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OIA-2026-5809

18th June 2026

Dear [REDACTED]

I refer to your email of 20 May 2026 requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA):

- *A copy of the latest NZDF workforce strategy – whether draft, final or other stage*
- *A copy of any other report associated with the workforce strategy that you consider necessary to read alongside it*
- *A copy of 3 most key document/s guiding the NZDF's workforce development in relation to implementing emerging technology done since the DCP was released*

Enclosed is the NZDF Workforce Strategy, finalised in March 2026. This should be read alongside the NZDF Organisational Strategy, also enclosed, and the 2025 Defence Capability Plan (DCP)¹.

There are no documents regarding *the NZDF's workforce development in relation to implementing emerging technology done since the DCP was released*. This part of your request is declined in accordance with section 18(e) of the OIA because the information does not exist.

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. NZDF Workforce Strategy
2. NZDF Organisational Strategy

¹ <https://www.defence.govt.nz/assets/publications/Defence-Capability-Plan-25.pdf>

NZDF WORKFORCE STRATEGY

A critical component of the NZDF Organisational Strategy



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Foreword

The New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) exists to protect our nation and safeguard its interests. In an era marked by increasing instability and strategic competition, the demands on our Defence Force are growing rapidly. We must be prepared for the most challenging security environment of our generation.

New Zealand requires a Defence Force with the strength, resilience, and readiness to conduct decisive military operations - with partners when we can, and alone when we must. We must be capable of sustaining those operations in harsh and likely contested environments, across great distances, and for longer than before. Meeting this demand is not an option; it is essential.

To respond, we must transform our workforce. Our people are the foundation of our capability, and we need them to be well trained, adaptable, highly skilled and focussed on successful military operations. This Workforce Strategy sets the direction for achieving that transformation. It defines how we will recruit talent, accelerate development, modernise training, and retain the expertise needed to achieve our military missions.

This strategy sits alongside our Military and Organisational Strategies and the Defence Capability Plan. Together, they describe the scale of change required and the steps necessary to rebuild our warfighting edge, modernise our systems, and strengthen interoperability with partners. The path ahead demands discipline, cohesion, and a shared commitment to excellence.

Delivering this strategy is vital to New Zealand's security. Our nation expects an NZDF that is professional, prepared, and ready to act. Meeting those expectations is a collective responsibility, and the need for urgency is clear. I have absolute confidence that across the NZDF — military and civilian — we will rise to this challenge and build a Defence Force that is ready to fight tonight, tomorrow, and together.



Air Marshal Tony Davies
Chief of Defence Force

Introduction

For decades, New Zealanders have enjoyed a world underpinned by an international rules-based order that reflected our values, protected our interests and supported our ambitions. This has changed. We now face a very different world, a global environment that is continuing to deteriorate and the potential for conflict between states is now real. Consequently, the changes that have been made to the Defence Policy settings require an ambitious lift in our military capabilities, including greater lethality, the ability to sustain operations for longer, and to be able to operate concurrently. The Defence Capability Plan (DCP) 2025 sets out the capability uplifts required to achieve this change in settings, and is a significant factor in our workforce planning.

The previously benign global environment has also driven prolonged underinvestment in the NZDF which is now evidenced in our capabilities, infrastructure, and the current state of our workforce.

The NZDF organisational strategy makes it clear that we need higher levels of readiness in the near term, due to the increasingly contested strategic environment and reduced warning time for conflict. **Being ready for conflict in the near term – by delivering combat capability – is the primary driver for this workforce strategy.**

Summary of our way forward

In summary, our way forward will ensure our workforce is ready and able to deliver on Defence policy, and the government's investment in the NZDF and our capabilities. Our strategy delivers value-for-money by focusing on:

- critical combat capabilities and readiness
- optimising our workforce by balancing uniformed, civilian and contracted personnel, and
- strengthening our workforce sustainability, resilience and military depth.

To deliver our strategy, we have identified three Lines of Effort (LOE), summarised below:

LOE 1: Regenerate our military capability, at pace (includes the following Key Focus Areas [KFA] in priority order:

- KFA 1: Strengthen SQEP¹ with urgency
- KFA 2: Ensure we can scale up at pace
- KFA 3: Commence DCP workforce growth

LOE 2: Enhance our warfighting readiness and capability

LOE 3: Enhance workforce sustainment and controls

Although the challenges facing us are increasingly severe, we also have significant opportunities available to us - to innovate, modernise and strengthen. These LOE's will help us maximise these opportunities as we respond to our challenges.

About this document

This strategy briefly summarises the challenges we face, then sets out our strategic way forward – our approach to developing and investing in our people. It then briefly outlines how we intend to deliver the workforce changes needed to address our challenges and exploit emerging opportunities. By necessity, it has a 4-year horizon and will be revised alongside the update of the DCP in 2027. We anticipate the next iteration will align to the horizons set out in the DCP.

¹ Suitably Qualified and Experienced People – the ranks and trades that are critical for an effective combat force

Our workforce

Our current total workforce is made up of military, civilian and contracted personnel and our supplier and partner workforces. We must also acknowledge the important role of family/whānau and others who step up to support our service people every day - they are a valued part of our 'people ecosystem'.

NZDF Total Workforce – 2025 current state

Military Workforce	Civilian Workforce
Regular Force (approx. 8,800)	Employed (approx. 3,000)
Reserve Force (approx. 1,600)	Contractors
Suppliers and Partners	

This workforce strategy is for our total workforce, both military and civilian. Given the imperative to be combat-ready in the near term, it has a greater emphasis on our military personnel. However, this emphasis does not diminish the importance or value of the civilian component of our total workforce.

A valued, capable and credible military partner

New Zealand's Defence policy states we will meaningfully contribute to operations alongside our five eyes partners and to be interoperable with our ally, Australia. There are significant benefits to New Zealand's security with this approach – we can act collectively. However, operating at this tier one level comes at a price. We must have the infrastructure in place, and meet the requisite standards, in order to deliver an interoperable, combat-capable force. The critical, underlying functions required to support, for example, a single ship, aircraft or special force is largely invisible to many, but is significant. Without these underlying support and enabling functions, and the people who do this work, we do not have a combat force.

The unique aspects of a military workforce

*"The Defence Force is the only tool of government equipped and mandated to apply military force. Its fundamental role is the generation and application of military capabilities and combat force to defend New Zealand, enforce our rights in our Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and advance its defence and security interests including in our broader maritime domain, the Southern Ocean, and Antarctica."*²

Military personnel are not employees

In swearing the oath of allegiance, our military personnel forgo normal employment rights and entitlements that the rest of New Zealand have. They do this willingly in service of their country and are prepared to make significant sacrifices to ensure the safety and security of our nation and the advancement of our interests. In return, we offer a combination of benefits that many other organisations can not:

- A deeply meaningful purpose and mission
- Comradeship that can be lifelong
- Adventure and highly unique life experiences
- Extensive trade and professional development
- Health and welfare benefits

² Future Force Design Principles

Civilians – a critical component of our workforce

Civilians are a critical component of the NZDF workforce. This includes those who are employed and those who are contracted for specific periods or tasks. They provide stability and expertise across all our functions, from operational capabilities through to corporate enablers, and a level of flexibility in how we utilise our military personnel. Some are directly involved in, and critical to, warfighting capabilities and operational functions.

We have recently undertaken a workforce savings programme where we made savings, while also re-examining all our civilian positions. We are now in a good position to actively manage our civilian positions and control workforce growth.

Investment in our workforce provides considerable value-for-money

The NZDF is arguably the largest single employer-based training organisation in New Zealand. The training we provide not only prepares people for military service but also provides transferable skills and qualifications that benefit the wider public sector, industries, and communities. This means the government's investment in our military has additional economic impacts for New Zealand well beyond the immediate, critical need for a combat-ready force.

The challenges we face

The strategic workforce challenges confronting us are complex. The deteriorating global environment demands that we give greater urgency to resolve these challenges so we are prepared for combat in the near term. This means that approaches to raising, training, sustaining and operating a military force which have served us well over recent decades, will not serve our needs today, or tomorrow.

In this section we summarise the key challenges in order to provide context for our Workforce Strategy that is set out in the next section 'Our way forward'.

We must grow, fast

In response to the deteriorating global environment, New Zealand's Defence policy settings were changed. They require the NZDF to be able to operate with greater lethality, be able to sustain operations for longer, and to be able to operate concurrently. The current state of our workforce prevents us from meeting these settings.

Therefore our most critical strategic workforce challenge is to grow more soldiers, sailors and aviators, with urgency.

It takes time to grow military expertise

Unlike nearly every other organisation, we do not 'buy' military people ready-made. For the most part, we have to grow our own and for *some* trades this *must* be from scratch. This means the lead-time to develop an effective and resilient warfighting force takes years, not months. The impacts of this on our ability to regenerate and grow at pace are significant (i.e. if the NZDF again experiences a high attrition event, or needs to scale up at pace or experiences mass casualties on an operation).

Complicating this challenge is that the suitably qualified and experienced people (SQEP) we need to grow and train our military workforce, are also needed to lead and contribute to our current operational activities *and* to develop our future capabilities. This means we can only grow and train the workforce we need, quickly, by being prepared to drive significant change in our approaches, policies and culture.

Military service significantly impacts whānau

Military demands become increasingly difficult for our people to manage over time. Many of our highly trained, and therefore valuable military technicians, experts, and commanders have partners and whānau who are also bearing the brunt of the demands of military life. The benefits of military service for many families, have become outweighed by the costs. We order our people to move locations, sometimes frequently, we send them on deployments, sometimes for months, we direct them to work at any hour of the day or night, and to forgo weekends or holidays, sometimes without notice. Furthermore, the Chief of Defence Force has the power to order them into harm's way³. This is why we cannot think about our military workforce in the same way civilian organisations think about their employees.

"We recruit individuals but retain families/whānau"

We acknowledge that some of our civilian employees are also required to work in ways that can have negative impacts on their lives outside of work. The needs of these employees must also be better met in the future.

³ Ref to Defence Act 1990

Military resilience and depth

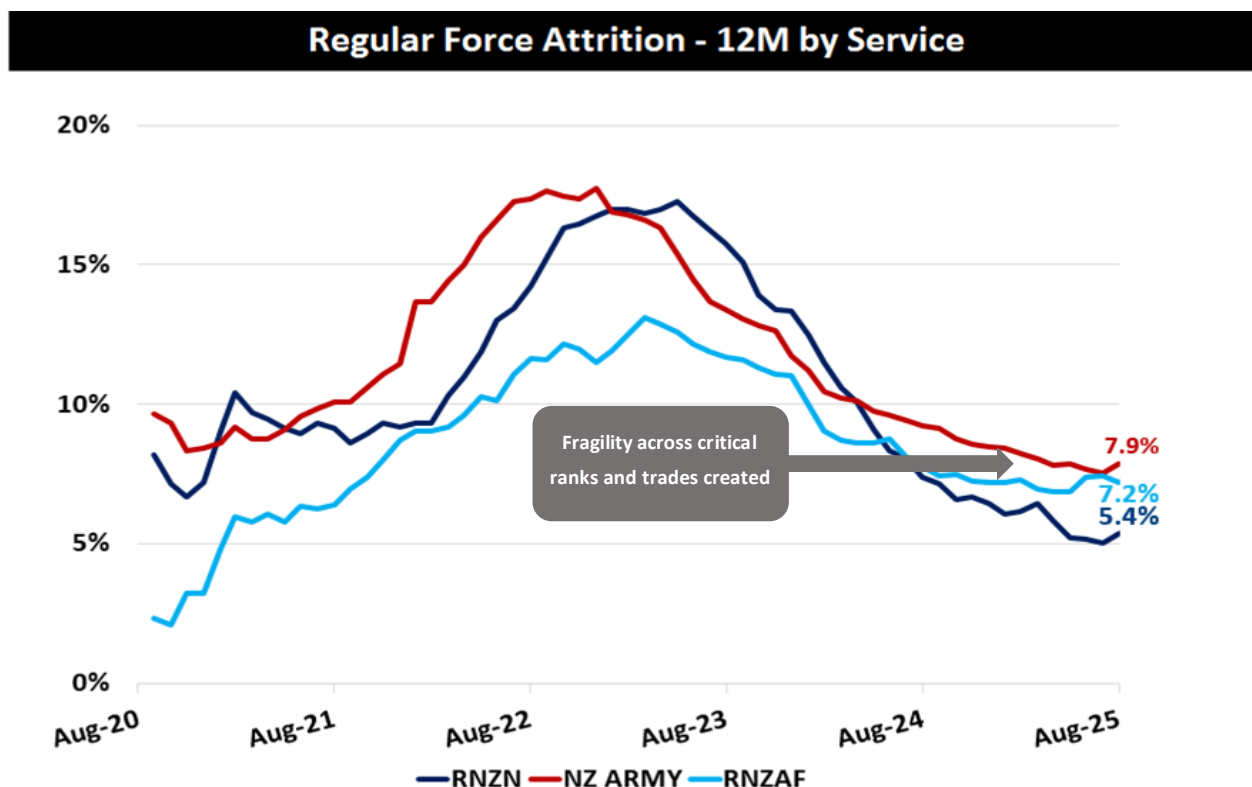
Military resilience and depth means our force can readily withstand shocks and maintain our warfighting effectiveness in the face of disruptive events (e.g. attrition) or conflict (e.g. casualties) and adversity. This includes having sufficient numbers of the right personnel to meet contingencies and sustain operations for the period required.

Right now, we do not have resilience or depth. Ships are tied up because we do not have enough people with the right skills and experience to operate them. Likewise, Army and Air Force have a significant number of trades where attrition of just one or two individuals will cripple capability availability and reduce the options available to government.

Retention challenges

Following years of underinvestment, we were vulnerable to the attrition event which occurred in the post COVID environment. In the 20 months up to February 2023, NZDF lost 30% of its full-time, uniformed, and trained personnel. In FY22/23, attrition was 13-16% for the military and civilian workforce. This attrition resulted in a net loss of personnel, many of whom held ranks and trades or roles that are critical to our operational capabilities. The actions implemented to stem this out-flow of critical warfighting talent (including retention bonuses and increased operational opportunities in some areas), combined with a tightened employment market, have been effective in bringing attrition rates down.

This high-attrition event reduced our workforce resilience (sometimes referred to as hollowness) across all trades and ranks. This severely impacts our ability to operate, to sustain our warfighting force, to grow for the future, or scale up at pace. Should we experience another high attrition event in the near term, our ability to be ready for combat would be even more severely compromised.



Recruitment challenges

To be prepared for conflict in the near term and provide the growth indicated in the DCP, we have been making substantial changes to our recruitment approaches and paradigms. We need to account for:

- The number of our core target demographic (18-24 year olds) who meet the current eligibility criteria for our military workforce is decreasing.
- The tight market for some expert specialist roles – including an international market in some cases, particularly STEM⁴.
- Increasing use of technological developments (e.g. uncrewed vessels, cyber warfare), which will require different skillsets – noting that these capabilities rely on key people with specific skills, not necessarily fewer people.
- The challenges facing employers (including military) globally, including expectations of agency over one's career and activity, flexibility in the workplace and ready access to modern technology, including AI.

In addition, we do not currently recruit (and train) existing experts into military roles, have an easy process to recruit laterally from other militaries, or make it easy for military personnel to change the way they serve, or return to service.

Training challenges

The NZDF has been recognised by our ally and military partners for producing highly trained warfighters who bring both breadth and depth to operations. We have successfully developed in this way because we are a small military, where every warfighter is trained to be able to competently adapt to a range of tasks, environments and situations.

However, our training pipeline, methods and approaches were designed to support the long-term development of military personnel in a more stable global context. The risk settings are currently too high to support our people to advance through ranks and trades at pace.

Our training systems are degraded and cannot easily or rapidly support battlefield adaptability and agility in the face of new techniques, tactics and technologies.

Most of our permanently employed civilians do not currently have active career management or progression opportunities. When the market is buoyant this can result in higher attrition which impacts our ability to retain some critical skills, including warfighting capabilities, leadership and important corporate memory.

Enabling system challenges

Our current enabling systems such as payroll, personnel and finance systems, do not serve us well and create difficulties for us when we want to make improvements. In DCP 25 the government agreed to significant upgrades to its enabling systems through the Future Enterprise Resource Programme (FERP). This will leverage technology, digitisation, and modern work practices to improve the speed and quality of decisions, maximise productivity and effectiveness, freeing-up people for higher value military and specialist tasks. Unfortunately, many of these benefits will not be available to us within the horizon of this strategy.

Meanwhile, the government has funded a \$25.9M programme of work to enhance our ability to recruit, retain, train and plan our workforce. This four year programme of work commenced in July 2025.

⁴ Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

Opportunities

These challenges also provide us with significant opportunity. For the first time in decades we have both the mandate, and imperative, to change. We also have a clearly articulated policy and capability blueprint in DCP 25 that identifies the criticality of our workforce. The changes we need to make will provide us with numerous opportunities to innovate, to modernise and to strengthen our military capabilities.

Our way forward, in the next section, sets out how we intend to address the challenges we face and exploit the opportunities we have.

Our way forward

The DCP provided the capability viewpoint of what an effective Defence Force for NZ will be, and some resultant workforce requirements. In this section, we set out the overall shape of our future workforce and our approach to achieving that.

In summary, our way forward will ensure our workforce is ready and able to deliver on Defence policy, and the government's investment in the NZDF and future capabilities. It delivers value-for-money by focusing on critical combat capabilities, optimising our workforce by balancing uniformed, civilian and contracted personnel and strengthening our workforce sustainability, resilience and depth.

We must regenerate our combat capability

Our primary objective is to regenerate the combat capability of the NZDF, at pace. All of the changes signalled in this section 'Our way forward' are designed to meet this objective.

We must do this if we are to be ready for conflict in the near term, operate with greater lethality, sustain operations for longer and to operate concurrently.

We need to grow, and fast

To be ready to fight in the near term and deliver the ambitious lift in our military capabilities, including greater lethality, the ability to sustain operations for longer and to be able to operate concurrently, we will need to regenerate, then grow our workforce. We have developed a detailed plan based on the DCP 25, and will specify the numbers required in our Strategic Workforce Plan. This plan will be updated annually, including for DCP 27 and future government budgets:

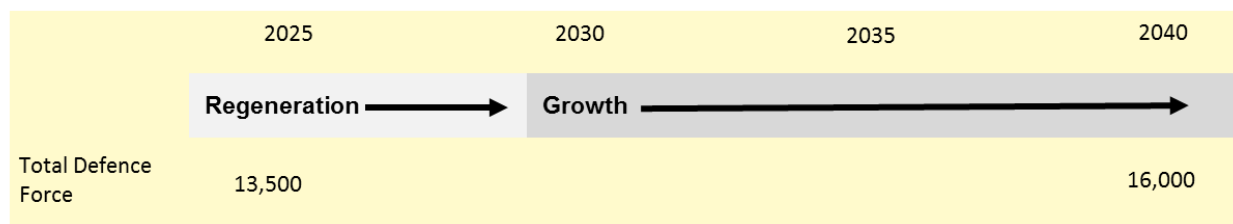
- **Maritime** – significant regeneration and growth indicated in the next 2 – 4 years to be able to project force, provide deterrence and undertake increased operational activity across one the largest EEZ and maritime areas of responsibility in the world.
- **Land** – moderate to significant regeneration and growth indicated in the next 2 - 4 years to provide a deployable, combat capable land force that is agile and responsive to the rapidly changing environment and threats to New Zealand.
- **Air** – moderate regeneration and growth indicated in the next 2 – 4 years to be able to deploy forces rapidly over considerable distances and provide air surveillance and support across the pacific region and beyond.
- **Space** – some growth indicated in the next 2 – 4 years in order to guarantee access to satellite communications and other systems that are critical to NZDF's capabilities.
- **Cyber/Electromagnetic (EM)**⁵ – significant growth indicated in the next 2 – 4 years to improve NZDF's ability to respond to various threats, provide greater response options to government, and improve our ability to make more informed and faster decisions in an increasingly complex environment.
- **Support, institutional, and enabling functions** – some growth indicated in the next 2 – 4 years, particularly in capability development and digital provisioning to ensure our combat capabilities are well supported and fully enabled.

Planned regeneration and growth is illustrated below:

⁵ Ref Doctrine Update, Number 125, November 2023

Growth plan

Based on current numbers and the DCP 25 forecast



Should the strategic environment deteriorate our need for growth is likely to increase in both tempo and volume.

Shift from out-sourced to in-house

Another source of workforce growth will be bringing back 'in-house' a number critical support and enabling functions that we currently 'out-source'. This will be a major policy change for us and should have significant, positive impacts in the longer term.

We outsourced these functions over the last 15 years, primarily for philosophical reasons with an expectation it would lower costs. However, due to our very small market, out-sourcing has not provided the expected benefits that much larger economies may have experienced.

We need to bring some functions back in-house for two reasons. Firstly it provides us a broader base for creating military depth and resilience. Secondly, if the worst happens and we find ourselves in active conflict, we need to have absolute confidence those support functions will continue to operate as we need them to. We can only have this level of confidence during times of crisis, if we have control of the workforce that provides the support we need.

We expect this shift to in-house will be cost-neutral in the long-term.

Grow and develop the reserve force

Our reserve force is an important enabler of military resilience and depth. We want to increase the size, capability and readiness of our reserves across all domains, with a significant uplift in the next four years. As we reinforce this imperative and the need for capable Reserve Forces, we must also provide for easier transfers between the regular and reserve forces. This will require major reform to our internal policies and a broader spectrum of service.

We need to broaden our spectrum of service

We propose to implement a more flexible spectrum of service to enable more rapid growth and the ability to scale up at pace. This includes the range of ways service members can serve from full to part-time active duty, more nuanced options for active duty, through to changes to reserve and civilian roles, with the possible introduction of military expert or specialist roles.

Achieving a more flexible and broader spectrum of service will require significant internal policy changes, potential legislative change and subsequent changes to how we think about, and manage, our military workforce – some of these changes will be seen as radical by our people.

This will also require a rethink of our current posting cycle – a potentially significant change that has not been contemplated for decades.

We must be a highly integrated workforce

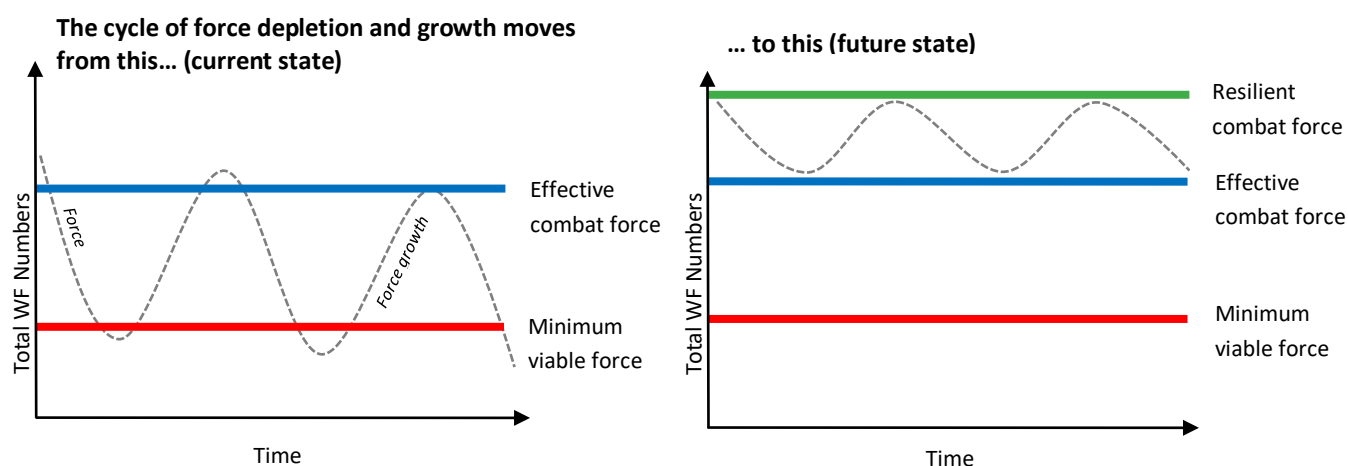
Increased military resilience and depth requires a highly integrated workforce, with the right balance of military and civilian personnel. Every function is inter-dependent and critical to deliver effect. It is easy to focus solely on the more visible operational/combat functions, but without the other functions, our operational and combat capabilities would be unavailable. Although the proportions differ, both military and civilian personnel are active across all five functions.

To be ready to fight in the near term, we need to ensure all five functions are appropriately resourced, trained and integrated.

- **Combat / operational functions** – the combat-ready force, both partnered and stand alone, that utilises all five domains (maritime, land, air, cyber/EM and space) as well as capabilities from the other functions to deliver the effects required for each operational task.
- **Operational support functions** – including Health, Logistics and Defence Science and Technology.
- **Raise/Train/Sustain functions** – including Single Services training ecosystems and institutions and the Defence College.
- **Institutional functions** – including Headquarters, Capability Development, Intelligence and Information, Future Force Development and Doctrine.
- **Corporate/enabling functions** – including Human Resources, Finance, Estate, Assurance, Procurement and Digital support.

We must have a more stable, predictable workforce

Collectively, the changes we propose in this section will reduce our workforce vulnerability and ensure we have a predictable, reliable military workforce. In particular we must *reduce the oscillations* we have experienced over decades, where military workforce depletion has been severe, requiring significant effort to restore the workforce. We need to ensure we are in a position where normal cycles of depletion and growth are relatively small and do not compromise our combat effectiveness. This is shown indicatively in the diagram below:



We will implement new decision-making paradigms

To make the changes we need across our organisation at pace, and rapidly increase our military workforce we must shift our paradigms:

- From enduring peace to being ready for conflict
- From civilianisation to militarisation
- From 'just in time' to 'just in case' settings
- From lowest cost to military resilience – Note: *this does not mean 'gold plated' but ensures we are able to operate at the levels expected by the government and to withstand unexpected shocks. Our previous focus on lowest cost has resulted in our current situation where we have ships tied up because we lack sufficiently experienced crew.*

This indicates a major shift in how we think about, and manage, our workforce.

Change in thinking for workforce decisions

In order to rebalance the tension between efficiency and resilience, we need our commanders, leaders and managers to apply different thinking to their decisions that may impact our workforce. We want them to ask themselves whether their decision will provide the right (fit-for-purpose) expertise, at pace – and to see this as their primary goal. We want them to be confident the decisions they make will also increase NZDF's military depth and resilience. They must also consider whether their decision could enable wider Defence Industry or sector resilience. Against all this they need to ensure their decision is fiscally responsible from a whole-of-system perspective.

We must radically change our approach to position management

Each of the single services is required to contribute personnel across all five of the organisational functions as well as the cyber/EM and space domains. We propose to implement a different system for identifying, and managing, the workforce requirements (including military/civilian ratios) for each of the organisational functions to ensure we are sufficiently resourced to deliver improved military depth and resilience. This will mean that the services would be funded, and held to account, to agreed establishments for raising and training their force. The military roles required for centralised functions will be funded separately, ensuring clarity and accountability for establishments, functions and work priorities. This is a significant change to the way we fund and manage positions currently.

This new approach would also require changes to a range of enterprise-level systems, e.g. the Capability Management System and People Management Systems, to ensure that the agreed establishments are well-controlled and that the people impacts associated with changes to capabilities are clear.

We intend to improve our executive oversight over the total workforce, to ensure the policies and controls are being applied across the organisation and that we are developing the workforce we need.

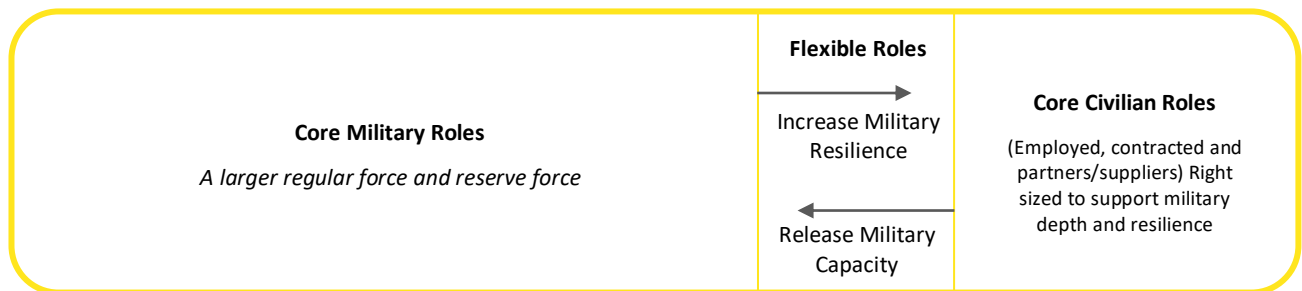
We must increase our resilience

Because we are a relatively small military, we need a total workforce design that creates a more innovative mechanism for releasing military capacity when it's needed. We propose to identify all roles across the total workforce that could reasonably be undertaken by a military person. Once our core military roles are filled (i.e. we have restored SQEP and regenerated our military workforce to agreed levels) we will fill flexible roles with military personnel as a means to improve military resilience.

This design has a productivity tariff because to retain the utility of these military personnel they will need to continue with regular training, certification and service-related activities. We estimate this will lift the total FTE

requirement in these roles by approximately 20% - 30%. This has not been factored into our personnel budget in the past because efficiency has prevailed over resilience. We will need to account for this change in approach in the future, due to the cost implications.

NZDF Total Workforce – 2040



We need remuneration to be fit-for-purpose

We appreciate people do not join our organisation to become wealthy. We offer other benefits that attract our people. However, we want to ensure that remuneration is **not** the primary reason people feel they must leave when they would prefer to stay. We particularly want to make sure that those with 5 – 15 years' service are appropriately remunerated to be able to stay. This will not only improve the return on our training investment, this group is the most critical to an effective combat capability.

We need to take more innovative steps to ensure remuneration remains relatively fair, balanced and reasonable over the longer term. This will require significant changes across our remuneration frameworks, approaches and settings. It may also include considering how remuneration levels are set, and by who.

We also need to reconsider conditions of service that might encourage people to stay, including the possibility of long service leave, contributions to superannuation or retention bonuses.

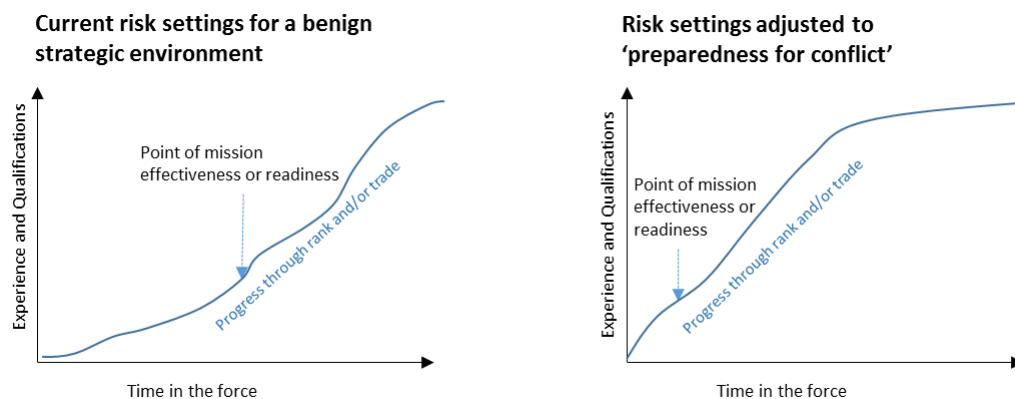
We must change our recruitment & training practices

We have commenced major changes to our recruitment processes, policies and rules in order to shorten the recruitment pipeline, broaden the talent pool we can pull from (e.g. qualified people with transferable skills, personnel from other militaries or military personnel who want to return to service), and expand our recruitment capacity i.e. our ability to recruit large numbers.

Likewise, we intend a rethink of our training ecosystems to ensure we can increase SQEP through more rapid advancement through ranks and trades and by providing operational experience sooner.

Change in risk appetite

We will make adjustments to our risk settings, which have been set to a benign global environment for decades. A number of our people may find this uncomfortable and need our support to adjust. However, we must make this change in order to update our training ecosystems and enable our people to progress through ranks and trades more rapidly. We also need to change our risk settings to enable our people to obtain the experience needed to be mission ready or mission effective earlier in their service. This also provides an opportunity to improve our return on our training investment.



To achieve this aim, we will need to utilise our more experienced military personnel to support the training intensity needed to regenerate SQEP rapidly.

We will consider a range of options and new approaches and expect these to evolve over time, including more tailored solutions that meet the needs of our heterogeneous workforce. For example, shared training opportunities with Australia, or with other training providers or simulation technologies.

Civilian career management which occurs in some specialist areas currently, will be considered for the wider civilian workforce where this is appropriate.

A greater focus on STEM and technology

Given the quickly evolving technical environment, our future workforce will require greater numbers of people who are skilled in STEM and technology.

We must improve our enabling systems and tools

We have a programme of work underway to resolve some of our most pressing challenges with outdated technology, enablers and tools until the more significant Future Enterprise Resource Programme (FERP) is implemented. These tools and enablers are critical supports for our workforce and our management capabilities.

A priority for the NZDF

Delivering this strategy, as a critical component of the broader NZDF Organisational Strategy, is a high priority for us. Some of it will require significant internal policy changes, culture change and major changes to how we develop and manage our people. We are up for this change for two reasons. Firstly, it is imperative we are combat ready in the near term. Secondly, these changes provide a valuable opportunity to innovate, modernise and strengthen our force.

The next section provides a high-level outline of how we intend to deliver against this strategy.

Delivering against this strategy

This Workforce Strategy is a critical component of the NZDF Organisational Strategy. Therefore, delivery against this strategy is a priority for the NZDF.

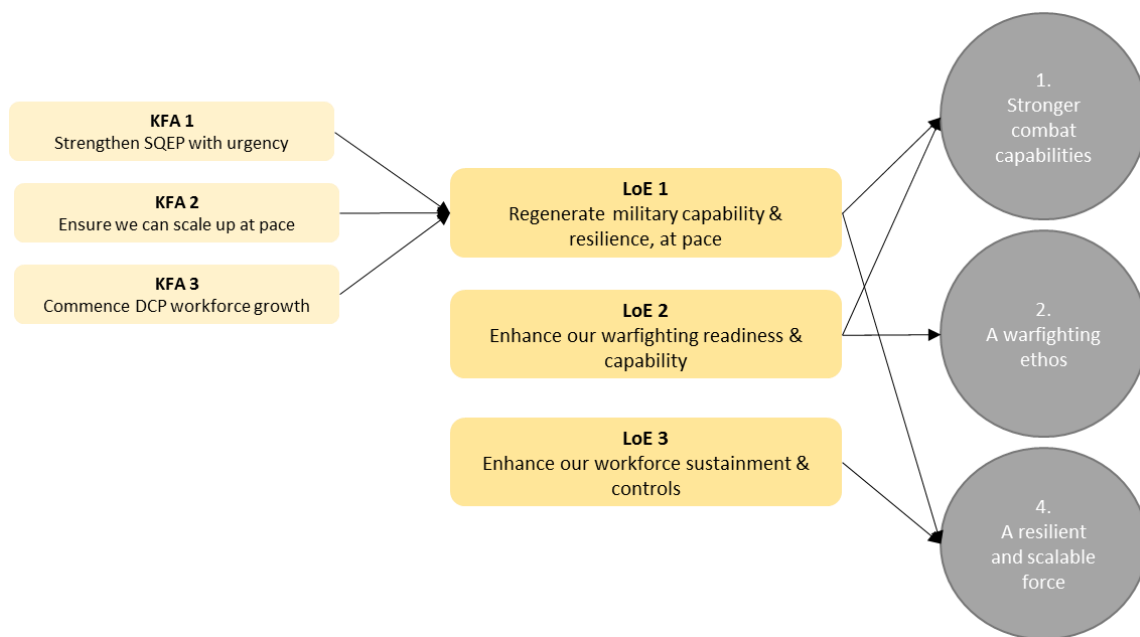
The Chief People Officer and the three Service Chiefs are jointly accountable to the Chief of Defence Force for ensuring its success.

This section sets out our high-level approach to delivering this strategy. Detailed plans are developed, or in development, to ensure we are able to deliver to our ambitions.

Lines of effort and priorities

There are three lines of effort (LOE) that have been identified. These LOE directly contribute to three of the five strategic outcomes within the NZDF organisational strategy.

LOE 1 also has three Key Focus Areas (KFA) which are expressed in priority order. These are summarised in the diagram below.



Expanding on our intentions

LOE 1: Regenerate our military capability, at pace

KFA 1: Strengthen SQEP with urgency

This will be achieved by improving our retention (including improvements to remuneration), and adjusting our recruitment and training policies and ecosystems to speed up progress through ranks and trades, enable easier lateral recruitment, and more flexible spectrums of service. We will adjust our risk settings to support this faster pace.

KFA 2: Ensure we can scale up at pace

This will be achieved by ensuring we have latency across our recruitment and training ecosystems, strengthening our reserve force (including both capacity and capability) and a viable force generation model ready to action if required.

KFA 3: Commence DCP workforce growth

As we strengthen SQEP, we will be in a position to commence the growth and workforce changes (e.g. different skill set) needed to successfully operate the future capabilities set out in the DCP.

LOE 2: Enhance our warfighting readiness and capability

We will ensure warfighting readiness through improved training systems (that quickly incorporate current and emerging battlefield realities), refreshed profession of arms and improved deployability of military personnel.

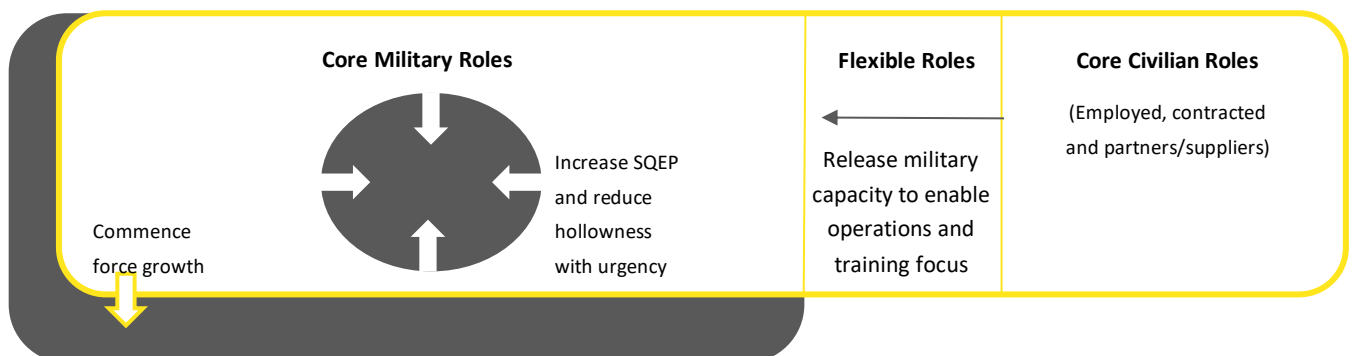
LOE 3: Enhance our workforce sustainment and controls

We will introduce more disciplined position management and controls, and improve, enhance and wherever possible automate our workforce enablement and support systems.

Working at pace

In order to undertake our lines of effort, we will need to **temporarily** release military capacity to focus on raising and training our military workforce, including the reserve force, at pace. Whenever it's viable, we will aim to utilise reservists and ex-military personnel so that our warfighting ethos can be maintained. Our intention is to move back to increased military personnel into these roles as soon as our regeneration, SQEP restoration and initial growth targets are met.

NZDF Total Workforce – temporary release of military capacity to 2028



Overseeing success

The Service Chiefs and the Chief People Officer are jointly accountable for delivery of this Workforce Strategy.

The Investment Committee will oversee the success of this strategy on behalf of the Organisation Governance Board.

A Strategic Workforce Programme Board will prioritise and drive the enabling programme of work. The board is chaired by the Chief People Officer and membership includes Deputy Service Chiefs, Domain and Capability leads and key people capability leaders.

Budget has been approved to commence implementation of key initiatives and some provision has been made for personnel growth and a remuneration uplift in FY 26/27.

A programme approach

A Programme has been set up to support much of this work and to provide data and insights to the Strategic Workforce Programme Board and the Investment Committee.

Some of the change required will be delivered through formal projects and some will be delivered through changing our business as usual activity across the services and our enabling functions.

Measures

The Strategic Workforce Programme Board will ensure the appropriate measures are developed and monitored to ensure the impacts we are seeking are achieved. These measures will be aligned to the three NZDF Strategic Outcomes [1. Stronger Combat Capabilities 2. Warfighting Ethos and 4. A resilient and scalable force].

Critical dependency on FERP

FERP will deliver significant systems change that underpin our payroll, finance, logistics and decision-making functions and efficiencies that will enable us to redirect a significant number of FTE to higher-value, military activity. It is a critical enabler to our workforce ambitions.

Alignment to the DCP

This strategy will be revised alongside the DCP 2027 to ensure the agreed capabilities have the workforce required to operate effectively. The workforce strategy will both inform, and align to, the DCP.



HEI MANA MŌ AOTEAROA
A FORCE FOR NEW ZEALAND



NZDF ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGY 2026

TE RAUTAKI MO TE OPE
KATUA O AOTEAROA

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CHIEF OF DEFENCE FORCE FOREWORD

By building a stronger, resilient, and more combat capable NZDF, we are delivering on our part in protecting New Zealand from threats and advancing our national interests. Given the destabilisation of the global strategic environment, the time for action is now and we must move together as one – unified in our purpose.

Following the release of the *2025 Defence Capability Plan* (DCP25) and the *2025 Strategic Defence Policy* (SDP25), it was clear that new approaches are required to transform the NZDF to better prepare for the reality we face. This *NZDF Organisational Strategy*, along with a new *Military Strategy*, is foundational in shaping a change in focus. We must not shy away from this new reality – it is our core purpose and what we are trained to deliver on.

This document sets out how we are achieving military preparedness over the near term and beyond, always with an emphasis on core military tasks. This means a clear-eyed focus on the readiness of combat capabilities, unlocking a warfighting ethos, implementing the DCP25, and strengthening key partnerships. We will have the capability and the resolve to respond to actions against our interests in a manner appropriate to the threat—up to and including combat.

I expect all commanders, leaders, and members of the NZDF to build a common understanding of the outcomes sought in this strategy and what we need to do to deliver against it. You should use this lens when considering how to deter adversaries today, prepare the NZDF for increasing competition and conflict tomorrow, and steward the force to meet whatever lies ahead independently or alongside our trusted partners.



A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading 'Tony Davies'.

Tony Davies

Air Marshal
Chief of Defence Force

March 2026



NZDF ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGY

VISION

**Ready to fight tonight,
tomorrow and together**

PURPOSE

**We defend New Zealand
and protect its interests**

STRATEGIC OUTCOMES



REQUIRED STATE

**The NZDF is prepared for
conflict in the near term**

VALUES

Courage Tū Kaha
Commitment Tū Tika
Comradeship Tū Tira
Integrity Tū Māia

INTRODUCTION

The Government has set clear goals for the NZDF. The NZDF is expected to ensure the security of the immediate region and contribute to achieving New Zealand's global interests, working with a network of international partners to maintain collective security. New Zealand does not intend to be involved in armed conflict, but the NZDF must be prepared for that eventuality and demonstrate that it is capable of protecting New Zealand.

The NZDF has identified three major shifts that influence the approach to pursuing and protecting defence interests. The NZDF is transforming with these shifts in mind.

From a benign environment to persistent competition

Nations are becoming more competitive, bringing the threshold of armed conflict closer. Grey zone activity is moving into our region and becoming sharper. The NZDF must be prepared to respond to events more frequently, for longer and with greater intensity.

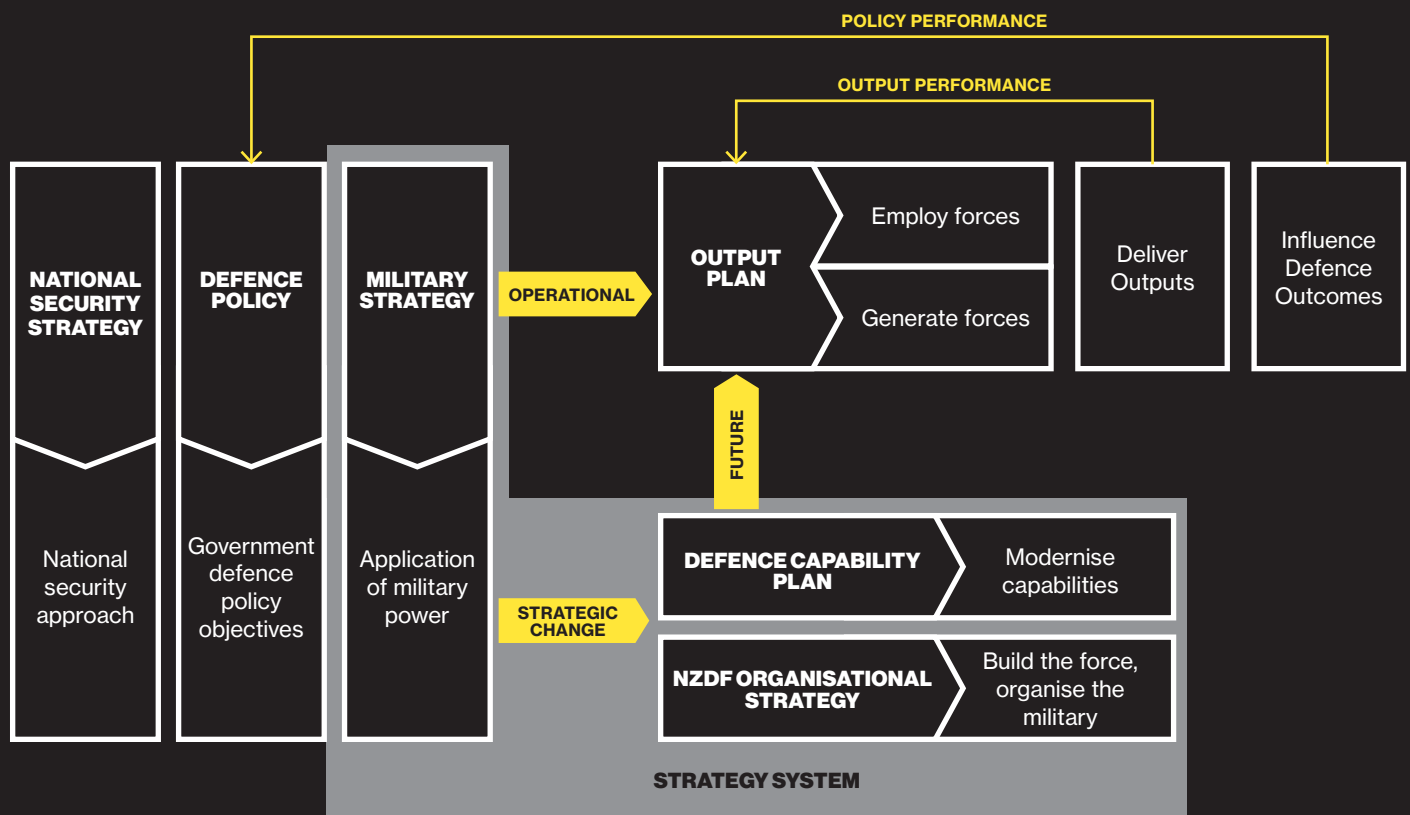
From a broad utility to emphasis on core military functions

The NZDF has provided and will continue to provide support for the Government and New Zealand communities. The NZDF is focussing on its core military role and emphasising preparation for medium-intensity warfighting to defend New Zealand and its interests.

From just enough to just in case

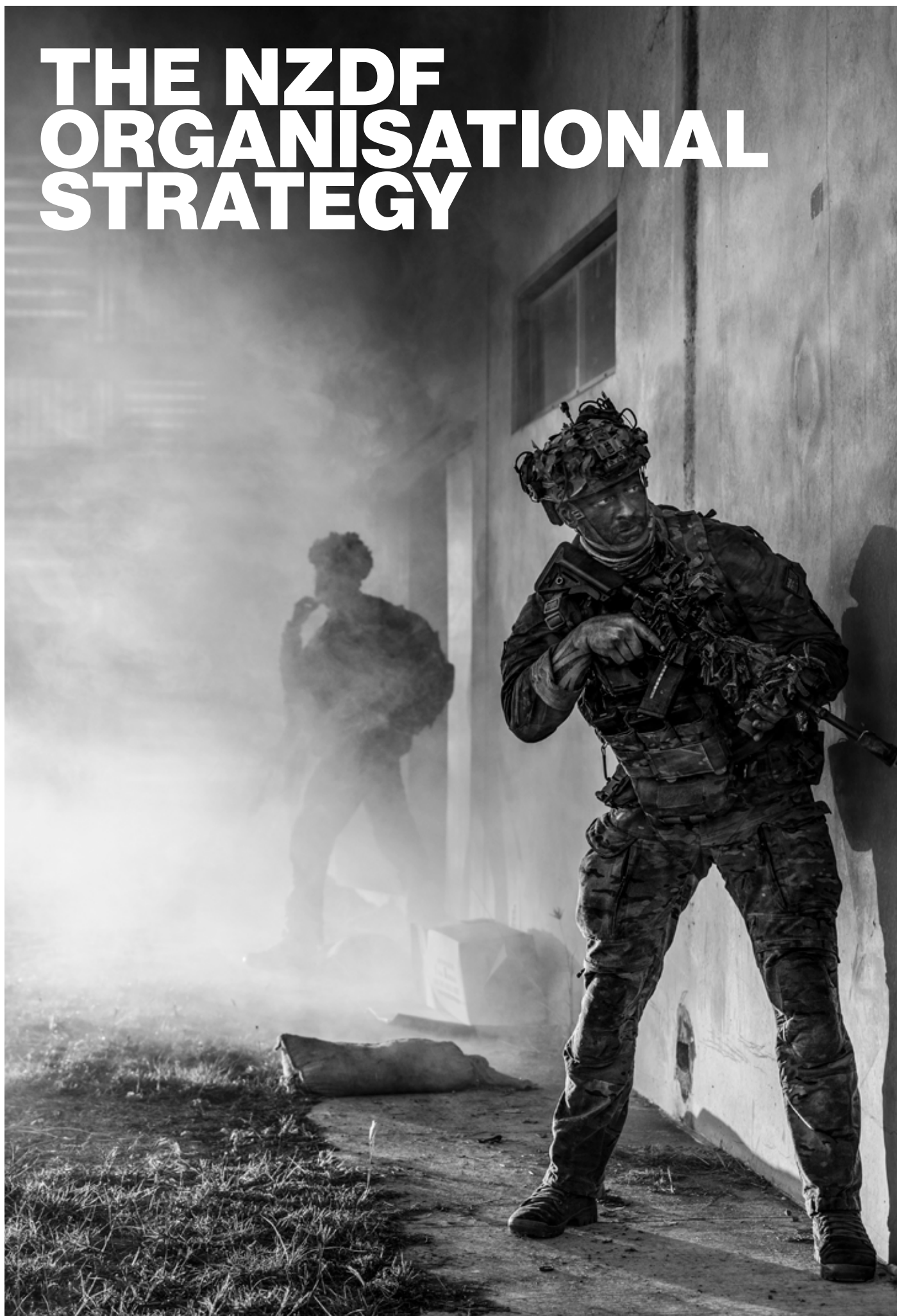
The NZDF is moving from an economically efficient and lean force to becoming a force that has scale, agility, contingencies and reserves needed for endurance and to absorb shocks.

THE NZDF STRATEGY SYSTEM



The NZDF Organisational Strategy is the blueprint for enterprise change to meet the Government's military needs. Together with the Military Strategy and DCP25, it sets the agenda for comprehensive long-term change and it connects the Government's defence policy objectives with the operations and missions of the NZDF.

THE NZDF ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGY



VISION

Ready to fight tonight, tomorrow and together

The NZDF is a resilient, persistent, innovative, and agile fighting force that will respond to security threats, immediately and decisively when required. Its core values underpin the profession of arms and are sustained by powerful bonds of comradeship tying them together with a shared purpose: defending New Zealand. NZDF personnel have unwavering determination, courage, and commitment to the military.

Moving to conflict could happen quickly. The NZDF must embed a warfighting culture across every level of the entire NZDF (Regular Force, Reserves, civilians, and contractors), to make decisions based on the need to defend New Zealand's security and be prepared for conflict.

PURPOSE

We defend New Zealand and protect its interests

The NZDF is first and foremost a military force. It makes a wide range of contributions to New Zealand's security and community through broad means, but its primary role is as the military arm of the New Zealand Government. It secures the country against external threats and protects its sovereign interests, acting at the Government's direction to meet likely contingencies. The reality of conducting military operations to respond to crises and to protect national interests is that this may involve the spectrum of operations, initiatives and activities up to the threat and use of lethal force.

VALUES

Courage Tū Kaha Commitment Tū Tika Comradeship Tū Tira Integrity Tū Māia

The people of the NZDF share a strong sense of what it means to be New Zealanders. The NZDF culture is based on the shared values of Courage (Tū Kaha), Commitment (Tū Tika), Comradeship (Tū Tira) and Integrity (Tū Māia). The NZDF draws on a unique blend of Māori and British warrior cultures. It respects and honours the past, its veterans and their service. They have created a legacy which the NZDF honours through its service.

REQUIRED STATE

The NZDF is prepared for conflict in the near term

The required state is the strategy's core message and central idea. It emphasises heightened urgency driven by threats in the security environment. The NZDF must rapidly increase the readiness of its military capabilities and its ability to sustain operations from peaceful cooperation to persistent competition and armed conflict.

Competition can occur across all dimensions of national power, across all domains and at the same time.



STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

The five Strategic Outcomes are high-level results that are needed to meet the vision and purpose and to achieve the required state. The Outcomes are interrelated and mutually supporting. Each is divided into three sub-outcomes that describe the Outcomes in more specific terms (see table below). The timeframe for the Outcomes is to 2030 in detail and looking out to 2040.



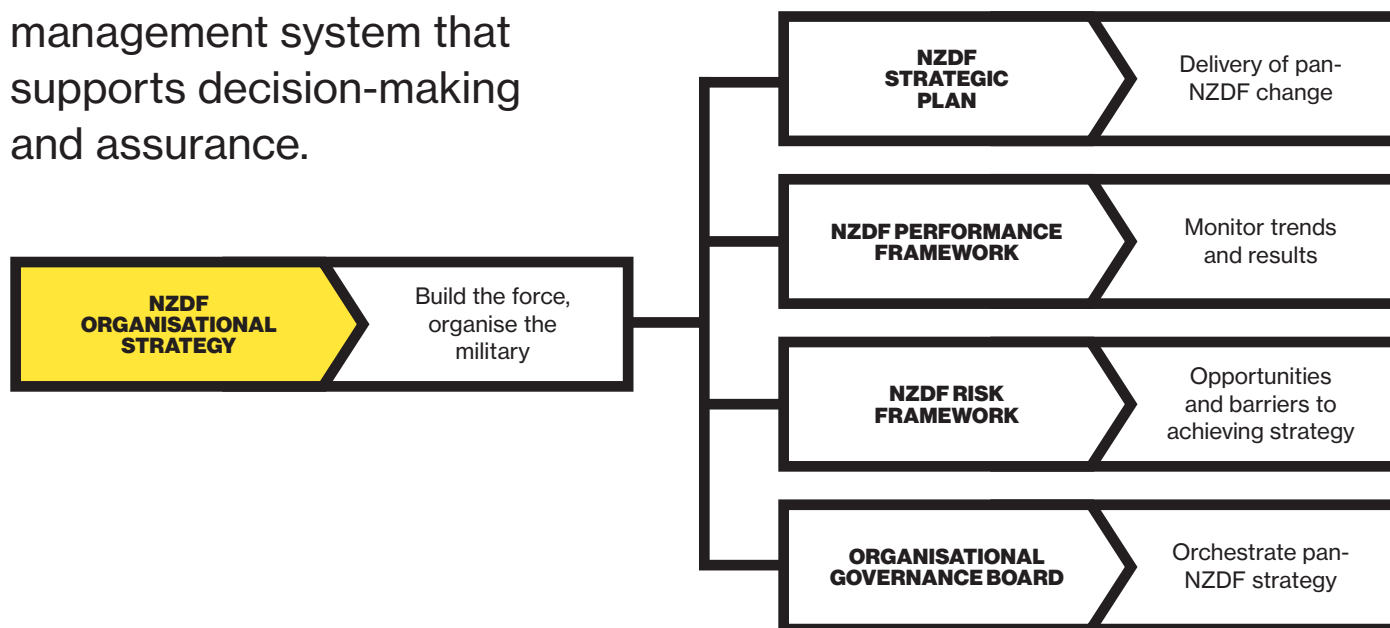
Strategic Outcomes	Description	Sub-Outcomes
Stronger combat capabilities	The NZDF capability contribution to national security deters those who would act in ways adverse to New Zealand's interests.	• The NZDF has an enhanced ability to deter and defeat. • Enhanced capabilities are delivered to warfighters quicker. • Combat capabilities are in service with the essential elements to enable enduring effect.
A warfighting ethos	NZDF people, both uniformed and civilian, work and act in ways that are focussed on operations in a warfighting environment.	• NZDF people have the mindset, skills and capability to win in conflict environments. • The profession of arms is strengthened. • NZDF ways of working are effective in a conflict environment.
Enhanced strategic command and control to apply military power	The NZDF's strategic-level command and control system decisively and incisively applies military effects.	• The NZDF command and control (C2) system can plan and direct military campaigns and operations to deliver warfighting objectives. • The NZDF has an improved C2 system to enable delivery of strategic warfighting effects. • The NZDF has the legal and regulatory settings to operate effectively in conflict.
A resilient and scalable force	The NZDF can conduct operations and actions over extended periods and through protracted strategic and operational situations.	• The NZDF can withstand shocks, absorb attrition, and preserve essential functions. • The NZDF can grow rapidly. • The NZDF has the suitably qualified and experienced personnel it needs to operate and regenerate.
Deepened relationships with key partners	The NZDF is a valuable security partner and has close ties with nations and organisations aligned to securing national interests.	• NZDF contributions are valued by our ally and international military partners. • The NZDF has increased support from the New Zealand industrial, logistical and technology innovation base. • New Zealand's other levers of national power are synchronised with the military lever.

DELIVERING THE STRATEGY



IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

The *NZDF Organisational Strategy* will be implemented through an integrated management system that supports decision-making and assurance.



Strategic Plan – delivery of pan-NZDF change

The *NZDF Strategic Plan* (Strategic Plan) turns strategy into action. It describes the key results and initiatives required for the period to 2030. The Strategic Plan considers prioritisation, sequencing and trade-offs that are required to balance available people and financial resources, within the NZDF's capacity to absorb and adapt to rapid change.

The overall approach of the Strategic Plan is an emphasis on improving military preparedness as much and as rapidly as possible, balanced with long-term stewardship of the NZDF.

Key considerations in the Strategic Plan are:

- What can be achieved with what the NZDF currently has?
- What foundational changes are required now?
- What can be achieved through organisational change and investment now?
- What can be achieved through partnership, either with Australia or with industry?

The Strategic Plan is divided into three horizons that provide a time-based perspective of change. The horizons thematically describe the nature of the strategic change occurring in each period.

The NZDF's Service and portfolio plans cascade from the NZDF Organisational Strategy and the Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan is also supported by subordinate plans that span across the Services and portfolios.

H1: 2026-2027

The NZDF is capable of generating credible multidomain combat operations with our ally Australia.

Near-term DCP investments are delivered.

The NZDF has improved resilience and is able to grow rapidly when needed.

The skills and abilities of the workforce have increased.

H2: 2028-2030

The NZDF is capable of generating sustained integrated operations with partners or on a sovereign basis.

The workforce has sufficient depth and experience.

Infrastructure and foundational organisational abilities are improved.

H3: PAST 2030

The NZDF is completing long-term investments in major combat and organisational platforms.

Long term infrastructure needs are being addressed.

Performance – monitor trends and results

Strategic Performance is one of three streams of the *NZDF Performance Framework*, along with Organisational Performance and Delivering Outputs. Together, these streams provide a combined overview of NZDF performance and health. Performance measures and reporting approaches will be reviewed and refined to ensure they effectively enable data-driven decision-making practices across the organisation. Performance measures will be reported regularly to track progress; ensure that strategy, capability, and resources are aligned; and adjust the strategic plan to meet evolving needs.

Risk – opportunities and barriers to achieving strategy

Significant inherent risks to achieving the strategy must be understood and managed. An increased appetite for risk is required for successful delivery of the strategy. The NZDF will address risks by:

- Embracing opportunities, identifying where calculated risk-taking can accelerate progress towards our strategic outcomes.
- Accepting appropriate risk-taking, underpinned by clear guidance to ensure timely, informed decisions that contribute to the strategic direction.
- Prioritising effort, ensuring resources are focussed on the most critical activities required to achieve our strategic outcomes.
- Understanding the consequences of decisions and actions, and escalating risks where appropriate.

Governance – orchestrate pan-NZDF strategy

Strategic performance and progress on strategic initiatives and activities will be monitored regularly by the Organisational Governance Board. The Strategic Plan will be reviewed annually through the NZDF's business planning process.

OUR PEOPLE

Our people are at the heart of the strategy. The attributes of our people that are emphasised in the Strategic Outcomes include:

Their professionalism, expertise and mastery.

Their warfighting skills.

Their resilience and adaptability.

Their commitment to service.

Their cultural competence and ability to build relationships.

Their essential part in operating advanced military capabilities in complex, high-risk environments.



PATH TO SUCCESS

The *NZDF Organisational Strategy* is ambitious in its intent, scope and timeframe; a slow steady approach cannot achieve the Government's expectations of the NZDF. The goals described through this strategy will generate competing demands across force modernisation, force generation, preparedness, and executing roles and missions.



The critical success factor for the strategy is generating momentum across the programme of projects and activities. Work is already in progress to increase the NZDF's preparedness. Other ways to support momentum include prioritising a focus on core military effects, reducing bureaucracy, encouraging novel approaches, and delivering minimum viable capabilities and products. The organisational strategy is underpinned by two tenets that enable sustained effort and guide how the NZDF works:

Operate and rehearse as if in conflict

This strategy requires a step change in urgency and intensity. The assumption must be that the NZDF is in a state of conflict, and that all operational capabilities and work processes are suitable for the NZDF to be able to respond. Working with conflict in mind enables the NZDF to be better prepared across the continuum of military response.

A learning organisation is one in which people collectively enhance their capacities; as a result, organisations can become more agile and flexible. All NZDF people will have to practice and innovate together at a wartime tempo so that they learn how to work at their best when the situation is critical. This applies as much to corporate and business functions as it does to military activities.

Work together with a focus on the purpose

NZDF people are unified by a shared purpose. They are driven and committed to operating together, with other levers of national power and with New Zealand's ally and partners.

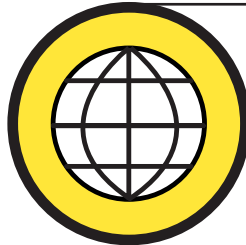
Working together requires an understanding that the NZDF is a system, not a collection of disparate parts. There are significant relationships amongst the Services, organisational functions, and partners that enable the NZDF to operate in an integrated way. Common goals and a shared purpose are the foundation that aligns the NZDF system and NZDF people.

APPENDIX 1: STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

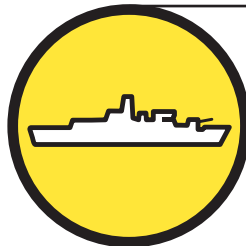


NEW ZEALAND'S STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

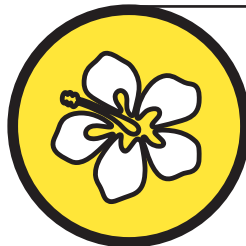
New Zealand is facing its most challenging and dangerous strategic environment for decades.



Actors are deliberately seeking to undermine international rules and norms and reshape them in ways counter to New Zealand's values and interests.



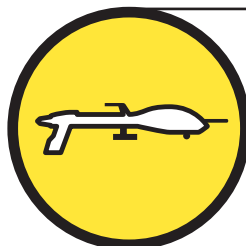
States are adopting stronger security postures and increasing investment in military capabilities; deepening and broadening their bilateral and multinational security partnerships.



Pacific Island states are responding to increasing great power strategic competition and activity in the Pacific. As a result, domestic and international tensions are growing.



Climate change is compounding other regional security challenges and putting increasing pressure on Pacific governments as they respond to effects on human security, economy, infrastructure and resources. Climate change also complicates military operations, logistics, equipment and infrastructure.



The return of high intensity state-on-state warfare in Europe and grey zone activities around the world has seen major shifts in the speed of innovation and in the application of commercial technology to warfare.



New Zealand's geographic remoteness does not shelter it from threats. There are increasing threats to the maritime area of interest, particularly the long lines of communication and supply chains. Cyber intrusions, which are not subject to the restrictions of geography, are ongoing and persistent.

APPENDIX 2: **TURNING STRATEGY INTO ACTION**



NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

The NZDF strategy system depicted on page 7 connects the NZDF's actions and activities to Government policy. This appendix provides additional information about the components of the system.

New Zealand's first ever *National Security Strategy* was released in 2023. It promotes a focussed, integrated and inclusive approach, working together both domestically and with a strong network of international partners. The NZDF contributes to the three outcomes and priorities for the security sector:

OUTCOME 1: New Zealand is protected from threats.

Priority: Acting early to prevent national security threats and build New Zealand's resilience.

OUTCOME 2: A resilient society, informed and engaged on national security threats.

Priority: Working together to foster collective understanding and approaches.

OUTCOME 3: An effective national security system.

Priority: Leading an integrated approach.

DEFENCE POLICY

The ongoing deterioration of the strategic environment has reinforced the need for a proactive strategy-based policy approach. Defence will act early and deliberately in promoting and protecting key defence interests. The Government's *Strategic Defence Policy* (SDP25) centres on three policy objectives:

1

Protect and promote the security of New Zealand and our immediate region.

Defence will safeguard New Zealand's sovereignty and territorial integrity; promote and protect the security of its immediate region; and sustain regional conditions favourable to our security interests.

2

Enhance our ANZUS alliance with Australia and our most important security partnerships.

Defence will make material contributions to New Zealand's security partnerships, particularly to its alliance with Australia, the wider Five Eyes partnership, and bilateral and regional Pacific partnership.

3

Contribute to achieving New Zealand's global interests.

Defence will contribute to global security through ongoing defence engagement, operations, and activities.

The SDP25 is based on foundations of an equipped and supported force and a regenerated, fit-for-purpose workforce. The policy influences the NZDF's decisions about training, development, and use of military force. It also influences how the NZDF modernises its operations and the capabilities and assets it uses.

NZDF MILITARY STRATEGY

The *Military Strategy* is the NZDF's high-level approach to using military power to achieve Defence policy objectives. It is the critical connection between Defence policy and operational planning. The *Military Strategy* is the capstone document for the NZDF's military plans and scenarios. It also guides Defence approaches for international engagement, industry engagement and capability investment.

DEFENCE CAPABILITY PLAN

The DCP25 outlines investments in new capabilities for enhancing combat capability as well as replacing critical assets, equipment, and other support that NZDF personnel need to succeed. It focusses on the next four years but looks out to 2040 so that the plan can be adapted as the world changes. The DCP25 includes significant new investments in lethality, uncrewed systems, and digital systems.

The *Future Force Design Principles* inform the Government's decisions for the development of DCP25. The principles also guide and shape choices about force structure and the NZDF's operating model.

NZDF OUTPUT PLAN

The *NZDF Output Plan* details the delivery of military capability and other services to ensure the NZDF provides effective military contributions when required by the Government. It establishes the readiness for contingent military operations and other key capabilities involved in preparing and deploying joint forces for operations and other tasks.

The output categories focus on the preparation of Navy, Army and Air Force capabilities; protection of New Zealand's sovereignty and services for New Zealanders; operations contributing to New Zealand's security, stability and interests; advice to the Government; and support for veterans.

R E A D Y T O
FIGHT
TONIGHT, TOMORROW
& TOGETHER

COURAGE TŪ KAHA

COMMITMENT TŪ TIKA



COMRADESHIP TŪ TIRA

INTEGRITY TŪ MĀIA

