



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

OIA-2026-5976

20th October 2026

Dear [REDACTED]

I refer to your email of 9 September 2026, under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA), requesting information regarding autonomous systems, unmanned systems, AI-enabled systems and the circumstances in which Defence capability may be used within New Zealand.

1. *Autonomous systems programme*

Please provide records identifying:

- a) objectives and scope of NZDF's autonomous-systems research programme;*
- b) programme commencement date;*
- c) responsible business unit;*
- d) programme budget and expenditure to date;*
- e) systems acquired, trialled, demonstrated or evaluated;*
- f) suppliers and contractors;*
- g) autonomous or semi-autonomous aerial systems;*
- h) loitering munitions;*
- i) AI-enabled targeting, recognition, navigation or decision-support systems;*
- j) current planned future acquisitions.*
- k) Human control*

For each relevant system, please provide policies or technical records identifying:

- a) whether it can identify a human, vehicle, object or location without human input;*
- b) whether it can recommend a target;*
- c) whether it can select a target;*
- d) whether it can engage or attack a target;*
- e) where human authorisation is mandatory;*
- f) what level of human supervision is required;*
- g) what technical safeguards prevent unauthorised autonomous engagement.*

The New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) does not have a dedicated autonomous-systems research programme. As such, there is no programme commencement date, no dedicated unit responsible for autonomous-systems research, nor is there a single programme budget or consolidated expenditure figure.

New Zealand's national policy position and international approach on Autonomous Weapons Systems was decided by Cabinet in 2021 and reaffirmed in 2024. Further details on this policy

and associated information can be found on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's website¹.

2. *Please provide every policy, legal opinion, memorandum or protocol addressing whether any NZDF drone, unmanned aircraft, autonomous system, AI-enabled surveillance system, loitering munition, acoustic technology, sensor system, or biometric/identification technology may be deployed or supplied for use inside New Zealand.*

Information regarding the above is withheld under section 6(a) of the OIA, as revealing military capabilities would likely prejudice the security or defence of New Zealand, and section 9(2)(h) of the OIA, because legal opinions and advice are subject to legal professional privilege.

3. *Assistance to Police*

Please provide records identifying the legal and operational framework under which Police may request Defence assistance involving technology, including:

- a) *who may make a request;*
- b) *who approves it;*
- c) *whether ministerial approval is required;*
- d) *statutory authority relied upon;*
- e) *safeguards protecting civilians;*
- f) *whether Defence equipment may be used during protests or civil disorder;*
- g) *whether Defence surveillance systems may collect information about civilians;*
- h) *whether data collected by Defence may be supplied to Police or other agencies.*

The New Zealand Police (NZ Police) can make a request for support from the NZDF in accordance with section 9 of the Defence Act 1990. Certain legislation such as the Search and Surveillance Act 2012, the Emergency Management Act 2026, the Intelligence and Security Act 2017 and the International Terrorism (Emergency Powers) Act 1987, may also permit the provision of support which may include technology.

In any such circumstance, the Chief of Defence Force may approve support to the NZ Police, or any other relevant government agency such as the National Emergency Management Agency.

Defence surveillance systems may only collect information about civilians in circumstances authorised by law and in accordance with a lawful request from the NZ Police. Data collected by the NZDF may be supplied to the NZ Police where the disclosure of the information is permissible in accordance with the Privacy Act 2020.

4. *Parliament protest connection*

Please provide records from 1 January 2022 to the present containing reference to Parliament protest, Wellington protest, public order, civil disorder, protest management, Parliament security or crowd control where those records also concern drones, autonomous systems, AI, surveillance, intelligence, acoustic systems, unmanned systems or force-protection technology.

As you may be aware, the Independent Police Conduct Authority (IPCA) has completed an independent review (Review) of the policing of the occupation on and around Parliament grounds in Wellington during February and March 2022. The findings are publicly available on

¹ <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/peace-rights-and-security/disarmament/autonomous-weapons-systems>

the IPCA's website² and include details of engagement with agencies to develop and execute operational plans.

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

² <https://www.ipca.govt.nz/Site/parliament-protest>