



21 July 2020

Our Reference: IR-01-20-15122

Alex Harris
Fyi-request-12999-44fOe005@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Mr Harris,

I refer to your Official Information Act request of 2 June 2020 seeking information as follows:
Today RNZ reported on a case where the police treated a request for a family harm report to support an urgent protection order during lockdown as an OIA request, resulting in it being delayed ("Police treated protection request during lockdown as OIA", RNZ, 2 June 2020). In this story, the victim says she was told by police staff that "the trouble is at the moment we only have one person handling all the information requests and they've been inundated". I would like to request the following information under the OIA:

- *How many staff did police have handling OIA requests each day from 20 April to 10 May?*
- *How many staff do police have handling OIA requests now?*
- *How many staff did police have handling OIA requests on 20 April 2019?*

These three answers should give an idea of usual staffing, lockdown staffing, and whether things are back to normal yet.

Please accept my sincere apology for the delay in responding to your request.

In terms of the incident you refer to, I understand Wellington District Police apologised to the person who requested the initial family harm report. It should have been treated as a priority.

In terms of your request you clarified you were looking for national figures, and the reason for requesting information for 20 April 2019 was for historical comparison (a year before the lockdown seeming appropriate).

By way of context, I can advise that Police receives the highest number of Official Information Act (OIA) requests of any Public or non-Public Service Departments or Statutory Crown Entities combined. For example in the calendar year 1 January 2019 - 31 December 2019 Police completed 83,043 OIA requests, more than all other agencies combined.

Official information requests are responded to by staff across the twelve Police districts via File Management Centres (FMCs), as well as at Police National Headquarters (PNHQ), with the work being demand driven.

Police staff based in FMCs are employed to provide file management and transcription services. As part of these services they also respond to OIAs and Privacy Act requests. In other words they are not directly employed to work only on official information requests. During any given day they can be working on a number of different things. It is not possible to interrogate Police systems to see who

might have been working on any particular day on official information requests as opposed to all the other things people employed in those roles do on any given day.

Requests responded to at PNHQ are allocated by dedicated staff in Ministerial Services Group to staff in more than 47 business groups across PNHQ. They are usually responded to by the most appropriate person in that group for the particular request. There is not dedicated staff per se, and the number of staff responding at any point in time will depend on the number of requests that have been submitted at that time. These staff usually respond to official information requests in addition to their core role. Again, it is not possible to interrogate Police systems to see who might have been working on any particular day on official information requests as opposed to all the other things people employed in those roles do on any given day.

The work required to identify information within the scope of your request, and the effect of that on the normal operations of New Zealand Police through diverting resources to meet your request, are such that your request is declined under section 18(f) of the Act as the information cannot be made available without substantial collation and research. I have considered whether charging a fee or extending the timeframe for responding to your request would assist, as required by section 18A of the Act. However I am of the view that, for the reasons outlined above, neither of those options is practicable.

Police needed to redeploy staff in the face of unprecedented circumstances as we responded to Covid-19. This had an impact on our ability to respond to requests for information under the Official Information Act 1982 in a timely fashion. For example staff who would normally have been working in their substantive roles, and therefore being available to respond to official information requests if required, had to be re-deployed elsewhere. Many staff, like other organisations and businesses, were unable to enter their usual place of work, thus impacting on their normal work-day.

We appreciate this would have been frustrating for some people but necessary to do everything we could to keep our communities safe. As part of our efforts to advise the public as much as possible of potential impacts, we placed wording on Police's external website stating that Covid-19 would have a severe impact on our ability to respond to requests for information under the Official Information Act 1982 and Privacy Act 1993 in a timely fashion. We also advised that we recognised these requests were a matter of high public interest, and we would continue to do our best to respond to them as soon as we could. I can advise that for the most part staff are now back in their usual roles.

I trust that the information I have been able to provide to you has been useful.

You have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review my decision if you are not satisfied with my response to your request.

Yours sincerely,



Megan Winch
Manager Ministerial Service