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

OIA-2026-5983

9th November 2026

[redacted]

Dear [redacted]

I refer to your email of 15 September 2026, requesting, under the Official Information Act 9182 (OIA), statistics concerning veterans' claims processed from 1 January 2006 to 15 September 2026. I apologise for the additional time taken to provide this response to your request.

The current Veterans' Affairs (VA) client management system was introduced in 2016. This system enables easy export of some data from claims, but is not designed for high-level tracking or reporting of medical conditions across the veteran cohort. Information predating 2016 is not readily retrievable and would require a substantial research and collation effort to generate the requested data. As far as your request concerns information from 2006 to 2016, it is declined in accordance with section 18(f) of the OIA. The particular parts of your request are addressed below.

1. ***Overall Claim Volume:***
    - *The total number of veteran claims received since 2006 (broken down by week, month, or year if readily accessible).*
2. ***Claim Outcomes & Status:***
    - *The total number of veteran claims accepted out of those received since 2006.*

The following table provides the number of claims (including reassessments) that VA received, processed, and approved by year from 2016 to 2025. Data for the current year has not been provided, however, claims and processing times is regularly updated on the Veterans' Affairs website, at https://www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz/for-clients/information-about-claims/processing-times-for-claims/. Data for the first half of 2026 is publicly available in the most recent update.

Calendar Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Claims Received	2,325	2,479	2,767	2,911	2,806	3,413	3,248	3,206	3,470	4,037
Claims processed	1,720	1,926	2,203	3,660	3,161	2,430	2,503	2,482	3,446	4,138
Approvals	949	1,319	1,553	2,360	2,212	1,706	1,861	1,931	2,615	3,003
% Approved	55%	68%	70%	64%	70%	70%	74%	78%	76%	73%

- *The number of veteran claims received since 2006 that are currently still under review.*

The below table provides the number of open claims which are currently in progress or waiting on a decision, broken down by the year the claims were received. There are no open claims predating 2022.

Calendar Year	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Total
Open claims	12	28	41	306	1,337	1,724

There are also 64 open reviews. This is where a claimant has requested a review of the original decision on their claim by VA. These concern 44 individual claimants and the oldest review has been open from March 2026.

3. ***Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) & Operator Syndrome Claims:***
    - *The number of claims received since 2006 specifically relating to Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) or Operator Syndrome.*
    - *Among these TBI or Operator Syndrome claims, the breakdown of how many have been accepted, declined/not accepted, or remain under review.*

As previously stated, the VA client management system is not designed for high-level tracking or reporting of medical conditions across the veteran cohort. For instance, the recording of a claimed condition may reflect the description of the condition as submitted by the veteran themselves, the diagnosis of their GP or specialist, or how the condition has been reclassified by VA staff to reflect its description in the Statements of Principles (the tools which guide decision-making on linking conditions to service). Because there is no standardised labelling, it is often not possible to give reliable, comprehensive data on specific conditions.

However, a search of the client management system was undertaken using the following terms: concussion; traumatic brain injury; TBI; mTBI; and, head injury. A manual review of the results to remove those claims concerning non-traumatic conditions indicated that there are 37 claims since 2016. Of these, nine were approved, 20 were declined, and eight are awaiting a decision. Given the low number of claims, a breakdown by year is not provided in order to protect privacy in accordance with section 9(2)(a) of the OIA.

With respect to operator syndrome, given the very low number of claims, this information is withheld in full in accordance with section 9(2)(a) of the OIA for the reason explained above. This syndrome does not have established or consistent diagnostic criteria. Some claims originally made for operator syndrome may have also been reclassified to reflect diagnosis of underlying conditions contributing to the individual veterans presentation.

4. ***Processing Delays:***
    - *Information on the primary factors or causes contributing to any delays in processing veteran claims, if applicable.*

Information about processing times, including contributing factors, is provided on the VA website.

The length of time it may take for VA to process and make a decision on any one particular claim will reflect a number of factors, including the complexity of the claim, and if supporting medical evidence is required. The average claim processing times displayed online include delays resulting from limited access to the necessary medical professionals, or where applications have been submitted lacking sufficient detail, and cannot be progressed until completed.

VA is able to prioritise or escalate some claims in certain circumstances, where there is an urgent need; but overall it is a question of demand and workload versus available resource, not just in terms of decision officers within VA, but also the availability of external expertise where required.

VA has also noted that updated and new procedures implemented to reflect the High Court's guidance and the decision of the Veterans' Entitlements Appeal Board with regard to Tā Harawira Gardiner would likely result in some more complex claims taking longer to process[1].

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

JHR Sellwood
Captain, RNZN
Acting Chief of Staff HQNZDF

[1] https://www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz/about-veterans-affairs/our-partners-and-the-veteran-sector/boards-and-panels/veterans-entitlement-appeal-board/decisions-of-the-board/gardiner/