

out of
scope

From: s6(a) .govt.nz>

Sent: Tuesday, 23 March 2021 12:17 pm

To: s9(2)(a) [DPMC] s9(2)(a) @dpmc.govt.nz>; s9(2)(a) s9(2)(a) @dpmc.govt.nz>

Subject: FW: NZ Herald - Covid and conspiracies

Hi s9(2)(a) and s9(2)(a)

We have been trying to line up an interview with s9(2)(a) for David Fisher on his COVID and conspiracies story but due to diary issues it has been very difficult. To get something to David to inform his story we are planning to move to a written statement.

The draft statement is below. Happy to discuss.

Best regards

s6(a)

Statement from Director-General of Security

The New Zealand Security Intelligence Service works to keep New Zealand and New Zealanders safe and secure. One of the ways we do this is by identifying and investigating terrorist threats. We work with the New Zealand Police or other government agencies to mitigate threats that are identified.

We work to identify and investigate individuals and groups who hold violent extremist views, and then make an assessment of both their intent and capability to actually carry out acts of terrorism. This assessment informs a decision on whether or not to continue or expand national security investigations, or work with law enforcement agencies on steps to mitigate the risk posed.

Our activities are legally required to be both necessary and proportionate, and carried out in accordance with the law. Any intrusive intelligence gathering may only be carried out if properly authorised.

New Zealanders have the legal right to freedom of speech. This includes the expression of views

that most New Zealanders would find offensive. In the online world it is not uncommon for people to espouse extreme views and ideologies and speak casually in favour of violence. This often takes place using anonymised identities and in online sub-culture forums or discussion groups.

It is important to note that holding and expressing extreme views or expressing support for violence does not necessarily mean that those individuals have the intent or capability to actually commit an act of violence.

I cannot give details of NZSIS capabilities, our areas of focus or how we make our assessments. I can however speak generally about the threat environment in New Zealand and the influence of the internet.

The internet is by definition worldwide, and freely available to New Zealanders. Worldwide online trends inevitably impact on New Zealand and influence New Zealanders.

While the vast majority of New Zealanders do not engage with or become influenced by it, there is a range of different forms of extremism represented online. This includes extreme forms of politics, racial identity and supremacist beliefs, extreme interpretations of different faiths, and different conspiracy theories.

Internationally, over the past year, some extremist ideologies and conspiracy theories have grown in popularity, particularly those connected to racial identity and political motivations. This is likely due to an increase in grievances driven by COVID-19 and its economic and social impacts in different countries, ongoing global racial tensions, and the proliferation of online extremist rhetoric and sub-cultures, which are in some cases merging with or co-opting mainstream ideas or concerns.

Individuals engage with extreme material online in their own way and there is no set pathway that is followed. People engaging with this material are often exposed to multiple ideologies or conspiracy theories. These people may believe in multiple ideological subsets or conspiracy theories and view issues in their own life or country through this lens.

While many of the extreme views and conspiracy theories are not inherently violent, they can lead some people 'down a rabbit hole' towards more extreme material or violent views online. Where individuals follow these pathways and engage with extreme material and views without modifying influences, over time some can become radicalised. This is a security challenge around the world.

The COVID-19 environment means that more people are spending more time at home online around the world. This means that there is more production and consumption of online material, including extremist content.

How this will manifest in New Zealand over the medium and long term remains unclear, but is something that NZSIS is aware of and is working to better understand.

From: David Fisher <xxxxx.xxxxxx@xxxx.xx.xx>

Sent: Thursday, 25 February 2021 4:36 PM
To: Media <xxxxx@xxxx.xxxx.xx_>
Subject: NZ Herald - Covid and conspiracies

Hi there,

I am hoping to interview the Director-General of the Service for a piece I am doing which involves, in part, looking at a part of our society that appears to have developed and grown with the advent of Covid-19.

That request comes out of a broader story focus, which looks at vaccine hesitancy, and the so-called anti-vax movement. I have included below a briefing email sent to DPMC ahead of - hopefully - an interview with DCE Cheryl Barnes about information management and planning, and dealing with misinformation.

With misinformation, I've been doing work looking at the various groups that have emerged as vocal forces in the country over the last year. Those groups, which have a degree of overlap, include opposition to such things as 5G, 1080, vaccinations, microchips being implanted by Bill Gates, the secret plot to form a One World Government, and so on.

As I've interviewed people, I've developed a perspective that there is a disenfranchised part of New Zealand society that has become activated, or motivated, over the course of the last year, with the pandemic as the catalyst. This group has low trust in state institutions and is looking for answers and security elsewhere. If social cohesion is an answer to extremism, this group is clearly distant from society.

As with other ideological movements, that wider group would appear to have some people - loosely aligned - who have developed extremist views. I've interviewed a few of those and found their views, and some of their actions, and some of their promised actions, extremely disturbing.

So, while there is an AOG approach to Covid-19, it seems this is a point where the NZSIS would have a lead responsibility. I was hoping to speak with the D-G about whether the Service had mapped the growth of these views and those who espouse such views, where the Service's responsibility begins and ends, at what point would it step in, and how it would know that point had been reached. Is there a heightened domestic security focus, and if so, has Covid-19 contributed to that?

Let me know if you have any questions on this, and I'd be happy to fill in gaps.

David Fisher
NZ Herald
021347154

From: David Fisher

Sent: Thursday, 25 February 2021 2:40 PM

To: s9(2)(a) @dpmc.govt.nz <s9(2)(a) @dpmc.govt.nz>

Subject: NZ Herald - information and misinformation

Hi s9(2)(a),

Thanks for the chat earlier.

I'm doing a piece about how misinformation relating to the pandemic is handled, with a particular view towards vaccines as the rollout gathers pace. I thought it might be useful to set out the landscape as I see it at this stage, and how I hope DPMC/Covid-19 AOG fit into that.

The big picture is the shifting principle of national security, which has broadened its definition in recent years to extend beyond traditional threats, and those traditional players. The pandemic, as a national security issue, presents threats and opportunities not wildly dissimilar from other threats, which is harm to New Zealand, varying degrees of insecurity in the population because of the threats posed, and within that population, those whose level of distrust of central government - or societies' authority figures - creates opposition, of one form or another.

With the pandemic, there are communities where that distrust and opposition is high. It seems to me that those communities are also those most vulnerable to the impact of the virus, were it to spread, and those with a high existing reluctance to be vaccinated. That community of distrust also has its own authority figures that emerge, such as Billy Te Kahika with his social media messaging and protests, and Vinny Eastwood, with his YouTube and other channels. It's not dissimilar to the social cohesion solution to previous national security issues, just from a different tangent.

It's been interesting in work I had done so far how those opposing a Covid-19 vaccine, or spreading untruths, seem to be part of a constantly shifting ideological collective that is also opposed to 5g, 1080, the one-world-plan, the "great reset" and so on. Those I have encountered are the disenfranchised, who don't feel they are listened to, who find a voice through social media. It's possible to speculate that the pressures we have suffered collectively in the last year have heightened that feeling of being disenfranchised, led to greater separation from the rest of civil society, and - in some of the interviews I've done - created circumstances in which extremism, of some form, has developed.

I'm looking to speak to someone at DPMC about how New Zealand as a country gauges the levels of distrust and misinformation, how it manages it, and what it does to counter it. I'm

not looking for someone to field questions about conspiracy theories. I am looking to understand how the government best engenders trust in the community, how it identifies areas where there is no trust, and how it works to manage that for our collective benefits.

I hope that helps give a wide-angle view of what I'm working on. I'm keen to do an interview next week, if possible. Also, as I said on the phone, I'm happy to brief you or the interview subject ahead of publication on what I will use from the interview and how it will sit in context. I appreciate this is a sensitive area and I'm keen to foster an environment of trust.

We could do that by phone or by video conference, as suits.

Thanks,

David Fisher
NZ Herald
021347154

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