

# Office of the Prime Minister

Prime Minister

Minister for National Security and Intelligence

Minister for Child Poverty Reduction

Minister Responsible for Ministerial Services

Associate Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage



Scott

[fyi-request-17424-507712bb@requests.fyi.org.nz](mailto:fyi-request-17424-507712bb@requests.fyi.org.nz)

25 FEB 2022

Ref: NSI OIA 2021-009

Dear Scott

## Official Information Act request for Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee documents

Thank you for your request of 2 November 2021 made under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). The following parts of your request were transferred from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to the Minister for National Security and Intelligence (Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern) on 15 November 2021:

*FIVE: The September 2019 Cabinet paper titled "National Terrorism Threat Level and Response System" [ERS-19-SUB-0020]*

*SIX: The November 2019 Cabinet paper titled "Progress Against the National Security and Intelligence Priorities" [ERS-19-SUB-0038]*

On 9 December 2021, we wrote to you extending the time limit for response by 20 working days. The additional time was needed to complete consultations before a final decision was made on your request. We are now in a position to respond.

Please find **attached** the two documents you requested:

- Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee (ERS) paper [ERS-19-SUB-0020] "*National Terrorism Threat Level and Response System*" together with related ERS and Cabinet Minutes considered on 10 September 2019;
- Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee (ERS) paper [ERS-19-SUB-0038] "*Progress Against the National Security and Intelligence Priorities*" together with related ERS and Cabinet Minutes considered on 19 November 2019.

Some parts of these documents have been withheld under section 6(a) of the Act, to protect the security or defence of New Zealand or the international relations of New Zealand. Additionally, some information has been withheld from the Cabinet Minutes as it is not relevant to your request.

The 2019 Cabinet paper "*Progress Against the National Security and Intelligence Priorities*" provides a report back on progress made to implement the 2018 Priorities. The 2021 Cabinet paper "*National Security Intelligence Priorities 2021 Review*" is planned to be proactively released shortly and provides an overview of the 2021 review of the Priorities. The 2021 paper includes the updated 2021 Priorities, improvements made to the system that supports the Priorities, and information on how Priorities begin to address relevant findings and recommendations raised in the Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Masjidain. Once released, the 2021 Priorities will be available to view on the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's website.

You have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and review our decision under section 28(3) of the Act.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Raj Nahna  
**Chief of Staff**

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Office of the Minister for National Security and Intelligence

Office of the Minister Responsible for the NZSIS

Chair, Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee

## **NATIONAL TERRORISM THREAT LEVEL AND RESPONSE SYSTEM**

### **Purpose**

1. This paper seeks agreement to changes and actions to strengthen our National Terrorism Threat Level (the Threat Level) and response system, in light of the terrorist attacks carried out in Christchurch on 15 March.

### **Executive Summary**

2. In the wake of the Christchurch terrorist attacks, the coordinated cross-system work programme to counter terrorism in New Zealand has grown. This includes the acceleration and strengthening of work-streams that were underway prior to 15 March. Namely, significant policy work, international engagement, changes to agency operational settings, reviews of agency capability and resource allocation, and public-facing communication and information work-streams.
3. This is the first in a series of papers for Cabinet consideration, based on lessons from the 15 March terrorist attacks. It seeks amendments to the setting and announcement of changes to the Threat Level.
4. Future papers will provide ministers with detail and options on a broad work programme to strengthen our system and implement lessons from the 15 March attacks. This work programme will also implement, when available, actions following from the findings of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Attack on Christchurch Mosques on 15 March 2019.
5. The Christchurch terrorist attacks were the first serious test of New Zealand's terrorism threat level and response system. While in important respects the Threat Level and response system worked as intended, the attacks also highlighted the importance of clarifying and strengthening parts of that system.
6. The proposals in this paper make changes to our approach to:
  - 6.1 setting the Threat Level;
  - 6.2 announcing the Threat Level;
  - 6.3 public communications related to the Threat Level and environment;  
and

6.4 government agency Threat Level response plans.

7. To date, practical responsibility for setting the Threat Level has rested with the Head of the Combined Threat Assessment Group (CTAG), an independent, inter-agency assessment group hosted by the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (NZSIS). The Christchurch terrorist attacks reinforced the very significant implications and weight of responsibility associated with the Threat Level. We recommend that responsibility for setting the Threat Level be elevated to the Director-General of Security (NZSIS), based on advice from CTAG. The Director-General would inform the Chief Executive of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), in his/her capacity as Chair of the Officials' Committee for Domestic and External Security Coordination (ODESC), prior to finalising the decision.
8. Any public announcement of a change in the Threat Level will involve judgements about timing, associated messaging and who makes the announcement. Accordingly, we recommend that the Chair of ODESC and the Director-General of Security consult the Prime Minister and Minister Responsible for the NZSIS, before any public statement about a change in the Threat Level is issued.
9. There is now a heightened need to keep the public informed about the New Zealand terrorism threat environment and Threat Level. We propose that the Director-General of Security, on behalf of the government, issues regular public statements on the terrorism threat environment and Threat Level. This approach is in line with partner countries, such as Australia and Canada.
10. It is important these public statements are incorporated into a broader approach addressing the advice and information and safety needs of the public. Officials from DPMC, NZ Police and NZSIS will develop a public communications approach that addresses these requirements.
11. To ensure maximum future readiness, ODESC has directed that each of the 36 state sector agencies review their plans for responding to a change in the Threat Level (noting that these plans are already a mandatory Protective Security Requirement).<sup>1</sup>
12. In addition, we propose that DPMC and the NZSIS review the national security system arrangements for ensuring best advice and information to support government agencies in response to a change in the Threat Level. This review should also consider the optimal arrangements for informing and advising key non-government organisations. The outcomes of this work will be provided to Cabinet by the end of November 2019.

<sup>1</sup> The Protective Security Requirements outline the government's expectations for government agencies' management of personnel, physical and information security. The Protective Security Requirements establish requirements for government agencies to have plans in place for responding to a change in the Threat level.

## Background

*There is a substantial counter-terrorism work programme, which predates the Christchurch terrorist attacks*

13. ODESC has provided governance over a strategic, multi-agency counter-terrorism work programme, coordinated by the counter-terrorism coordination committee (CTCC) reporting through the Security and Intelligence Board<sup>2</sup> (SIB).
14. In the wake of the Christchurch terrorist attacks, this work programme has grown significantly, with many of the work streams underway prior to 15 March accelerated and expanded to take account of the changed threat environment. The work programme includes:
  - 14.1 a significant policy work programme - including reform of the Arms Act, and consideration of counter-terrorism legislation;
  - 14.2 agencies reviewing operational settings, <sup>s6(a)</sup> [redacted] and border settings (e.g. national security screening);
  - 14.3 international and domestic engagement on violent extremist content online;
  - 14.4 public-facing work-streams, including information and advice on the management of crowded spaces and more general public safety and threat-related information;
  - 14.5 initial thinking regarding social inclusion; and
  - 14.6 agencies beginning to reallocate and/or review counter-terrorism-related resourcing and capability (notably, NZ Police and NZSIS).
15. SIB will provide governance over the work programme, which will continue to grow as reviews of the Christchurch response are implemented, as lessons from international experience are gathered, and once the Royal Commission of Inquiry has delivered its findings. In addition, there are important issues that officials were engaged on prior to the Christchurch terrorist attacks that also need to be kept in mind, such as planning for the potential return of foreign terrorist fighters, and ensuring our counter-terrorism legislation is fit for purpose.
16. A paper that draws together the key threads of the revised counter-terrorism work programme will be prepared for Cabinet consideration by the end of September. This will provide the opportunity to ensure the forward work programme is comprehensive and strategically oriented.

<sup>2</sup> SIB comprises the Chief Executives of DPMC, NZSIS, the Government Communications Security Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Ministry of Defence, New Zealand Customs, New Zealand Defence Force and New Zealand Police. The role of SIB is to govern external threats and intelligence issues.

*The Threat Level and response systems are a core part of New Zealand's counter-terrorism arrangements*

17. The role of the Threat Level is to provide an indication of attack likelihood, activate the national security system and prompt consideration of security posture across government and beyond. New Zealand has a six-tier terrorism threat level framework – ranging from Negligible to Extreme. The full Threat Level framework is attached at Appendix A.
18. A change in the Threat Level triggers action by the national security system. But the specific actions prescribed in response to a change are limited - ODESC is required to meet and the Prime Minister is to be informed. While it is a mandatory Protective Security Requirement for government agencies to have a plan for responding to a change in the Threat Level, it is up to individual agencies or organisations to determine the specific measures they will take in response to a change.
19. This reflects the dynamic and varied nature of possible threats. For instance, if the Threat Level has been increased based on intelligence and/or in parallel with an ongoing covert operation, care will need to be taken in framing the threat narrative and its communication to stakeholders to avoid compromising the operation to counter the threat. The “threat narrative” helps to inform the risk mitigation and actions taken by both the system and individual agencies.
20. This approach, which is to inform and educate agencies while leaving them to determine their own operational responses, is consistent with that taken by Five Eye partners, and reflects the reality that it is impossible for the centre to manage the profusion of individual agency circumstances and responses.
21. While it is relatively straightforward to engage with central government agencies, more work needs to be done in terms of offering information and education to local government, the private sector, and the general public. This will be addressed in the September paper to ERS.


*The Combined Threat Assessment Group (CTAG) is responsible for national terrorism threat assessments on behalf of the national security system*

22. CTAG is a multi-agency organisation, governed and resourced by several agencies but hosted by the NZSIS.<sup>3</sup> It was established by Cabinet in 2004, in response to the changing global terrorism environment, 9/11 and Bali bombing terrorist attacks. CTAG performs a role similar to terrorism threat assessment agencies in other western countries.

s6(a)

<sup>3</sup> Agencies that contribute to CTAG include NZSIS, GCSB, NZDF, CAA/Aviation Security Service, NZ Police, Department of Corrections, and MFAT.

s6(a)

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25. While CTAG has produced national terrorism threat assessments for more than a decade, a national Threat Level was not adopted until 2011. This was initially set at "Very Low", was lifted to "Low" in 2014 reflecting an elevation in the global and domestic terrorism threat, and remained at low until the Christchurch terrorist attacks. On 15 March, the Threat Level was raised to "High". It was subsequently lowered to "Medium".
  26. CTAG reviews the Threat Level in response to changes in the threat environment that may arise at any time. In addition, CTAG intends to introduce a regular, annual national terrorism threat assessment (including a review of the Threat Level). This will help support systematic consideration of counter-terrorism system priorities, inform agency security settings outside specific threat events, as well as provide the basis for regular public statements on the terrorism threat environment (an initiative set in motion prior to the Christchurch terrorist attacks).

*The Threat Level and response system performed as intended during the Christchurch terrorist attacks, but there are improvements that should be made*

27. Following the terrorist attacks in Christchurch, the Threat Level was raised from "Low" to "High". The attacks were an unprecedented event, and the first serious test of New Zealand's Threat Level and response system.
28. In important respects the system operated as intended. In this situation it was the attacks themselves, rather than the change in Threat Level, that activated the national security system and provided the context for public communications. But the change to a "High" Threat Level supported individual agencies in calibrating their revised operational security settings, as did the change to "Medium". These settings include the positioning of security guards outside public services and government agencies, requiring passengers to progress through additional screening at airports, and deferring court cases and major events. Any future change in the Threat Level would provide agencies with both a clear signal of the need to review those security settings as well as inform the calibration of any adjustments made, to provide consistency especially where changes are visible to the public.
29. As would be expected in the wake of such a significant event, there are lessons on how we can improve. A debrief of the national security system response to the Christchurch terrorist attack has been undertaken, commissioned by the Chair of ODESC. This paper takes into account feedback from agencies captured through that debrief. Based on these

lessons, we judge that it is necessary to clarify, strengthen and make some changes to the Threat Level and response system.

30. CTAG anticipates that New Zealand will face an elevated, and potentially more volatile, threat environment over the foreseeable future.<sup>4</sup> This will place additional pressure on the role of the Threat Level and response system and reinforces the need to make these changes with some urgency.

**Responsibility for setting the National Terrorism Threat Level should transfer from CTAG to the Director-General of Security**

31. Since CTAG was first established, the Head of CTAG<sup>5</sup> has held responsibility for all of CTAG's threat assessment products, including the national terrorism threat assessment and Threat Level.

32. This ensured a strong degree of assessment independence and has served the national security system effectively. The implications and weight of responsibility associated with the Threat Level, however, became increasingly evident following the first public disclosure of its level in 2014. This led to the SIB considering a change to the decision making process, which was reinforced by the Christchurch terrorist attacks and associated movement of our Threat Level to "High".

33. There have not previously been any Cabinet decisions concerning responsibility for setting the Threat Level. Given the potential volatility of the threat environment and the potential for further movements in the Threat Level, it is proposed that Cabinet should now confirm the location of this responsibility.

34. A change to the Threat Level has implications across the national security system, for the public and potentially New Zealand's international relationships. Therefore we recommend responsibility for setting the Threat Level should rest with the Director-General of Security, and that the Director-General should inform the Chair of ODESC (the Chief Executive of DPMC) before a decision to change the Threat Level. This will ensure that:

- 34.1 decisions are based on independent assessments;
- 34.2 the national security system is well connected to any potential change in Threat Level; and
- 34.3 responsibility of this magnitude is carried at an appropriate and senior level within the public service.

35. Decision-making responsibility for CTAG's terrorism threat assessment products other than the Threat Level would remain with the Head of CTAG.

s6(a)



**Before announcing a change in the National Terrorism Threat Level, the Director-General of Security and Chair of ODESC must consult the Prime Minister and Minister Responsible for the NZSIS**

36. The Threat Level was first disclosed publicly in 2014 (by then Prime Minister Key). This established a level of public interest and public expectation about ongoing disclosure of the Threat Level, including any change in that level. It has become a point of regular media inquiry.
37. Following the Christchurch terrorist attacks, this interest has intensified and there is a clear expectation on the part of the public in being informed of the threat environment and Threat Level. Nevertheless, there are a number of communications challenges associated with the Threat Level that need to be considered.
38. First, the Threat Level itself is a relatively blunt communications tool and was not designed for the purpose of public communications. Without additional context and messaging it has the potential to create considerable, undue public anxiety and uncertainty. In respect of the 15 March announcement of a change in the Threat Level, this followed highly visible attacks. The context was clear, even while the extent of the residual threat was still being determined. This will not always be the case.
39. Second, it is possible that the Threat Level could be raised based on an emerging threat in parallel with an ongoing security operation. In this situation, an immediate public disclosure of the new Threat Level could interfere with a live operation.
40. For these reasons, while it is important that the public is informed of a change in the Threat Level, important judgements may be required about the timing, associated messaging and who makes the announcement. In circumstances such as those where there is high public concern, it might be expected that the Prime Minister would make this announcement. But this will not always be the case, the process of consultation with the Prime Minister will determine the best approach.
41. To provide the necessary level of reassurance around the management of this important and sensitive issue, we recommend that the Chief Executive of DPSC as the Chair of ODESC and the Director-General of Security be required to consult the Prime Minister and Minister Responsible for the NZSIS before any public statement about a change in the Threat Level is issued. This will effectively codify what has been the recent practice.
42. For significant changes in the Threat Level the Prime Minister may decide to advise other political parties represented in Parliament or a wider group of ministers before any public statement about a change in the Threat Level is issued.
43. Appendix B provides a high level overview of the key steps and decision points leading to a change in the Threat Level and subsequent public announcement.

**Work on a broader approach to public communications about the terrorism threat environment is required**

44. The Christchurch terrorist attacks have heightened the need to keep the public informed about the New Zealand terrorism threat environment. Officials propose that the government publishes regular public statements on the national terrorism threat environment. These statements would reference the Threat Level, but would be issued whether or not there had been a change.
45. These statements would provide a predictable vehicle for updating the New Zealand public on the nature and extent of the terrorism threat in this country. At a minimum, it is expected these statements would be published on agency websites. But they could also form the basis for other statements by senior officials or ministers as required and appropriate. They would perform a similar role to regular public terrorism statements issued in a number of other countries. These vary from short statements (e.g. Australia) to more extensive publications (e.g. Canada). The Australian statement, published at [www.nationalsecurity.gov.au](http://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au), is attached as an example (see Appendix C). These statements could potentially be incorporated into current relevant publications, such as the NZSIS Annual Report.
46. There are important, wider public communications issues to address in the wake of 15 March, including further proactive communications to build on work already underway. This includes information, advice and engagement related to the management of crowded places and major events, as well as consideration of the information and advice available to the public around terrorism and public / personal safety. It also takes into account the background work regarding social inclusion and considers international partners.
47. This work will be progressed by DPMC, NZ Police and NZSIS to ensure a comprehensive, coordinated, cross-government approach to terrorism-related public information, safety, and communications, incorporating the proposed publication of regular public updates on the terrorism threat environment and Threat Level.
48. This work will be reported back to Cabinet by the end of September 2019.

**Government Agency Threat Level Response Plans will be reviewed, and more support could be provided to assist agencies in their planning**

49. It is a mandatory Protective Security Requirement for government agencies to have a plan for responding to a change in Threat Level. The Christchurch terrorist attacks revealed differing levels of planning and readiness across agencies for a change in the national terrorism threat level. This led to confusion and a lack of consistency in response across the system.
50. To ensure maximum future readiness, ODESC has directed that each of the 36 state sector agencies review their protective security arrangements for a response to a change in the Threat Level.

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51. We also propose that DPMC and the NZSIS review the national security system arrangements for ensuring best advice and information to support government agencies in response to a change in the Threat Level. This review should also consider the optimal arrangements for informing and advising key non-government organisations.
52. This work will be reported back to Cabinet by the end of November 2019.

**Consultation**

53. The Department of Internal Affairs, Government Communications Security Bureau, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Transport, New Zealand Defence Force, and New Zealand Police were consulted on this paper.

**Financial Implications**

54. There are no financial implications arising from this paper.

**Legislative Implications**

55. There are no legislative implications arising from this paper.

**Human Rights, Gender Implications and Disability Perspectives**

56. The proposals in this paper have no implications with respect to human rights, gender or disability.

**Publicity**

57. Aspects of this paper, including the provision of regular public updates on the Threat Level, will be made public.

**Proactive Release**

58. The paper will not be released until after Cabinet consideration of the work programme and communications plan. Elements of the paper, including amendments to the process for setting the Threat Level, will then be made public as part of the wider counter-terrorism communications strategy. The release will be subject to redaction as appropriate under the Official Information Act 1982.

**Recommendations**

59. The Minister for National Security and Intelligence and the Minister Responsible for the NZSIS recommend that the Committee:
  1. **Note** that, in the wake of the Christchurch terrorist attacks we are progressing a wide ranging counter-terrorism work programme to strengthen our system, and that a paper drawing together all of the key threads of the revised work programme will be submitted to Ministers before the end of September 2019;

2. **Note** that the Christchurch terrorist attack was the first serious test of New Zealand's National Terrorism Threat Level and response system;
3. **Note** that, while in important respects the National Terrorism Threat Level and response system worked as intended, the attack also highlighted the importance of clarifying, strengthening and making changes to that system;

*Setting the National Terrorism Threat Level*

4. **Note** that, to date, practical responsibility for setting the National Terrorism Threat Level has rested with the Head of CTAG;
5. **Agree** that responsibility for setting the National Terrorism Threat Level transfer to the Director-General of Security;
6. **Agree** that the Director-General of Security inform the Chair of ODESC before confirming a change in the National Terrorism Threat Level;
7. **Note** these arrangements are intended to maintain assessment independence, ensure the national security system is well connected to any potential change in National Terrorism Threat Level, as well as ensure that a responsibility of this magnitude is carried at an appropriate and senior level within the public service;

*Announcing the National Terrorism Threat Level*

8. **Agree** that the Chief Executive of DPMC as Chair of ODESC and the Director-General of Security consult the Prime Minister and Minister Responsible for the NZSIS before any public statement about a change in the National Terrorism Threat Level is issued;

*Public Communications about the Terrorism Threat Environment*

9. **Note** the heightened need to keep the public informed about the New Zealand terrorism threat environment and National Terrorism Threat Level;
10. **Note** the proposal that the government issues periodic public statements on the terrorism threat environment and National Terrorism Threat Level;
11. **Note** the need for these public statements to be incorporated into a broader communications approach addressing public advice and information requirements;
12. **Note** the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, NZ Police and NZSIS will progress work on this overall approach to terrorism-related public communications;

13. **Agree** that officials report back on this work to Cabinet by the end of September 2019.

*Government Agency Threat Levels Response Plans*

14. **Note** it is a mandatory Protective Security Requirement for government agencies to have a plan for responding to a change in the National Terrorism Threat Level;
15. **Agree** that NZSIS and DPMC review the national security system arrangements for ensuring advice and information to support government agencies and key non-government organisations in response to a change in the National Terrorism Threat Level.
16. **Agree** that officials report back to Cabinet on this work by the end of November 2019.

Authorised for lodgement by

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, Minister for National Security and Intelligence

Hon Andrew Little, Minister Responsible for the NZSIS

**Appendix A – Terrorism Threat Level Framework**

Threat Level	Definition	Qualitative Statement
Negligible	Terrorist attack is assessed as very unlikely	Remote / Highly Unlikely
Very Low	Terrorist attack is assessed as unlikely	Improbable / Unlikely
Low	Terrorist attack is assessed as possible, but not expected	Realistic possibility
Medium	Terrorist attack is assessed as feasible and could well occur	Probably / Likely
High	Terrorist attack is assessed as very likely	Highly / Very Probable / Likely
Extreme	Terrorist attack is expected imminently	Almost Certain

Note – the above framework is applied by CTAG across all of its terrorism threat assessment products.

Released under the Official Information Act 1982

## Appendix B – National Threat Level Change Process

### National Threat Level Change Process

This is the high-level process related to a change in the National Terrorism Threat Level (as proposed in the accompanying Cabinet paper). It is focused on the main stages and decision points of interest to ministers.

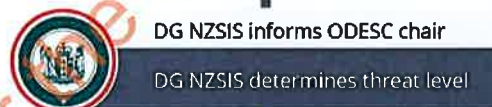
This high-level process would be supported and facilitated by:

- a range of interactions between the key agencies and organisations in the national security system
- ongoing visibility of the unfolding operational situation.

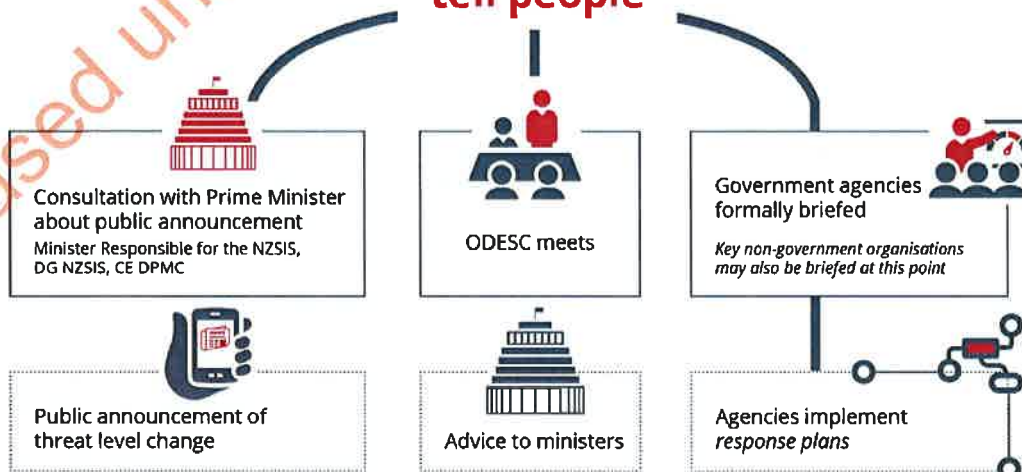
### consider changing level



### level changes



### tell people



### Appendix C: Australian National Terrorism Threat Advisory System

(Taken from [www.nationalsecurity.gov.au](http://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au))

Australia's current National Terrorism Threat Level is PROBABLE.



- [Current advice to the public](#)
- [Video—Overview of the National Terrorism Threat Advisory System](#)

The National Terrorism Threat Advisory System is a scale of five levels to provide advice about the likelihood of an act of terrorism occurring in Australia:

When the threat level changes, the Australian Government provides advice on what the threat level means, where the threat is coming from, potential targets and how a terrorist act may be carried out.

The National Terrorism Threat Level is regularly reviewed in line with the security environment and intelligence.

It is important to be aware of the current threat level and to report any suspicious incidents to the National Security Hotline on 1800 123 400. More information is available in the following fact sheet:

- [National Terrorism Threat Advisory System fact sheet \[PDF 216KB\]](#)
- [National Terrorism Threat Advisory System fact sheet \[DOCX 287KB\]](#)

### The Australian security environment

Australia's National Terrorism Threat Level remains **PROBABLE**. Credible intelligence, assessed by our security agencies, indicates that individuals or groups continue to possess the intent and capability to conduct a terrorist attack in Australia. The public should continue to exercise caution and report any suspicious incidents to the National Security Hotline by calling 1800 123 400. Life-threatening situations should be reported to the police by calling Triple Zero (000).

International terrorist groups have proven adept at using their extremist ideology to motivate lone actors and small groups to use violence in their home countries. Individuals in Australia can be influenced directly by overseas-based extremists as well as by a wide range of propaganda which provides inspiration, encouragement and instructions for terrorist attacks onshore. External influence has been a feature of several prevented terrorism plots and attacks in Australia and also in terrorist incidents across Europe, the United States and Asia.





The terrorist threat in Australia has been elevated since September 2014—in the subsequent period there have been 15 major disruption operations in relation to imminent attack planning and seven terrorist attacks targeting people in Australia. Almost all these attacks and disruptions occurred in Sydney or Melbourne, and we expect those cities will remain most exposed to the threat. However, in Australia, as in other Western countries, the terrorist threat is not confined to the major cities. Australia and Australians continue to be viewed as legitimate targets by those who wish to do us harm and believe they have an ideological justification to conduct attacks. Additionally, any of the small number of Australians involved with violent extremist groups overseas who return home may present long-term challenges.

## Terrorism in Australia

The violent ideology of Sunni Islamist terrorist groups—such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and al-Qa'ida—continues to appeal to a small number of people in Australia. These groups use the power of the internet to spread their propaganda to an existing audience and also aim it at those susceptible to radicalisation. The broad body of terrorist propaganda continues to grow. Some propaganda releases specifically celebrate previous terrorist attacks including the methods and tactics used in attacks, while others feature tailored messaging that references specific countries or individuals. Australia continues to be specifically mentioned in some pro-ISIL propaganda—these releases add to a large body of material that encourages terrorism. While a single piece of propaganda, or mention of Australia, is unlikely to be the sole catalyst for an onshore attack it can offer inspiration, guidance and instructions that may appeal to individuals willing to use violence. The impact of the actions of even one individual willing to use violence can be significant and is clearly evident in the terrorist attacks that have occurred in Australia since 2014.

The primary terrorist threat in Australia is from a small number of Islamist extremists, principally lone actors or small groups. While we must be prepared for more complex attack plots, simple attack methodologies that enable individuals to act independently and with a high degree of agility remain the more likely form of terrorism in Australia. The simple nature of these attacks means preparation may not involve activity that will come to the attention of authorities—meaning there is no guarantee of early detection or disruption. Many Islamist terrorist attacks and plots aim to inflict maximum casualties or indiscriminately target members of the public and attackers often aim to be killed during their attack.

The lone actor threat is not confined to Islamist extremists. Individuals motivated by other ideological agendas could also consider conducting an act of terrorism; the 2016 arrest and subsequent terrorism-related charges against a right-wing lone actor in Melbourne reinforces this threat.

## Terrorist targeting

While the symbolic appeal of an attack against a government or authority—such as the military, police and security agencies—remains, members of the public and locations where large crowds congregate could also be attacked indiscriminately. Attacks against the general public designed to cause injury or death are aimed at disrupting our lives and causing fear; even a simple attack can meet this objective. Additionally, an alleged complex terrorist plot to attack aviation disrupted in Sydney in July 2017 is a reminder that sophisticated terrorist plots targeting the West are possible.

It is important for the public to maintain a level of awareness and to report any suspicious activity immediately to authorities—[www.nationalsecurity.gov.au](http://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au) provides information on what to report and how to report it.

## Terrorist weapons and tactics

While the most likely form of terrorism in Australia remains an attack by an individual or small group using simple attack methodologies, the possibility of more complex attacks cannot be ruled out. Any terrorist attack in Australia over the next 12 months would probably involve weapons and tactics that are low-cost and relatively simple, including basic weapons, explosives and/or firearms. Basic weapons are readily available, as everyday objects that do not require specialist skills. Terrorists have used basic weapons such as knives, machetes or vehicles to conduct lethal attacks. Explosives

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remain a favoured terrorist weapon globally. There is a range of online literature and propaganda that provide instructions on how homemade explosives can be manufactured from readily available materials. Firearms can be sourced through legal and illicit channels.

### Our response

Governments are working closely with communities to prevent terrorism, combat terrorist propaganda online and promote early intervention programmes.

Federal, state and territory authorities have well-tested cooperative arrangements in place and have adopted appropriate security measures.

Police and security agencies liaise closely with critical infrastructure owners and operators.

In the current environment, Australians should go about their daily business as usual but should exercise caution and be aware of events around them. If you see, hear or become aware of something suspicious or unusual, call the National Security Hotline on 1800 123 400. Every call is important and could prevent a terrorist attack in Australia.

### Local advice

See the following websites for information specific to your state/territory:

- Australian Capital Territory—[ACT Policing](#) website
- New South Wales—[SecureNSW](#) website
- Northern Territory—[Northern Territory Government](#) website
- Queensland—[Safeguarding Queensland](#) website
- South Australia—[South Australia Police](#) website
- Tasmania—[TasALERT](#) website
- Victoria—[Victoria Police](#) website
- Western Australia—[Western Australia Police](#) website.

See the [Frequently asked questions](#) page for answers to some general questions about national security.



# Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee

## Minute of Decision

*This document contains information for the New Zealand Cabinet. It must be treated in confidence and handled in accordance with any security classification, or other endorsement. The information can only be released, including under the Official Information Act 1982, by persons with the appropriate authority.*

### National Terrorism Threat Level and Response System

**Portfolios**                      **National Security and Intelligence / NZSIS**

On 10 September 2019, the Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee (ERS):

#### Background

- 1        **noted** that, in the wake of the Christchurch terrorist attack:
  - 1.1      officials are progressing a wide ranging counter-terrorism work programme to strengthen the National Terrorism Threat Level and response system;
  - 1.2      a paper drawing together all of the key threads of the revised work programme will be submitted to Ministers before the end of September 2019;
- 2        **noted** that the Christchurch terrorist attack was the first serious test of New Zealand's National Terrorism Threat Level and response system;
- 3        **noted** that, while in important respects the National Terrorism Threat Level and response system worked as intended, the attack also highlighted the importance of clarifying, strengthening and making changes to that system;

#### Setting the National Terrorism Threat Level

- 4        **noted** that, to date, practical responsibility for setting the National Terrorism Threat Level has rested with the Head of the Combined Threat Assessment Group;
- 5        **agreed** that responsibility for setting the National Terrorism Threat Level transfer to the Director-General of Security;
- 6        **agreed** that the Director-General of Security inform the Chair of the Officials' Committee for Domestic and External Security Coordination (ODESC) before confirming a change in the National Terrorism Threat Level;
- 7        **noted** that these arrangements are intended to:
  - 7.1      maintain assessment independence;
  - 7.2      ensure the national security system is well connected to any potential change in National Terrorism Threat Level;

- 7.3 ensure that a responsibility of this magnitude is carried at an appropriate and senior level within the Public Service;

### **Announcing the National Terrorism Threat Level**

- 8 **agreed** that the Chief Executive of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), as Chair of ODESC, and the Director-General of Security consult the Prime Minister and the Minister Responsible for the NZSIS before any public statement about a change in the National Terrorism Threat Level is issued;

### **Public communications about the terrorism threat environment**

- 9 **noted** the heightened need to keep the public informed about the New Zealand terrorism threat environment and National Terrorism Threat Level;
- 10 **noted** the proposal that the government issues periodic public statements on the terrorism threat environment and National Terrorism Threat Level;
- 11 **noted** the need for these public statements to be incorporated into a broader communications approach addressing public advice and information requirements;
- 12 **noted** that DPMC, the New Zealand Police and the NZSIS will progress work on this overall approach to terrorism-related public communications;
- 13 **directed** officials to report back on this work to ERS by the end of November 2019;

### **Government agency threat levels response plans**

- 14 **noted** that it is a mandatory Protective Security Requirement for government agencies to have a plan for responding to a change in the National Terrorism Threat Level;
- 15 **agreed** that NZSIS and DPMC review the national security system arrangements for ensuring advice and information is available to support government agencies and key non-government organisations in response to a change in the National Terrorism Threat Level;
- 16 **directed** officials to report back to ERS on this work by the end of November 2019.

Janine Harvey  
Committee Secretary

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**Present:**

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern (Chair)  
Hon Andrew Little  
Hon David Parker  
Hon Stuart Nash  
Hon Ron Mark

**Officials present from:**

Office of the Prime Minister  
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Ministry of Defence

**Hard-copy distribution:**

Minister for National Security and Intelligence  
Minister Responsible for the NZSIS



# Cabinet

## Minute of Decision

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### Report of the Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee: Period Ended 13 September 2019

On 16 September 2019, Cabinet made the following decisions on the work of the Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee for the period ended 13 September 2019:

Not relevant to your request



ERS-19-MIN-0020 **National Terrorism Threat Level and Response System** CONFIRMED  
Portfolios: National Security and Intelligence / NZSIS

Not relevant to your request



Not relevant to your request



Michael Webster  
Secretary of the Cabinet

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Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee  
Minister for Economic Development

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Office of the Minister for National Security and Intelligence

Chair, Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee

## Progress against the National Security and Intelligence Priorities

### Purpose

1. This paper provides a report back on progress made to implement the National Security and Intelligence Priorities (the Priorities).

### Background

2. The Priorities outline key areas of national security interest to the New Zealand government. The Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee (ERS) agreed the current Priorities framework in December 2018 [ERS-18-SUB-0026 refers]. Officials were also directed to produce an unclassified version of the Priorities to inform the public about the general focus areas for the national security and intelligence sector. In June 2019, Cabinet asked the Minister for National Security and Intelligence to report back to ERS in November 2019 on progress made on the Priorities, including against performance measures [ERS-190MIN-005 refers].
3. In June 2019, following a small-scale review of the Priorities, <sup>s6(a)</sup> [redacted] It was further noted that officials would consult with the Minister for National Security and Intelligence on how an unclassified version of the Priorities would be shared. A version of the Priorities is now publicly available for the first time through the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's (DPMC's) Annual Report, released on 17 October 2019.

### Implementation of the Priorities

4. When the Priorities were agreed in 2018, Ministers discussed the need for greater assurance around how the Priorities are operationalised across the national security and intelligence sector. The Priorities should enable a cohesive, cross-agency approach to effectively support decision-making and advice on key national security issues.

*What has been done to strengthen the system?*

5. To support decision-making, the sector requires fit-for-purpose coordination mechanisms that result in intelligence and information delivering insights where these are needed most. Over the course of 2019, DPMC has overseen the set-up of a new approach to implementing the 16 Priorities across the sector. The aim is to ensure that agencies work collectively to support evidence-based decision-making on national security issues. Annex 1, *National Security and Intelligence Priorities: Making an impact* shows examples of a range of decision-making that has been supported by insights from intelligence, assessment or other relevant information.

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6. Officials are setting up coordination mechanisms for all 16 Priorities, where relevant agencies work together to understand and respond to key policy, operational, strategic and other questions that could be supported by intelligence, information and assessment. This ensures providers of such information are clear about what customers from across the sector need, and are better able to collectively respond. This more systematic approach also brings greater visibility to any gaps, issues and risks with resourcing or cross-agency collaboration on the Priorities. The sector is also working to strengthen the strategic governance architecture that supports agencies to deliver against the Priorities, with a focus on managing system risks.

*What difference has this new approach made? – Performance measures*

7. DPMC has developed performance measures to support the governing bodies for the Priorities (the National Intelligence Coordination Committee and the Security and Intelligence Board) to manage system risks. These measures focus on how well agencies are working together, whether effort is focused on the most important issues within each Priority, and the impact on decision-making.<sup>s6(a)</sup>

8. DPMC has noted high levels of engagement and participation from across the national security sector in implementing this new approach. This includes agencies that have not previously seen themselves as having a role in national security and intelligence or the Priorities themselves (such as the Ministries for Environment and Health).

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9. I expect further tangible benefits to emerge over time, as agencies that provide intelligence, information and assessment, can make well-informed and accountable decisions about where to put their effort and resources. We are already starting to see examples of the difference the new approach has made, including:

### Next steps

#### *Complete the new system set-up*

10. Officials will continue to operationalise the 16 Priorities. Roll-out is expected to be completed by the end of 2019, and progress will be monitored against performance measures.

#### *Review of the Priorities due in 2020*

11. Cabinet directed officials to review the Priorities every two years to ensure these keep up with changes in the national security environment and the need to be responsive to evolving circumstances. A refreshed set of Priorities is due for consideration at ERS by the end of 2020.

12. s6(a)

An annual Strategic Assessment, produced by the National Assessments Bureau, will be used to inform this work. DPMC will report back to the Minister for National Security and Intelligence on the small-scale review.

**Environment, climate change, and natural resources:** A Stakeholder Group has increased engagement between agencies that have limited staff with security clearances, and agencies that mostly work with classified material. Agencies that provide intelligence are increasing their understanding of customer requirements on this issue and how to provide information in a user-friendly format. Customers are increasing their awareness of what intelligence, information and assessment is available to support their policy, operational and regulatory decision-making.

**Space security:** The agencies involved in New Zealand's Space programme have collectively prioritised their intelligence and assessment requirements. These have been discussed with providers who have responded to fill identified gaps, including intelligence that was required to develop effective Space policy for New Zealand. The group meets regularly to ensure they have the correct information to make well informed policy, international engagement, regulatory and operational decisions.

s6(a)

**Primary Industries:** The Ministry for Primary Industries is currently reviewing the Biosecurity Act 1993. Amendments to the Act will enable and facilitate greater use of intelligence information to assess risks and to prevent the arrival of pests and diseases.

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13. I will report back to ERS before the end of 2020 with the findings of the next full review of the Priorities and a further update on progress.

*Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Attack on Christchurch Mosques*

14. Officials are alert to the reporting timetable of the Royal Commission. Any implications from the Commission's findings that may be relevant to the Priorities, or the system that supports them, will be taken into account and advice provided to Ministers as appropriate.

**Consultation**

15. The following agencies have been consulted on this paper, and their views incorporated: Government Communications Security Bureau, New Zealand Security Intelligence Service, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (includes Immigration, Space, Energy and Resources, Foreign Interference, and Science and Innovation interests), Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Ministry of Defence, New Zealand Defence Force, New Zealand Police, New Zealand Customs Service, and Ministry for Primary Industries (includes Agriculture, Biosecurity, Fisheries, Food Safety, Forestry interests).

**Financial implications**

16. There are no financial implications arising from this paper.

**Human rights**

17. The proposals in this paper are not inconsistent with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 or the Human Rights 1993.

**Legislative implications**

18. There are no legislative implications arising from this paper.

**Gender implications**

19. There are no gender implications arising from this paper.

**Risks and publicity**

20. The Priorities were made publicly available for the first time in October 2019. DPMC will coordinate the response to any media queries with the national security and intelligence sector agencies.

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21. The Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Attack on Christchurch Mosques could possibly present findings that require changes to the Priorities and how they are implemented. Officials will provide further advice as appropriate.

### **Proactive release**

22. I do not propose to proactively release this paper.

### **Recommendations**

The Minister for National Security and Intelligence recommends that the Committee:

23. **Note** that in December 2018 Cabinet directed officials to report back on progress made to implement the National Security and Intelligence Priorities;
24. **Note** that officials have been working this year to develop coordination mechanisms and performance measures for the 16 National Security and Intelligence Priorities, and the sector is judged to be tracking well as the new approach rolls out;
25. **Note** that officials will report back to ERS before the end of 2020 with the findings of the next full review of the Priorities and a further update on progress made by the sector on implementing the Priorities.

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern

Minister for National Security and Intelligence

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# NATIONAL SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE PRIORITIES

## Making an impact

Intelligence and assessment supports evidence-based decision-making. The National Security and Intelligence Priorities ensure insights from information, intelligence and assessment on national security issues are focused in areas where they are needed most. These are some examples of where this makes an impact.



### strategy development

### identifying risks

### decisions made on the ground

#### COUNTER-TERRORISM STRATEGY

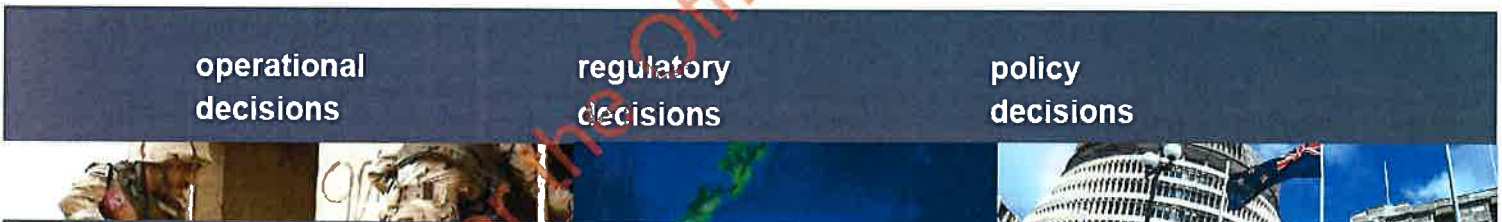
Intelligence, both domestic and that of partner countries, has provided the risk context necessary to develop the National Counter-Terrorism Strategy, work programme priorities, communications plan, and crowded places guidance. Within this work, intelligence plays a vital role in our detection and understanding of returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters and international terrorist designations.

#### MARITIME MASS ARRIVALS

Intelligence alerts us about possible maritime mass arrivals to New Zealand and enables us to quickly work with partners to manage risks offshore, preventing the need for a wholesale domestic response. New Zealand, Australia and other regional partners in the Asia-Pacific work closely and share information to prevent and manage maritime mass arrivals.

#### CHRISTCHURCH 15 MARCH

Intelligence, particularly Police intelligence from the Districts, enabled immediate risk management actions during the response to the Christchurch attack. Police intelligence and other forms of classified intelligence (including that from overseas partners) continue to support longer-term evidential and prosecutorial processes.



### operational decisions

### regulatory decisions

### policy decisions

#### NZ DEFENCE FORCE DEPLOYMENTS

Intelligence enables government officials to plan and deliver the types and scale of defence engagement activities with individual countries, regions, and international forums. It ensures defence personnel are equipped with the right kit, tools, experience, and knowledge when deployed overseas.

#### TICSA and OSHAA

Intelligence provides the evidence that enables policy officials to consider regulatory interventions in the face of national security risks. For example:

- the Telecommunications (Interception Capability and Security) Act 2013, which mitigates security risks arising from the design, build, or operation of public telecommunications networks
- the Outer Space and High-altitude Activities Act 2017, which establishes a system for regulating space activities and certain high-altitude activities.

#### FOREIGN INTERFERENCE

Intelligence continues to inform the direction and focus of the Foreign Interference work programme by raising awareness of risks, and informing decisions about where we should be putting our effort to build resilience within our economic and democratic institutions. Our approach to managing foreign interference risks involves our intelligence agencies, MFAT, DPMC and line departments with portfolio responsibilities <sup>s6(a)</sup>. These agencies work together to develop mitigations, informed by intelligence. Intelligence is also critical to the successful management of one-off incidents.

**Working together on the same priorities means we take a cohesive, cross-agency approach to effectively support decision-making and advice on key national security issues.**

#### THE NATIONAL SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE PRIORITIES:

Biosecurity and human health • Environment, climate change and natural resources • Foreign influence, interference and espionage • Global economy, trade and investment • Implications of emerging technology • International governance, geopolitics and global security • Malicious cyber activity • Middle East regional security • New Zealand's strategic interest in the Asia region • Pacific regional stability • Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and conventional weapons • Transnational organised crime • Territorial security & sovereignty • Terrorism • Threats to New Zealanders overseas • Space security

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# Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee

## Minute of Decision

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### Progress Against the National Security and Intelligence Priorities

Portfolio                      National Security and Intelligence

On 19 November 2019, the Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee (ERS):

- 1        **noted** that on 4 December 2018, ERS agreed to a set of National Security and Intelligence Priorities (the Priorities) [ERS-8-MIN-0026];
- 2        **noted** that on 25 June 2019, ERS noted that:
  - 2.1        officials had reviewed the Priorities in light of changes to the security environment and considered that the Priorities remain fit-for-purpose;
  - 2.2        the Minister for National Security and Intelligence would report back in November 2019 on the progress made on the Priorities, including against performance measures;

[ERS-19-MIN-0015]

3        s6(a) 

- 4        **noted** that officials will report back to ERS before the end of 2020 with:
  - 4.1        the findings of the next full review of the Priorities;
  - 4.2        a further update on progress made by the sector on implementing the Priorities.

Janine Harvey  
Committee Secretary

Hard-copy distribution: (see over)

**Present:**

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern  
Rt Hon Winston Peters (Chair)  
Hon Grant Robertson  
Hon Andrew Little  
Hon David Parker  
Hon Stuart Nash

**Officials present from:**

Office of the Prime Minister  
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

**Hard-copy distribution:**

Minister for National Security and Intelligence

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# Cabinet

## Minute of Decision

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### Report of the Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee: Period Ended 22 November 2019

On 25 November 2019, Cabinet made the following decisions on the work of the Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee for the period ended 22 November 2019:

ERS-19-MIN-0038 **Progress Against the National Security and Intelligence Priorities** CONFIRMED  
Portfolio: National Security and Intelligence

Not relevant to your request

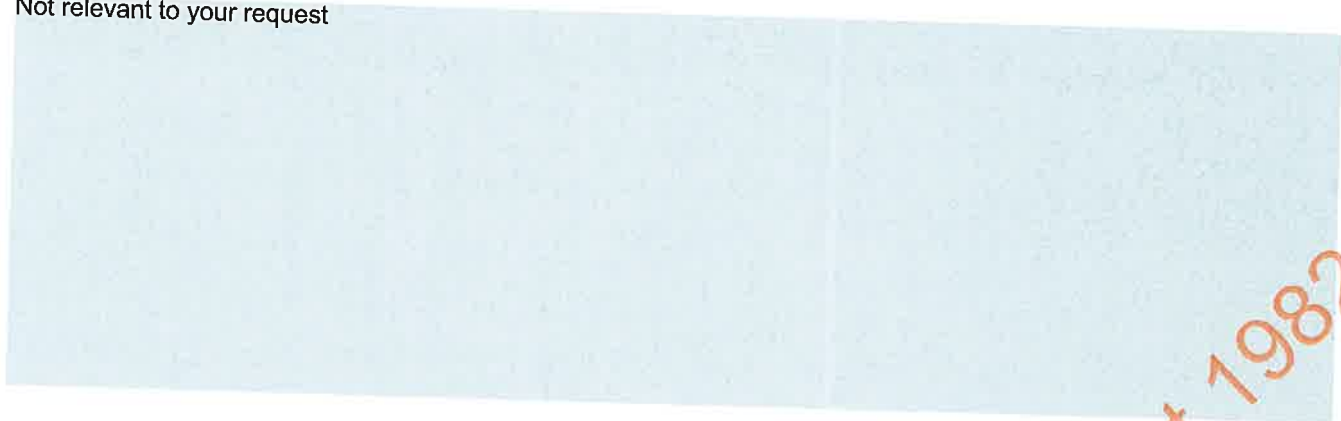
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CAB-19-MIN-0612

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Michael Webster  
Secretary of the Cabinet

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