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New Zealand

OIA-2026-5816

22nd
June 2026

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

I refer to your email of 22 May 2026 seeking, under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA), *up to date, accurate and comprehensive information for the public on drone and counterdrone directives and doctrine/concepts regarding capabilities and deployment*. The elements of your request are addressed below.

It is important to note that the Ministry of Defence and the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) are separate agencies with very different responsibilities. Because of your assumed combination of the defence agencies and the wording of your request, it was not possible to draw a clear distinction of what would be Ministry information and what would be NZDF information to inform a transfer under the OIA. This response only considers NZDF information.

- *Copies of the 2026 non-restricted command directives:*
 - *Land component commander*
 - *Chief of Army*
 - *1 NZ brigade commander*
 - *And all directions in army wing/domain to develop drone capability in the last 12 months*
- *Ditto as above for Air component command [in its various commander parts]*
- *Ditto as above for Maritime command [in its various commander parts]*
- *Ditto as above for Joint forces command [in its various commander parts]*
- *Re Capability branch – any direction to develop drone capability in the last 12 months*
- *Re DST - any direction to develop drone capability in the last 12 months*

With respect to uncrewed or robotic systems (i.e. drones) there are no command directives within the scope of this part of your request. It is therefore declined in accordance with section 18(e) of the OIA as the requested information does not exist.

- *Has a robotics and autonomous systems concept or doctrine or similar been released to guide any wing/domain (army, air, navy) to develop drone capabilities? YES/NO. In either case, please then provide an upto date summary of what has happened (or not), when and why*

The NZDF does not have a doctrine to guide drone development. A Robotics and Autonomous Systems (RAS) concept is in development and will not be signed until

results of experimentation activities have been included in it. This is expected to occur by December 2026. The concept will include policy standards, operational requirements, technical standards, data standards, a legal framework, and training and workforce requirements.

There is a land domain doctrine for unmanned aircraft systems operations that has been adopted by the NZDF. It provides a baseline for training, safety, and employment matters and is withheld in full in accordance with sections 6(a) and 6(b)(i) of the OIA.

- *What expenditure on drones has been completed or is planned at unit level under unit command discretion? Please specify amount/s, dates, per unit*
 - *and what did that expenditure add to capabilities eg number of drones?*

Expenditure at a unit level is withheld in full in accordance with section 6(a) of the OIA as this provides detail on capability.

- *What Capability branch purchasing is currently underway to equip units with drones? Please detail the scope and budget of that*
 - *And what is planned*
- *If there is any other directive or similar that provides direction on autonomous systems please provide the title of each such, the date from when this first was introduced and a copy of the latest such*
- *The 3x most substantive document/s* about the robotics and autonomous systems concept*
- *A summary of the last year of work and ongoing work on the robotics and autonomous systems concept*
- *The above queries do not extend to the key other party, industry, so please provide a statement summarising any concrete initiatives (eg the Syos tests) taken with industry on drones and counterdrones in 2026.*

The NZDF's Capability Branch is undertaking work in the following main areas:

- continued acquisition of small scale tactical Uncrewed Aerial Vehicles for use by Army combat units (reconnaissance), and airfield security units (surveillance);
- introduction into service of the T7 Explosive Ordnance Disposal robot;
- introduction into service with the Navy of the Bluebottle uncrewed surface vessels to conduct persistent surveillance;
- experimentation of New Zealand manufactured uncrewed ground, uncrewed aerial, and uncrewed surface vessels to assist in understanding how these types of systems could operate within the NZDF;
- the acquisition of two Maritime uncrewed systems: a polar-capable Uncrewed Aerial System to complement HMNZS Aotearoa during southern ocean patrols; and more persistent surveillance uncrewed surface vessels; and,
- development of a business case to acquire Counter Uncrewed Aerial Systems.

As part of the experimentation, NZDF's Capability Branch has spent approximately \$1 Million in capital funds. The majority of this sum was spent on SA7, SG400, SM300, and SA-2 systems from Syos Aerospace (NZ).

In addition to establishing the experimentation programme, for the past twelve months NZDF's Capability Branch work programme has included: commencement of multi-domain trials; assisting with testing of selected systems in contested environments; understanding

the development of automated/autonomy software and domestic production capabilities; and preparation for Project Convergence 2026.

The NZDF's Defence Science and Technology (DST) unit produces annual plans for its programme portfolio including the autonomous systems programme. Enclosed is a copy of the autonomous systems programme for financial year 2026/27. Where indicated, information related to specific capability is withheld in accordance with section 6(a) of the OIA.

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

Enclosure:

1. DST autonomous systems programme FY 2026/27

Autonomous Systems



Impact

- s. 6(a)
- Operational and cost effectiveness of future NZDF Air and Maritime capabilities enhanced by fully exploiting the advantages of uncrewed air, surface, and underwater platforms
- Capability acquisition projects supported by a team of DST autonomous systems experts

What we do

- s. 6(a)
- Conduct research into enabling technologies to accelerate NZDF adoption of autonomous systems to meet defence outputs



Focus Areas

- **Mission-Level Autonomy** - Develop autonomy concepts using DST autonomy framework: Rapidly and efficiently test autonomy concepts in simulation before seamless implementation on uncrewed platforms for real-world validation
- **Blue Force Autonomy Enablers** - Develop and advise on resilient navigation systems, conduct experimentation to enable beyond visual line of sight drone operations

• s. 6(a)



DST Autonomous Systems Programme Update against B25 Plans

Summary & Status – Summary of achievements and impact (since start of FY).

- s. 6(a)
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- Industry Support: MINDEF Industry Strategy Launch, s. 6(a)
- Support to NZDF: Cap Br CUAS project, Persistent Air Surveillance, s. 6(a)
- s. 6(a)
- CUAS: Attended Canadian Urban CUAS Sandbox, s. 6(a)

Timeline - How are we tracking against our B25 plans?

- s. 6(a)
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Resources - Do we have the resources available to deliver the plan? Will you spend your 7265 budget?

- Recruitment now approved for key team member s. 6(a)
- s. 6(a)

Issues or risks – Any issues or risks to raise

- s. 6(a)
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DST Autonomous Systems Programme Plan for B26

s. 6(a)



DST Autonomous Systems Programme Plan for B26

s. 6(a)

