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New Zealand

OIA-2024-5193

3rd December 2024

Rodney Parsons

fyi-request-29021-5a6310fb@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Rodney Parsons

I refer to your email of 2 November 2024 to the Ministry of Defence requesting the following information under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA):

Colonel Charmaine Tate (CMO and Surgeon-General) released a memo about the impacts of explosives on defence personnel's brains-

Given that Ministry of Defence defines a veteran differently to other countries, please provide estimates for how many former defence personnel will not be covered by veteran affairs, for this and other significant PCBU risks (e.g. hearing). Specifically, given that veteran status is conferred based on operational status, the question is how many people who have not been granted veteran status by the New Zealand Government will be ineligible for cover due to the New Zealand Government's definition of a veteran

Your request was transferred to the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) in accordance with section 14 of the OIA as the nature of your request aligns more closely with the functions of the NZDF.

The NZDF does not hold information on the number of veterans who may or may not be eligible for service related cover, but only for those former NZDF personnel who apply for support under the Veterans' Support Act 2014. The legal definition of veteran for the purpose of determining eligibility under this Act is only a subset of those who have served. Your request is therefore declined in accordance with section 18(e) of the OIA as the requested information does not exist.

For further context, the issue of uncertainty about the number of Veterans and the valuation of the veterans' disability entitlements liability is not new, and both the NZDF (NZDF Annual Report 2024, pages 209-11) and the Office of the Auditor General have highlighted this issue. The Veteran, Family and Whānau Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy Framework estimates that there are more than 140,000 people who have completed a period of military service, but who no longer serve.

While the problem is complex, the NZDF is making progress on the matter of defining the eligible population, and improving the quality of veteran data. For example, in the past year, NZDF have made progress on supplying Veterans Affairs with data that captures the majority of personnel who achieve qualifying operational service as and when this happens. This allows Veterans Affairs to register the veteran and over time will increase awareness of

the total veteran population. This new reporting function went live during 2024. A further phase of work is planned to focus on adding other known veteran datasets to the Veterans' Register.

You have the right, under section 28(3) of the OIA, to ask an Ombudsman to review this response to your request. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Please note that responses to official information requests are proactively released where possible. This response to your request will be published shortly on the NZDF website.

Yours sincerely

GA Motley

Brigadier

Chief of Staff HQNZDF