further coordination matters.

Nga mihi kia koutou.

REQUEST FOR NZDF 1NZSAS REGIMENT TRACKING SUPPORT

TO

NZ POLICE SPECIAL TACTICS GROUP (STG).

9.1 DEFENCE ACT 1990

PREAMBLE

This matter relates to a pending search phase for Thomas Phillips and his three (3) children who have been at large since December 2021.

The Waikato Police district have employed an Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) to conduct a search of a 50km² area in Marokopa. The ground is considered challenging and consists of undulating terrain, thick native bush, and extensive farmland.

STG have been requested to provide a contingent response in the event of any sighting of the cohort. The contingent response has a number of possibilities, the focus is on covert activity to achieve the mission: to safely locate and secure s. 9(2)(a) .

The STG response is scalable dependent on the activities of the group and initially only involves Northern STG.

If there is PID and a high likelihood of achieving the mission, the National STG will be activated IOT conduct a Deliberate Action (D.A) to safely secure the children.

Given the ground and task, NZ Police seek support of 1NZSAS Regiment and its tracking capability.

WHAT IS REQUESTED:

Reference attached STG CONOPS dated 31 March 2025.

1. Liaison support to Northern STG OTP 14 – 24 April 2025 in the Waikato District, and
2. Tracking capability to respond to Waikato District to deploy in support of STG if required within the same period.

Note: Police seek an NZDF L.O to be co-located with STG at a designated holding area (H.A) and then upon any confirmed sighting, provide advice re tracking support. It should be noted that, due to the circumstances and/or location of the sighting, this support may not be required.

If it is deemed that the capability could add to STG response, then a 2-4 person tracking team would be sought to project to the area, brief and deploy under NZ Police Operational Command.

TASK – GENERAL OUTLINE:

NZ Police to conduct a search phase of a designated area in Marokopa using a UAS. Sorties to be conducted daily evening/ night.

The UAS, upon a confirmed sighting, is able to maintain a 24/7 ISR support to forces deployed into the area of operation (A.O).

STG will maintain a s. 6(c) QRF and dog tracking capability in a s. 6(c) posture at a designated H.A approximately s. 6(c) drive from the A.O.

In the event that the cohort, or part thereof, are:

1. *Transiting* across ground, or
2. Their location *cannot be specified* or
3. Are *lost from sight*, given the terrain and heavy native bush,

based on advice from an L.O - tracking support would be sought to enable STG to locate their direction of travel/ location/ camp as the case may be.

This deployment posture would be consistent with the October 2024 (Operation Curly 9) where 2 x 1NZSAS trackers deployed with STG teams into the field IOT locate sign of the group who were sighted the day before.

RISK

s. 6(c), s. 9(2)(a)



WEAPONS/ OTHER TASKS

Authorities are sought for any 1NZSAS to be armed for self defence purposes and in line with the postures that STG teams would have in the field.

The risk of NZDF becoming involved in any direct engagement would be minimised due to the location and posture within the patrol as per that on Curly 9.

Also as per Curly 9, full NZ Police fire orders would be articulated and comprehended by any armed tracking capability prior to deployment.

GROUPS INVOLVED

- Waikato District Investigation team – Operation Curly

- Northern STG
- s. 6(c)
- STG ICT
- Tactical Groups Operations Support PNHQ (upon escalation)
- Central/ Southern STG (upon escalation)
- Waikato AOS (upon escalation)
- Police Negotiation Team/ APNT (national) (upon escalation)
- NZ Police Air Support (Eagle) (upon escalation)
- RNZAF 3 Squadron (upon escalation) – subject of separate request to SCE
- St John SERT (upon escalation)

GROUND/LOCATION

Refer attached STG CONOPS for ground.

WHEN

- STG Command travel to H.A and conduct final checks ICT/ UAS/ TOG – Sunday 13 April 2025
- STG QRF to H.A and s. 6(c) NTM – NLT 1530hrs Monday 14 April 2025
- STG QRF only s. 6(c) NTM during daily UAS sorties 6-8 hrs.
- No intended UAS sorties OTP 18-20 April – STG intend to W/D from area back to district during these dates unless sighting has occurred.
- s. 6(c)
-
-
-
- Messing – all teams to be self-sufficient at the H.A and in the field (RAT packs)

WARRANTS/CHAIN OF EVIDENCE

There is no expectation that NZDF personnel are identified or will provide any evidential role if deployed.

- A Surveillance Device Warrant per the Search and Surveillance Act 2012
- s. 9(2)(a)
- s. 6(c), s. 9(2)(a)

Direct liaison once authorised can be with Inspector Gary Rakena on s. 9(2)(a) to address further coordination matters.