



26 May 2022

Harold

fyi-request-19102-7004337b@requests.fyi.org.nz

Ref: OIA-2021/22-1234

Dear Harold

Official Information Act request for documentation relating to a strategic framework strengthening resilience against mis/disinformation

I refer to your Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) request received by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) on 10 April 2022. You requested:

I would like to make a request for documents relating to the DPMC-led programme to develop a strategic framework for strengthening resilience to mis/disinformation. This is a follow up to a request I submitted 26 May last year (Ref: OIA-2020/21-0619).

At the time of my initial request, you advised me that the framework would not be released as it was still in draft form. If the framework has since been finalised, I would like to request a copy.

I would also like to request copies of all briefings or Cabinet papers relating to the development or implementation of the countering mis/disinformation strategy, dated since 26 May 2021.

If a multi-agency group has been established to co-ordinate this work, I would like to request a copy of their terms of reference and the dates of any meetings they have held since the beginning of 2021.

If it isn't already covered by the above, I would like to request copies of all of the documents DPMC released to Stuff reporter Michelle Duff on this topic (this would have been sometime prior to 7 December 2021).

I note your request was extended by 10 working days to allow for further consultation to take place. Following this, I am now in a position to respond.

Although a strategic framework for strengthening resilience to mis- and disinformation had been proposed, DPMC's approach has evolved as the situation changes. Rather than one strategy for strengthening resilience to misinformation and disinformation, DPMC's focus shifted to ensuring connection and consistency across different work programmes. Accordingly, while it is possible we may reconsider developing such a strategic framework, at this point it has not been created. I am therefore refusing the part of your request for a *finalised strategic framework for strengthening resilience to mis/disinformation and copies of all Cabinet Papers and briefings relating to the development and implementation of the strategy*, under section 18(g) of the Act, as the information is not held by DPMC, nor do we believe it to be held by another government agency or Minister of the Crown.

While a strategic framework has not been developed, we have been considering approaches to addressing mis- and disinformation. With regard to the part of your request for “*copies of all briefings or Cabinet papers relating to the development or implementation of the countering mis/disinformation strategy, dated since 26 May 2021*”, a briefing titled *Policy levers for addressing mis/disinformation* (9 March 2022) has been identified as broadly within scope. This briefing provided advice to Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, in both her capacity as Prime Minister and Minister for National Security and Intelligence, on potential policy levers to address online mis/disinformation networks and their impacts on New Zealand, including long-term approaches to build resilience. However, it is necessary to withhold the content of this document under the following sections of the Act:

- Section 6(a), to protect the security or defence of New Zealand or the international relations of the Government of New Zealand;
- section 9(2)(f)(iv), to maintain the constitutional conventions for the time being which protect the confidentiality of advice tendered by or to Ministers and or officials; and
- section 9(2)(g)(i), to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinion.

More recently, the work has focused on approaches to address COVID-19 misinformation and disinformation, in coordination with academic and non-governmental partners. In addition, DPMC is developing advice for the long-term response to misinformation and disinformation in general, including looking at Aotearoa New Zealand’s specific needs and taking on lessons from other countries.

The long-term response will require multiple stakeholders to deliver a whole of society approach. This is due to the complexity of the issue, and to ensure freedom of expression, and an open online environment. Government, civil society, tech companies, media, academia, business and the public all have a role to play to counter misinformation and disinformation and strengthen resilience, including through focusing on education, improving communication, and ensuring public safety.

Individual agencies remain responsible for addressing false and misleading information issues that relate to their specific portfolio areas.

Regarding the part of your request for *If a multi-agency group has been established to coordinate this work, I would like to request a copy of their terms of reference and the dates of any meetings they have held since the beginning of 2021*, DPMC’s COVID-19 Group chairs an inter-agency disinformation group, which has met fortnightly since 23 September 2021. The groups work continues to evolve and at this stage there are no terms of reference.

In making my decision, I have taken the public interest considerations in section 9(1) of the Act into account.

To date, DPMC has not released any information to Michelle Duff regarding misinformation or disinformation under the Act. Consequently, this part of your request is refused under section 18(e) as the information requested does not exist.

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

This response will be published on DPMC's website during our regular publication cycle. Typically, information is released monthly, or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

Yours sincerely

Marika Hughes
Acting Deputy Chief Executive
National Security Group