5 September 2025

Brook Barrington
Secretary of Defence
Ministry of Defence
PO Box 12703
Molesworth Street
Wellington 6144
New Zealand

Dear Brook,

Our OIA 2025/14 – Impact of COVID-19 and follow-up on recommendations

Given it is now five years since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the Institute considers it timely to ensure that all research, reflections and analysis by departments are in the public domain. This is one of eight OIAs sent as part of our Project *PandemicNZ*, the remainder are available on our website here.

To contribute to this, we have been creating a comprehensive public record of the pandemic in our signature book *COVID-19 Nation Dates*. The Institute has committed to updating this book over time in order to provide the general public with a record of our past in an easy-to-access and well referenced format. However, several questions and topics remain outstanding. Some relate to reflections from the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) on the impacts of the pandemic on their capabilities, training and infrastructure – along with any lessons learned that can be implemented now in preparation for the next pandemic or other event that might lead to an emergency or crisis.

With this in mind, we have the following ten OIA questions:

Analysis and reflections

1. Has any work been undertaken by the MOD or NZDF to review the impact of Operation Protect, including what impact this operation had on NZDF's ability to respond to other major crises?

2. Has there been a review of the total financial costs of Operation Protect? If yes, can you provide us with a copy of that review?

3. Was Operation Protect funded wholly by the Treasury's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund (CRRF)? If not, how much did Operation Protect cost the MOD and NZDF? We note that Treasury's CRRF data release (here) includes that the overall fiscal impact of funding for the Defence Force was $3.37 million.

4. Would MOD and NZDF prefer a separate agency to be established to manage MIQ requirements in the future? Why/why not?

Actions taken to date

5. Has there been any discussion on designing a MIQ system, ready for implementation when New Zealand is faced with of the next pandemic?

6. Has MOD and NZDF read and contributed to the upcoming reform being proposed under the Emergency Management Bill?

7. What is the role of MOD and NZDF in terms of major disasters (e.g. earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, extreme weather events etc)? See Figure 1 below from DPMC cabinet material. We suggest you refer to the recommendation in *Discussion Paper 2025/02 – How to Tell the Difference Between an*

Emergency and a Crisis and Why it Matters that New Zealand's emergency legislation should become a Crisis and Emergency Bill.

Follow-up on recommendations

Attachment 1 is an excel that contains a consolidated list of recommendations from both the Phase One of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19 Lessons Learned – Te Tira Ārai Urutā (Sheet 2, Table 1 of the excel) and the Office of the Auditor-General (OAG) (Sheet 3, Table 2 of the excel). Sheet 1 contains a key, as well as provides links to the documents where the recommendations were sourced from. We are interested in knowing to what extent particular recommendations have been implemented. Can you please:

8. Complete the attached excel, in particular Columns E-H of Sheet 2, and Columns C-F of Sheet 3.

9. Provide the report of progress against the recommendations of Phase One of the Royal Commission (mentioned in Recommendation 39b of the Royal Commission).

10. Advise whether MOD will be producing a report on progress against the Phase One recommendations for tabling in Parliament (mentioned in Recommendation 39c of the Royal Commission).

The Institute aims to bring our COVID-19 research to a close, and is considering publishing a third edition of *COVID-19 Nation Dates* in 2026. In the meantime, we are preparing a booklet titled *Additional COVID-19 Nation Dates Since September 2024,* which contains additional information since we published the second edition in September 2024.

We also have a Project 2058 report to complete on pandemics. It will focus on creating a decision tree, showing the types of decisions and the timing of decisions that need to be made during a pandemic. Once completed, we will provide chief executives a copy of the report for their libraries.

Thank you for your help with the above.

Best wishes,

Wendy McGuinness
Chief Executive

Attachments:
1. *COVID-19 Nation Dates: Additional Dates since September 2024* (draft)
2. *Discussion Paper 2025/02 – How to Tell the Difference Between an Emergency and a Crisis and Why it Matters*
3. 20250904 COVID-19 recommendations (Excel)

Figure 1 (mentioned in Question 6 above)

Appendix B: Example modelled natural hazard risk scenarios

Table 1: Example modelled natural hazard risk scenarios

Modelled scenarios	Likelihood in the next 50 years	Modelled building/ infrastructure losses
Auckland volcanic eruption	10%	**$5bn–$65bn** (buildings only)
Large Taranaki eruption	1%	**$10bn–$15bn**
Hikurangi subduction zone M9.1 earthquake and tsunami	1%	**$144bn** (buildings only)
Hutt River flood (above stopbank design event)	5%	**$5bn–$10bn**
Alpine Fault M8 earthquake	75%	**~$10bn**
Cyclone Gabrielle equivalent event	80%	**$9bn–$14bn** (est. actual cost)