



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

OIA-2020-3795

8 May 2020

D Gounder

fyi-request-12454-6d4428c8@requests.fyi

Dear D Gounder

I refer to your email of 16 March 2020 to the Ministry of Defence requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA), information on the classification, status and role of dogs utilised by the Ministry of Defence.

The Ministry of Defence does not use working dogs. Rather, the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) has military working dogs (MWDs) trained for different roles by the New Zealand Army and the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF). Your request was therefore transferred to the NZDF for response under section 14 of the OIA.

You asked a number of questions, which I will answer in turn below:

1) How many dogs are utilised in military service currently and also in the last five years?

As at 16 March 2020, there were 12 MWDs in service with the NZDF. Over the past five years, a further 28 MWDs have provided service.

2) How many dogs are currently deployed overseas?

No NZDF MWDs were deployed overseas as at 16 March 2020. In the past, the Army has deployed explosive detector dogs on operations in Afghanistan. The RNZAF also deployed MWDs to the Solomon Islands in 2003 as part of a peace stabilisation operation.

3) What is the current status of military dogs for the Ministry of Defence? Are they classified as soldiers, weapons or equipment?

The New Zealand Army manages its MWD capabilities using a hybrid system which treats dogs primarily as equipment with regards to classification, management and for accounting purposes; but with additional provisions as to care and welfare in accordance with the Animal Welfare Act 1999. Army MWDs are capitalised and treated as an asset as public money is used to purchase them. The RNZAF classifies its MWDs as NZDF Property.

4) Are there any orders, laws or regulations providing dogs with protection during their service in armed conflict situations?

Planning for deployments of MWDs encompasses compliance with the Animal Welfare Act 1999, the offence provisions of which are given specific extra-territorial effect by section 4 of the Armed Forces Discipline Act 1971.

5) How long do dogs have to be trained before service?

This varies depending on what role the MWD will fulfill. It also depends on the origin of the dog. For example, the NZDF has accepted detector dogs from the New Zealand Police Detector Dog Breeding

programme at eight weeks of age. Individual dogs have different learning capacities, so training techniques and programmes are tailored accordingly. All new RNZAF MWDs go through an eight-week 'Introduction to Service' course, but again, the length of the course can vary depending on the dog's performance.

6) Are there vets (sic) on hand when dogs are deployed with soldiers in armed conflict situations?

When MWDs are deployed, the NZDF has three options to provide the necessary support. First, it will use qualified veterinarians from coalition partners. Second, host nation support will be used if it is suitable, and third the NZDF can also mobilise NZDF Reserve veterinarian staff. Should it be deemed necessary to deploy MWDs a veterinary plan will be developed in accordance with the specific mission guidelines, and include which support option is to be used.

MWD handlers receive veterinary training from Massey University's Centre for Working Dogs as part of their initial training. Army handlers must undertake refresher training every 24 months, and as part of any pre-deployment training. This training has been developed using military veterinary training documentation from the United States and the United Kingdom. The NZDF also refers to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Standardisation Agreement 'AMedP-8.4 Animal Care and Welfare and Veterinary Support During All Phases of Military Deployments'.

With the introduction into service of MWDs trained to undertake different tasks, work has also been carried out regarding the treatment of any dog that becomes a casualty. The Defence Health Strategy includes animal as well as human health, and the operational health support model takes account of the requirement to access professional veterinary support.

7) What happens to dogs who are too old, injured or unfit for service?

The NZDF's procedure for the "casting" of MWDs is enclosed.

8) Are there any dogs who have been captured during service? If yes, what was the procedure followed and the outcome?

The NZDF is not aware of any New Zealand MWDs that have been captured. The timeframe for this question is very broad, however. The New Zealand Army Museum and the Air Force Museum of New Zealand (both independent of the NZDF) may hold information about any military dogs or mascots used in the past 80 years that may have been captured while in service.

You have the right, under section 28(3) of the OIA, to ask an Ombudsman to review this response to your request.

Yours sincerely



AJ WOODS

Air Commodore
Chief of Staff HQNZDF

Enclosure:

1. Extract from DM 4.1.2.2 Disposal Procedures, section 5.6, Casting of military working dogs

Chapter 5 - Disposal Process for Specific Items

Out of Scope

5.6. Casting of military working dogs

- a. The term 'casting' is used to describe the removal of military working dogs (MWD) from Service. MWDs may be cast for the following reasons—
 - (1) **Veterinary.** On guidance from a trained veterinarian that the welfare, treatment or operational capability of the MWD is compromised and is deemed unfit to continue service through—
 - (a) disease;
 - (b) disability; and/or
 - (c) physical incapacity.

- (2) **Remount—**
- (a) within or in access of the NZDF MWD age criteria of 7–8 years of age;
 - (b) temperamentally unsuitable for further service;
 - (c) fails to develop, respond and retain training techniques; and
 - (d) fails to maintain operational efficiency.
- b. **Approval for casting**
- (1) **New Zealand Army.** The commanding officer (CO) of the respective MWD holding unit is the approval authority for the MWD casting process, with guidance from the MWD Capability Manager (Land), MWD Section in charge (IC) and veterinarian.
 - (2) **Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF).** In accordance with [NZAP 3300](#) *Manual of RNZAF Ground Defence and Air Security*, Chapter 10, the Commanding Officer Operations Squadron Auckland is the approval authority for any RNZAF MWD casting application. The only exception is if the MWD (under guidance from the veterinarian) is in great pain and euthanasia is the only option, then the Flight Commander Security Forces Flight Auckland can be the approval authority.
- c. **Planning.** Once the reason for casting has been determined, then a disposal plan is to be formulated and presented as part of the approval process. The following options are available—
- (1) offer to other NZDF MWD capability;
 - (2) offer to other government agency as a working dog;
 - (3) live cast through re-homing to—
 - (a) volunteer NZDF-qualified handlers currently in appointment or past-serving; or
 - (b) volunteer NZDF employees;
 - (4) euthanasia.
- Note:** Live cast of a MWD through re-homing qualifies as a 'gratuitous issue' of an NZDF asset. In addition to the suitability assessment requirements specified above, approval to gratuitously issue any MWD must be undertaken in accordance with NZDF Materiel Management policy. Guidance on this requirement and the process to be followed is to be sought from the NDO.
- d. **Live cast.** This is the preferred option. The following factors are to be taken into consideration—
- (1) reason for termination of service; and
 - (2) classification and prior training of the MWD (MWDs that have undergone bite-related training can be considered for live cast); and
 - (3) all incidents regarding behaviour that are attributable to the respective MWD.

- e. **Euthanasia.** This is to be the last resort. The MWD authority is to advise the chain of command prior to undertaking this step, unless the MWD is suffering, or there is an increased risk of injury to personnel and/or to itself. Only an authorised veterinarian may euthanise an MWD and this is to be administered as humanely as possible.
- f. **Documentation.** Proposals and actions taken to cast an MWD are to be recorded using form [MD1653](#) *New Zealand Defence Force Military Working Dog Application for Casting*.

Released under the Official Information Act 1982