



Minister of Foreign Affairs
Minister of Defence

For approval by
For approval by

25 April 2022
25 April 2022

Contingency planning for COVID-19 in the Pacific: Extension to the use of New Zealand Defence Force Capabilities

BRIEFING Decision Submission

PURPOSE This submission seeks approval to extend the previous authorisation to use New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) capabilities to support relief responses in the Pacific region relating to COVID-19 from 1 May 2022 – 30 April 2023.

Tukunga tūtohua – Recommended referrals

Prime Minister	For information by	30 April 2022
Associate Minister of Foreign Affairs	For information by	30 April 2022
Minister for COVID-19 Response	For information by	30 April 2022

Taipitopito whakapā – Contact details

NAME	ROLE	DIVISION	WORK PHONE
s. 9(2)(a)	Divisional Manager	Partnerships, Humanitarian and Multilateral (MFAT)	s. 9(2)(a)
s. 9(2)(a)	Director, Pacific Americas Europe	International Branch, Ministry of Defence	s. 9(2)(a)
s. 6(a)		New Zealand Defence Force	s. 9(2)(a)

Mā te Tari Minita e whakakī – Minister's Office to complete

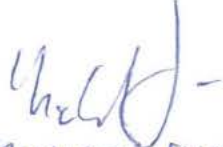
- | | | |
|--|---|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Approved | <input type="checkbox"/> Noted | <input type="checkbox"/> Seen |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Needs amendment | <input type="checkbox"/> Declined | <input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Overtaken by events | <input type="checkbox"/> See Minister's notes | |


Comments

Pito matua – Key points

- A standing approval to allow for the use of NZDF capabilities in response to COVID-19 related requests for assistance from Pacific island countries was agreed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defence on 6 July 2020, and extended twice since then. It is due to expire on 30 April 2022.
- Since June 2020, Aotearoa New Zealand has used this approval to respond to 22 requests from Pacific island governments for critical medical equipment and supplies and the repatriation of Pacific island nationals.
- Many countries in the Pacific are in the midst of community outbreaks for the first time and the urgent medical supplies, personal protective equipment (PPE) and relief items to respond to outbreaks is therefore expected to continue. In addition, Pacific island countries continue to experience regular challenges in vaccine access and the supply of essential medical equipment as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Flight paths in to the Pacific remain irregular or unreliable and needs will continue to arise. We are therefore likely to receive further requests.
- We therefore recommend that you agree to extend the standing approval from 1 May 2022 to 30 April 2023. This will best position us to respond to future requests. All requests must meet agreed criteria and be approved by both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) at Deputy Secretary level and the Chief of Defence Force.


for Jackie Frizelle
for Andrew Needs
For Secretary of Foreign
Affairs and Trade
Date:


for MICHAEL SLAVIN
for Andrew Bridgman
Secretary of Defence
Date:


for KR Short
Air Marshal, AOD
Chief of Defence Force
Date: 14 Apr 22

Tūtohu – Recommendations

It is recommended that you:

- | | | |
|---|---|----------|
| 1 | Note Aotearoa New Zealand expects to continue receiving regular requests for assistance related to COVID-19 from Pacific island countries over the coming months; and | Yes / No |
| 2 | Note that individual tasks for the NZDF to meet these requests will be recommended by MFAT at Deputy Secretary level; and | Yes / No |
| 3 | Agree that standing approval is given for NZDF capabilities to be used, as determined by the Chief of Defence Force, to support New Zealand Government activities in response to these requests, provided they meet an agreed set of criteria; and | Yes / No |
| 4 | Note that the ongoing necessity for this arrangement will be evaluated by 31 March 2023. | Yes / No |

Hon Nanaia Mahuta
Minister of Foreign Affairs

Hon Peeni Henare
Minister of Defence

Date: / /

Pūrongo – Report

1. This submission seeks your agreement to continue using New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) capabilities to support COVID-19 relief responses in the Pacific region. Approval is sought for the period 1 May 2022 – 30 April 2023.

Background

2. A submission titled “*New Zealand Defence Force COVID-19 support to the Pacific and the Polynesian Vaccine Programme*” was approved by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence on 7 May 2021.
3. This decision extended the existing authorisation for NZDF capabilities to be used in response to COVID-19 related requests for assistance from Pacific island countries for 12 months.¹ Prior to the standing authorisation, ministerial agreement was sought for each individual NZDF activity. With the extension decision, Ministers agreed additional criteria for seeking the NZDF's support to the Ministry of Health's programme of vaccine support to Polynesia.²
4. Since the standing approval was first established on 6 July 2020, the NZDF have responded to a number of requests under the name 'Operation Pacific Support', including the repatriation of Pacific nationals stranded in Aotearoa New Zealand, logistical support in transporting essential medical supplies to the Pacific, and supporting the roll out of COVID-19 vaccines under the leadership of the Ministry of Health. A full list of support activities is included as Appendix B.
5. This submission seeks agreement to continue supporting the Ministry of Health's vaccination support programme to Polynesia, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's requests for COVID-19 support, under one approval process with one set of criteria.

Renewal of the standing approval

6. The standing approval expires on 30 April 2022. There is an ongoing necessity for support to the Pacific region. Pacific countries continue to respond to COVID-19 outbreaks as they implement their COVID-19 management plans, and begin to re-open their borders. There are variable levels of preparedness to manage COVID-19, which places pressure on capacity constrained health systems across the region. Pacific countries continue to turn to Aotearoa New Zealand for support to access essential medical supplies, equipment, PPE, relief assistance and vaccines, when demand, urgency and quantities required exceed existing

¹ First authorisation approved for 3 month period from 6 July to 31 October 2020. An extension to this arrangement was approved on 8 December for the period 10 December 2020 to 30 June 2021. A third extension was approved for the period 1 May 2021 – 30 April 2022, expanding the scope of support to include the vaccination programme.

² CAB-21-MIN-0100: *Provision of COVID-19 Vaccine and Relevant Support to Six Polynesian Countries*, 6 April 2021.

capacity. Flight options in to the Pacific remain sporadic, and many Pacific island governments continue to enforce strict border restrictions which hamper transit routes to parts of the Pacific.

7. As outbreaks continue, Aotearoa New Zealand is likely to continue to receive further requests for support including for:
 - Planned delivery and accelerated delivery of vaccines when needed.
 - Responding to additional requests for vaccines where feasible.
 - Supplying PPE, laboratory and testing equipment, and medical equipment to support care of patients with COVID-19 in health facilities.
8. More requests are expected over the coming months. In addition, requests for clinical and operational surge support, which will increase in-country human resource capacity to help manage overwhelmed health systems, will continue to be received, including to countries where commercial flight options are not available.
9. We therefore seek renewal of the standing approval for the period of 1 May 2022 to 30 April 2023. The ongoing necessity for this arrangement will be evaluated by 31 March 2023.
10. This standing approval allows officials to be responsive to requests from Pacific countries, which are often changeable and come at short notice. The alternative to continuing the standing approval process would be to revert to the pre-COVID practice of seeking Ministerial approval for each individual activity in the Pacific. This would result in a significant volume of correspondence for Ministers' offices and possible delays in responding to requests.

Process for approval of activities

11. Individual tasks will continue to be recommended by MFAT at the Deputy Secretary level, to the NZDF, based on the consolidated criteria set out in Appendix A. In response, the Chief of Defence Force will determine whether capability is available and able to be allocated to the task. In the event that a decision has significant implications for concurrent NZDF commitments, then Ministers will be consulted in the usual way.
12. The existing risk management framework will continue to be managed by the NZDF.
13. MFAT will advise the Minister of Foreign Affairs of potential tasks through the weekly MFA Notes and Pacific COVID-19 updates. The NZDF will advise the Minister of Defence of potential tasks through the weekly NZDF Operations brief and the Defence Weekly Report.
14. Media engagement will continue to be managed by MFAT in consultation with the NZDF. Draft proactive and reactive media lines will continue to be prepared and provided to your offices for each task.

Appendices

- A. Criteria under which approved relief activities are required to meet.
- B. Use of NZDF capabilities in response to COVID-19 related requests for assistance from Pacific island partners (June 2020 –March 2022).

Appendix A

Criteria which approved relief activities are required to meet

1. The activity has the agreement of the partner government;
2. Should a NZDF capability be used, the activity does not compete with an available commercial air service, and does not duplicate other donor mechanisms such as the World Food Program's Pacific Air Service;
3. The activity complements regional priorities such as those identified through the Pacific Islands Forum's Pacific Humanitarian Pathway for COVID-19;
4. COVID-19 precautions requested by the partner government are taken to meet partner government protocols for border entry;
5. An activity could be used to repatriate stranded foreign nationals by utilising remaining space on a capability that is primarily being used for another purpose;
6. The activity is for the purposes of relief assistance in response to COVID-19, or is in support of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout for which New Zealand's Ministry of Health is providing support;
7. The employment of the NZDF is requested and agreed to by the relevant government authorities (i.e. health authorities) within the supported country; and
8. The task is determined to be an appropriate use of NZDF capabilities, taking into consideration ongoing commitments and other potential requests for emergency response within the region.

Appendix B

Use of NZDF capabilities in response to COVID-19 related requests for assistance from Pacific Island partners (June 2020 –March 2022).

Date	Pacific country	Capability	Purpose
19-23 June 2020	Vanuatu	B-757	Repatriation of 1,000 Recognised Seasonal Employer workers at the conclusion of their employment
29 June 2020	Solomon Islands	C-130 Hercules	Transport of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and New Zealand Government officials to Solomon Islands
6 October 2020	Timor-Leste	C-130 Hercules	Transport of 35 Timor-Leste nationals and 10 New Zealand Government officials to Timor-Leste; Repatriation of eight New Zealanders, including Government Officials and NZDF personnel, to New Zealand
19 November 2020	Tuvalu	C-130 Hercules	Transport of medical supplies and diplomatic freight to Tuvalu; Repatriation of 12 New Zealanders and four Tuvalu nationals (under the New Zealand-funded Medical Treatment Scheme) to New Zealand
20 March 2021	PNG	B-757	Transport of COVID PPE to Port Moresby
23 March 2021	Timor-Leste	C-130 Hercules	Transport of COVID PPE to Dili
20 April 2021	Timor-Leste	C-130 Hercules	Transport of COVID PPE and humanitarian aid supplies to Dili
2 June 2021	Fiji	C-130 Hercules	s. 9(2)(a)
14 October 2021	Solomon Islands and Kiribati	C-130 Hercules	Repatriation of 8 Solomon Island nationals. Collect unserviceable generator from Kiribati for repair in NZ.
13 November 2021	Papua New Guinea	Boeing 757	Deployment of MFAT/NZDF Aid team and COVID PPE stores.
27 November 2021	Papua New Guinea	Boeing 757	Deployment of NZDF personnel and equipment to support C-130 deployment.
27 November 2021	Nauru and Kiribati	C-130 Hercules	Repatriate 5 Nauru nationals. Return generator to Kiribati.

29 November 2021	Papua New Guinea	C-130 Hercules	Deployment of a C-130 to Port Moresby to distribute aid around PNG 4 Sorties to 5 destinations over 8 days.
10 December 2021	Papua New Guinea	Boeing 757	Repatriation of 20 Papua New Guinea nationals plus deliver stores to NZ High Commission and NZ Police. Recovery of NZDF and OGA personnel and equipment following completion of C-130 deployment.
15 February 2022	Kiribati	C-130 Hercules	Deliver COVID PPE and Humanitarian Aid supplies.
24 March 2022	Vanuatu	C-130 Hercules	Deliver COVID PPE and Humanitarian Aid Supplies

NZDF flights on other primary missions which have also supported outcomes of Op Pacific Support (1 May 21 – 25 Feb 22).

Date	Pacific Country	Capability	Purpose
3 Feb 2022	Solomon Islands	C-130 Hercules	Delivery of COVID PPE and other aid. Also rotation of NZDF pers on Op Solomon Islands Assist.
5 Feb 2022	Tonga	C-130 Hercules	Delivery of COVID vaccines and PPE and aid associated with Op Pacific Relief.
18 Feb 2022	Tonga	C-130 Hercules	Delivery of COVID vaccines and PPE and other aid associated with Op Pacific Relief.

NZDF ship deployment of Op Pacific Support (1 May 21 – 25 Feb 22)

Date	Pacific Country	Capability	Purpose
12 Jul – 4 Aug 21	Tokelau and Cook Islands	OPV HMNZS WELLINGTON with a SH-2G helicopter from 6SQN embarked	Delivery of vaccines and associated consumables to the following locations Fakaofu, Nukunonu and Atafu (Tokelau) and Palmerston Island (Cook Islands). This was followed by a log stop at Rarotonga, which included hosting COMJ and NZHICOM during KLE. On the RTNZ passage WGN conducted aerial surveillance of Raoul Is.