

# Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall

Minister for COVID-19 Response  
Minister of Research, Science and Innovation  
Minister for Seniors  
Associate Minister of Health



04 OCT 2022

Scott

[fyi-request-20336-7b276726@requests.fyi.org.nz](mailto:fyi-request-20336-7b276726@requests.fyi.org.nz)

Ref. AVOIA92

Tēnā koe Scott,

## Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) on 25 August 2022 for:

*[3-Dec-21] "Making better use of COVID Technologies"*

*[1-Apr-22] "Briefing: Transitioning the COVID-19 response functions to the new system structure in 2022"*

*[6-Apr-22] "Briefing: Lifting importation and use restrictions on unapproved COVID-19 vaccines"*

*[28-Apr-22] "Briefing: Strategic planning for potential new variants of concern: Scenarios, planned responses and next steps"*

*[2-May-22] "Memo: Health National Adaption Plan"*

*[6-May-22] "Memo: Aotearoa New Zealand's COVID-19 Variants of Concern plan: Initial version"*

*[20-May-22] "Memo: Variants of Concern Planning – Preparedness Rationale."*

*[17 Jun-22] [20221081] "Briefing: Ministry of Health Briefing to Incoming Minister for COVID-19 Response"*

Please find the requested documents attached to this letter as Documents 1-8. All documents are itemised in Appendix 1 and copies of the documents are enclosed. Where information is withheld under section 9 of the Act, I have considered the countervailing public interest in release in making this decision and consider that it does not outweigh the need to withhold at this time.

Please note, Document 6 titled *"Memo: Aotearoa New Zealand's COVID-19 Variants of Concern plan: Initial version"* refers to a draft version of the variants of concern framework. I have provided the updated version of the framework, which is attached to this letter as Document 9.

*If the minister received any other Briefings to the Incoming Minister upon taking up the COVID-19 Response portfolio in June 2022, for instance from DPMC or any other agency besides the Ministry of Health, then I would like to request copies of these as well.*

*If the minister received any Briefings to the Incoming Minister upon taking up the role of Associate Minister for the COVID-19 Response in February 2022, from any agency, then I would like to request copies of these.*

These parts of your request are refused under section 18(e) of the Act, as the information does not exist. At the time of my appointment to the role of Associate Minister for COVID-19 Response, I was the Associate Minister of Health involved in the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, no briefing was necessary upon my appointment in February 2022.

However, I received Briefings to the Incoming Minister (BIMs) from the Border Executive Board, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment and Ministry of Health in June 2022, which are itemised as Document 8 in Appendix 1.

*Finally, I would like to request copies of all other reports, briefings, memos, or aides memoire received by the minister dated since 21 May 2022 on the topic of COVID-19 Variants of Concern planning and/or the Ministry of Health Strategic Framework for COVID-19 Variants of Concern (i.e. on the same topic as parts FOUR, SIX and SEVEN of my request above, but dated since 21 May 2022).*

Two documents have been identified within scope of this part of your request and are attached to this letter as Documents 9 and 10. This includes the full variants of concern strategic framework as well as the covering memorandum. Please note, Document 9 is the updated version of the variants of concern framework. This document accompanies Documents 6 and 10.

I trust this information fulfils your request. Under section 28(3) of the Act, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request. The Ombudsman may be contacted by email at: [info@ombudsman.parliament.nz](mailto:info@ombudsman.parliament.nz) or by calling 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā



Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall  
**Minister for COVID-19 Response**

## Appendix 1: List of documents for release

#	Date	Document details	Decision on release
1	26 November 2021	Making better use of COVID Technologies 20212432	Some information withheld under the following sections of the Act: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section 9(2)(a), to protect the privacy of natural persons, and</li> <li>• Section 9(2)(b)(ii), where its release would likely unreasonably prejudice the commercial position of the person who supplied the information, and</li> <li>• Section 9(2)(f)(iv) to maintain the constitutional conventions that protect the confidentiality of advice tendered by Ministers and officials.</li> </ul>
2	1 April 2022	Transitioning the COVID-19 response functions to the new system structure in 2022 20220241	Some information withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act.
3	6 April 2022	Lifting importation and use restrictions on unapproved COVID-19 vaccines 20220551	Some information withheld under the following sections of the Act: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section 6(a) as its release would likely prejudice the international relations of the Government of New Zealand, and</li> <li>• Section 9(2)(a).</li> </ul>
4	28 April 2022	Strategic planning for potential new variants of concern: Scenarios, planned responses and next steps 20220674	Some information withheld under the following sections of the Act: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section 6(b)(i) as its release would prejudice information entrusted to the Government of New Zealand from another Government or agency, and</li> <li>• Section 9(2)(a), and</li> <li>• Section 9(2)(g)(i), to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions by or between or to Ministers and officers and employees of any public service agency.</li> </ul>
5	28 April 2022	Health National Adaption Plan 20220015	Some information withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act.
6	6 May 2022	Memorandum - Aotearoa New Zealand's COVID-19 Variants of Concern plan: Initial version 20220824	Some information withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act.

#	Date	Document details	Decision on release
7	20 May 2022	Variants of Concern Planning – Preparedness Rationale 20220921	
8	June 2022	Briefing to Incoming Minister for COVID-19 Response	Refused under section 18(d) of the Act, as the information requested is publicly available at: <a href="http://www.beehive.govt.nz/feature/briefings-incoming-ministers-4">www.beehive.govt.nz/feature/briefings-incoming-ministers-4</a> .
9	8 June 2022	Final Version - Aotearoa New Zealand's Strategic Framework for COVID-19 Variants of Concern	Some information withheld under section 9(2)(g)(i) of the Act.
10		Memorandum - Updated version of Aotearoa New Zealand's Variants of Concern Strategic Framework 20221005	Some information withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act.