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05 April 2023



Royal Commission of Inquiry into  
COVID-19 Lessons

## ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO COVID-19 LESSONS: INITIAL INFORMATION REQUEST

Thank you for your letter of 16<sup>th</sup> March 2023 requesting initial information on the lessons learnt from the national response to COVID-19 in order to strengthen New Zealand's preparedness, and response to, any future pandemic. I also acknowledge the follow up letter from Kira Mikelatos on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April.

The New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) is pleased to assist in providing relevant lessons for the Commission's report. Given the NZDF's large scale commitment to the pandemic response which saw over 6500 staff directly engaged in our support (Operation PROTECT) to the Government response, detailed collection and collation will require a substantial effort. Additionally, due to the nature of the NZDF information systems, we are not able to provide publically accessible electronic links to the majority of information via the internet. This part of the request will be followed up separately.

Notwithstanding these expected difficulties I am pleased to be able to provide an initial response to the questions in your request as follows:

- a. **Lessons Learned Exercises.** The NZDF has conducted reviews at various levels into the response to COVID-19; including at the strategic and operational levels, as well as with other government agencies. Much of the content of these reviews is internally focused and is likely to be outside the scope of the Commission. Most of these reviews are not centrally recorded or easily retrievable in the timeframe of your initial request; however if desired pertinent information can be provided in due course.

- b. **Timeline of Activities.** Attached as an enclosure is a timeline of the key NZDF events in the NZDF COVID-19 response between January 2020 and May 2022. Please note this does not show the numbers of personnel involved, or ongoing participation in multi-agency planning and governance activities which occurred concurrently throughout.
- c. **Core information from NZDF.** Core information where relevant will be held within a number of NZDF documents, which can be provided in due course. Key documents include:
- Notes to the Minister.
  - NZDF Directives, Orders, and Instructions.
  - National Operations Centre Tactical Insights Reports.
  - Operation PROTECT Snapshots and Situation Reports.
  - NZDF intranet announcements.
  - NZDF external public affairs announcements.

Additionally useful information would also be found within the minutes of external boards in which the NZDF participates—such as the Hazard Risk Board—and from other agencies such as MBIE, where NZDF personnel were embedded.

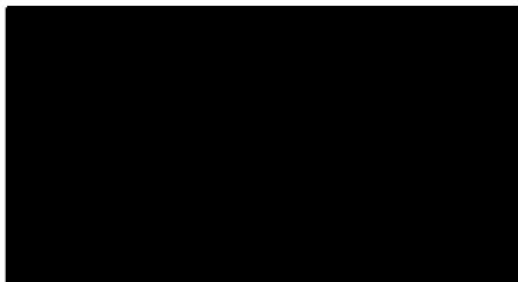
- d. **Overarching Narrative.** NZDF would be prepared to provide an overarching narrative to assist the Commission and to support key national-level lessons from the organisation. These lessons would be themed around:
- The scale and extended duration of the NZDF commitment to the COVID-19 response—in roles outside our core business—and the subsequent detrimental effects to the organisation. These include degradation of core capability and high attrition, creating a requirement to regenerate staff levels, trained state and wider capability effect which will take years to overcome.
  - The deviation from the National Security System ODESC/Watch Group process in favour of an ad hoc process that limited the flow of information, and did not involve the appropriate agencies.
  - The inertia within the system to commit early to enduring solutions; instead relying on reactive, ad-hoc and incremental actions, which were more costly in the longer term.
  - The fragility of the supply chain system across New Zealand and the requirement for greater resilience in this area.

For initial engagement for the Commission and as a conduit into the NZDF, please contact Lieutenant Colonel Anthony Blythen, who served as the Deputy Director for Strategic Commitments – Domestic throughout the response period. Email:

s. 9(2)(a) [REDACTED]

Other contacts will be provided in due course as the NZDF works through management of the workload associated with the Royal Commission of Inquiry.

Yours sincerely,



**Enclosure:**

1. Timeline of key NZDF events during the COVID-19 response

Timeline of Key NZDF Events during the COVID-19 Response

This timeline show the major NZDF activities conducted over the 28 months between Jan 2020 – May 2022, when NZDF was heavily committed to the national Covid-19 response.

