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OIA-2026-5701

6<sup>th</sup> May 2026

Spencer Jones

[fyi-request-33989-ff80408b@requests.fyi.org.nz](mailto:fyi-request-33989-ff80408b@requests.fyi.org.nz)

Dear Spencer Jones

I refer again to your request of 7 March 2026, under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA), seeking information relating to the existence of a national register of those who meet the definition of 'veteran' under the Veterans' Support Act 2014, and my response to you of 7 April 2026.

The New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) and Veterans' Affairs (VA) provide the Minister for Veterans with regular updates on relevant operational matters. The following items, which relate to or are closely aligned to the topic you have requested information on, were included in briefings to the current Minister, for the period specified.

***Status Report to the Minister for Veterans for the week beginning 6 May 2024***

***Recording of qualifying operational service***

*A change has been introduced relating to the recording on the NZDF's HR information system (SAP) of an individual's qualifying operational service (QOS) - by country or location - and the dates of the related deployment.*

*All QOS completed from the date the change was introduced, 1 May 2024, will now be recorded on SAP, and will be accessible to the staff concerned, and their managers. The next phase of this project will be looking to add records of QOS status from earlier deployments (those that took place between 2014 and the current date).*

*The new solution will record an individual's QOS deployment (by country or location) and the dates of the deployment, using a bulk upload process to load the data into SAP.*

*A notification email will then be sent to affected personnel, and this will include a link to relevant information about entitlements from Veterans' Affairs that they have become eligible for.*

*There are currently only three deployments (with a total of around 40 personnel) who have qualified for QOS status since the new system came into operation, with the first contingent being those taking part in OP FARAD (MFO Sinai) who will return to New Zealand later this month.*

**Status Report to the Minister for Veterans for the week beginning 29 September 2025**

Veteran data added to VA's client management system

We have previously advised you that VA has received data from the NZDF on service members who had undertaken qualifying operational service since 2014 (and who may therefore be eligible for support under the Veterans' Support Act); and that VA now receives a qualifying operational service update each month from the NZDF.

Last week, VA was able to add this data to our client management system – this involved more than 1,400 veterans (including those who remain in service as well as those who have since left active service) who are now formally registered with VA, so they will be known to us should they apply for support at some stage in the future.

Work is under way to source data for those who achieved qualifying operational service earlier than 2014, and who have not yet "opted in" to VA by making a claim with us.

**Status Report to the Minister for Veterans for the week beginning 6 October 2025**

Public consultation about the proposed data collection approach and content of the New Zealand census

Veterans' Affairs has been advised of the intention of Stats NZ to release a public consultation document on the proposed future of the New Zealand census. The intention which is being canvassed is a new approach, aimed at delivering an effective and efficient census within a modern administrative data-first framework.

While we had no comment to make on the Cabinet paper, we have signalled that we will be seeking to engage on the public consultation document regarding the definition of veteran given in the document and on data needs.

We have noted that the consultation document states that in New Zealand a veteran is anyone who has completed a period of military service with the New Zealand Defence Force but no longer serves. We feel that this could have the potential for confusion, and it may be helpful to let Stats NZ know that there is a different legal definition of this term in New Zealand, and this should perhaps be noted in their document.

We will also be keen to engage with them on data collection. It is good to see that consideration is being given to collecting data on those who have served and that they are seeking to identify what use such data could be put to.

**Status Report to the Minister for Veterans for the week beginning 27 October 2025**

Veteran data added to the Stats NZ Integrated Data Infrastructure

VA previously worked with Stats NZ to have de-identified data on Vietnam veterans added to the Integrated Data infrastructure (IDI) that Stats NZ manages.

*We have arranged to supply another batch of de-identified data for input to the IDI before the end of the year. The data will not include any names or addresses, and, when we advise veterans that it will be added to the database, we will reassure them that privacy issues have been carefully considered, and we are confident that the data is safe, and no one's personal information will be compromised. We will not be supplying any data that we hold about spouses or children.*

*Once this material has been added, it will be available, under carefully controlled arrangements, for a range of research to be undertaken which will ultimately benefit all veterans. The need for more research on Kiwi veterans, and the gaps in our knowledge about them as a group, have been known for a long time. The development of The Veteran, Family and Whānau Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy Framework – Te Arataki highlighted the problem, as it was largely based on studies from overseas because of the lack of research from within New Zealand and about New Zealand service personnel*

*Once veteran data is in the IDI, researchers can take a closer look at things like how veterans engage with government agencies, what their needs might be, and the impacts of their deployments. The Veterans' Medical Research Trust Fund sponsors researchers to use IDI as one of reference tools.*

*We will be letting veterans know about this through our email newsletter, and have published a webpage for veterans to read more about our plans and the IDI. The address for this webpage is [www.va.mil.nz/IDI](http://www.va.mil.nz/IDI).*

In addition to these weekly updates, two briefings to the Minister are enclosed. The Social Wellbeing Agency paper 'Building an evidence base for understanding veteran outcomes' which was included as an annex to Enclosure 2 can be found online, from the Social Investment Agency website.

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. Possible Question on Military Service for New Zealand Census
2. Report on Interrogation of Integrated Data Infrastructure to Identify and Explore a Veteran Cohort



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 March 2024

Minister for Veterans

## **REPORT ON THE INTERROGATION OF THE INTEGRATED DATA INFRASTRUCTURE TO IDENTIFY AND EXPLORE A VETERAN COHORT**

### **Purpose**

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide you with an understanding of the work performed by Veterans' Affairs (VA) and the Social Wellbeing Agency (SWA) to identify a veteran cohort from the data contained within the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI)<sup>1</sup>. This is an output from the implementation of Te Arataki mō te Hauora Ngākau mō ngā Mōrehu a Tū me ō rātou Whānau – The Veteran, Family and Whānau Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy Framework (Te Arataki).

### **Background**

2. VA sponsored the development of Te Arataki in 2022. The completed report identified a critical deficit in both data and research regarding the mental health and wellbeing of New Zealand veterans. The primary limitation on improving our understanding of veterans in New Zealand, and their needs, was the inability to identify veterans within the larger population.

3. This gap made epidemiological examination of the veteran population difficult, if not impossible. This in turn limited both the quality and quantity of research performed on veterans in New Zealand.

4. Following completion of Te Arataki, VA engaged with the SWA to use new and previously developed tools within the IDI to identify a cohort of veterans and to perform a preliminary analysis to explore mental health and wellbeing indicators in veterans in New Zealand.

### **Progress**

5. Working alongside VA, the SWA created a veteran indicator within the IDI utilising pension data and various employment markers to identify a veteran cohort.

6. The SWA utilised a broader definition of veteran than that described in the legislation deriving the definition from Te Arataki – those that have completed a period of service in the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF), irrespective of duration, who are no longer serving in the NZDF.

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<sup>1</sup> The IDI is a large research database that collects individual level data about people and households. It includes administrative data about education, income, benefits, migration, justice, and health and comes from government agencies, Stats NZ surveys, and non-government organisations.

7. The marker was able to identify a cohort of 43,941 veterans within the IDI. The size of the whole veteran population in New Zealand is difficult to estimate in the absence of validated release numbers from the NZDF over time. Estimates range between 80,000 and 140,000. While the IDI sample does not capture the entirety of the veteran population, it is a representative and material sample of the whole.
8. The sample appears to be demographically representative of the NZDF; 64% of veterans were aged between 30 and 65 years, 72% were male, while 84% were New Zealand European, and 20% Maori.
9. During the period of the project, verified data regarding Vietnam veterans was added to the IDI. The SWA was able to use this data to validate the sample population identified using the veteran marker.
10. VA and the SWA performed preliminary analyses of two characteristics to evidence the utility of the sample in exploring the current and future needs of the veteran community; disability and employment.
11. Data collected as part of the 2018 census, the household labour force survey, and the general social survey allowed examination of the impact of functional disability on veterans when compared to the larger population. The analysis suggested the frequency and severity of disability in veterans aged less than 30 was less than that in the community, while for those aged greater than 65, the frequency and severity of disability became greater than in their peers.
12. Exploring employment data from 2018-19 allowed for illustration of employment characteristics of veterans in New Zealand. Overall, a large proportion of veterans, higher than the general population, had stable employment over the period studied. However, a higher proportion of veterans than the general population were not associated with any employer during the period. The data further allowed for an illustration of trends in the employment of veterans by industry.
13. These findings have been summarised in the attached report produced by the SWA (see Annex A).
14. In line with the requirements of Statistics New Zealand, both the veteran marker and the source code generated to interrogate the veteran cohort are available in the public domain.
15. These preliminary analyses signal possible utility in future research. The identification of a veteran cohort in the IDI will provide a resource previously unavailable to researchers, likely stimulate academic interest in the study of New Zealand veterans, allow examination of veterans' needs by relevant agencies, and potentially allow for the identification of targets for preventative investment in preserving the health and wellbeing of veterans.
16. The SWA authors are available to brief you in person on the results of their report.

### **Future work**

17. Entitlement data ceased to be uploaded into the IDI from 2014, when VA took over processing from the Ministry of Social Development. In part this is because VA does not have any data science capability. As part of the current interagency work programme created to support Te Aratangi, VA is exploring uploading historic entitlement data back to 2014, and recommencing uploads to the IDI on a yearly basis. This would enable a greater percentage of veterans to be identified.

IN CONFIDENCE

18. To ensure success, any future program of work designed to improve the mental health and wellbeing outcomes of veterans will be dependent on a knowledge of the veteran population. It was apparent from Te Arataki that the data to support this knowledge is not currently available to government or non-government agencies. The absence of data has critically hindered past endeavours to improve outcomes. The use of the IDI to establish a validated population of veterans in the wider community will allow for future interrogation of this population to identify and target the needs and vulnerabilities of the veteran population in New Zealand.

**Recommendations**

19. It is recommended that the Minister:

- a. **Note** the analysis and report undertaken by the Social Wellbeing Agency.

NOTED

- b. **Note** the efforts by Veterans' Affairs to recommence data entry into the IDI to enable further research.

NOTED

- c. **Agree** that you meet with the Social Wellbeing Agency authors of the report to brief you on its results.

AGREE/DISAGREE



**KR SHORT**  
Air Marshal  
Chief of Defence Force

**HON CHRIS PENK**  
Minister for Veterans

**Annex**

- A. Building An Evidence Base for Understanding Veteran Outcomes, Social Wellbeing Agency, April 2024



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NEW ZEALAND



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18 March 2024

Minister for Veterans

## **POSSIBLE QUESTION ON MILITARY SERVICE FOR NEW ZEALAND CENSUS**

### **Purpose**

1. This note responds to your request for background on, and the current status of, a matter that has been considered several times in the past regarding the possibility of including a question about military service in the New Zealand Census.

### **Background**

2. There has been no question relating to military service in the New Zealand census since 1971. The possibility of reinstating such a question has, however, been raised a number of times.
3. In 2008, the National Party made a pre-election commitment to restore a question about war service in the New Zealand Census. This matter was explored in 2009, in relation to the upcoming 2011 census. When that census was delayed by the Christchurch earthquakes, attempts were made to seek inclusion in the 2013 and 2016 censuses.
4. Statistics New Zealand did not support these approaches for a variety of reasons. They did not consider such a question to be a cost-effective way to obtain the information that was being sought (which was a comprehensive population-based assessment of living veterans in the general population and their social and economic status). The cost at the time of adding such a question to the census was assessed at \$300,000, and this would have required a Budget bid.
5. The matter came before a Cabinet committee in September 2012, and the decision was taken that such a question would not be included.
6. The matter was raised again by Ministers for Veterans in 2018 and 2021. It has not been progressed further.

### **The Census in Other Countries**

7. The UK, Canada, and Australia added a question about military service to their 2021 Census. The aim in all cases has been to gain a better understanding of the circumstances of those who have served and their families, which in turn will support better provision of services.
8. The questions being added to their censuses by other countries are brief and simple:
  - a. In Australia: has the person ever served in the Australian Defence Force?

- b. In Canada: the question asks people to self-identify as a veteran or as a currently serving Canadian Armed Forces member.
- c. In the UK: Have you previously served in the UK Armed Forces?

**Comment**

- 9. Any change to a census is costly, requires a long lead-time, and needs to be justified.
- 10. The justification for adding such a question is that the sort of information that it could generate is not easily available elsewhere, and it could assist service providers and others who support veterans and their families. It would provide an accurate estimate of the community of those who have previously served in the armed forces, and could provide data on such things as their housing situation, general health indicators and activity in the labour market.
- 11. In the case of a question in New Zealand about veteran status, however, there would be complications given the disparity between the term as used in common parlance, and the term as used legally to define eligibility for entitlements and services under the Veterans' Support Act 2014. In the interests of simplicity, such a question would need to focus on military service generally, rather than on identifying those who are eligible for support from Veterans' Affairs. While it would be of assistance should New Zealand wish to have a better understanding of its overall population with service experience, it is unlikely to be of specific assistance to Veterans' Affairs.
- 12. Given the cost, the difficulty of obtaining a "slot" in the census where so many Ministers and agencies are seeking to have information needs addressed, and the doubtful benefit of what would have to be a very general question, recent work to develop better information on veterans has focused instead on other areas.
- 13. We are working with the Ministry of Health, for example, to have a service marker added to the information which is held in New Zealand's health system so that GPs and others will be aware that a person with such a marker against their name could have specific experiences and specific needs. As part of the Te Aratangi work plan, we are also seeking to provide better education for healthcare professionals on the needs of veterans. Another strand of the Te Aratangi work plan is looking to ensure that information about veterans is added to the Integrated Data Infrastructure – this will facilitate research, and also enable the linking up of information about service-related experiences across a variety of indicators, including health, housing, and the labour market.

**Recommendations**

- 14. It is recommended that you:
  - a. **Note** that Australia, Canada, and the UK have added questions about military service to their respective censuses.
- b. **Note** that the New Zealand Census has not had a question about military service since 1971.

**NOTED**

**NOTED**

Zealand would not be of direct value to Veterans' Affairs in its work to support eligible veterans with qualifying service.


NOTED

- d. **Note** that attempts since 2008 to add a question about military service to the New Zealand Census have been unsuccessful.

NOTED

- e. **Note** that alternative avenues to obtain information that would develop understanding about New Zealand veterans are now being explored.

NOTED



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**HON CHRIS PENK**  
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