



5 October 2022

[REDACTED]

Ref: OIA-2021/22-1545

Dear [REDACTED]

Official Information Act request for copies of various documents relating to the COVID-19 interagency disinformation and online harms group

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) request received on 27 July 2022. You requested:

ONE: The minutes, agenda and action points for all meetings of the COVID 19 interagency disinformation and online harms group held since the beginning of April 2022

TWO: If the standing agenda for this group has gone through any updates since the beginning of April 2022 I would like to request all versions of the standing agenda produced during this period

THREE: If DPMC produced any submissions, presentations or other items that were tabled or presented for 14 February 2022 alternate agenda item 3 ("Strategic view of disinformation landscape") then I would like to request a copies of these documents

FOUR: I would like to request a copy of the "Working Group Terms of Reference" referred to in the 14 February 2022 alternate agenda (item 4)

FIVE: I would like to request a copy of the "Landscape Report" Request for Proposal and any other RFX documentation produced for the procurement of this "Landscape Report" (14 February 2022 alternate agenda item 5)

SIX: If the procurement of this "Landscape Report" has been awarded I would like to request the identity of the organisation it was awarded to

SEVEN: If the "Landscape Report" has been completed I would like to request a copy of it

EIGHT: I would like to request a copy of the "Work Plan (6 month goals)" referred to in the 14 February 2022 alternate agenda (item 8)

NINE: If any other "Work Plans" for the group have been produced since the one referred to in 14 February 2022 alternate agenda item 8, I would like to request copies of all these more recent work plans as well

TEN: I would like to request copies of any submissions, presentations or other items produced by the National Security Group that were tabled or presented for 24 March 2022 alternate agenda item 5c ("Quick fire updates... Disinformation wider landscape (NSG)")

In our response dated 24 August 2022, we responded to questions 1 (minutes and agenda but not the action points), 2, 3, 4, and 10, and extended the time frame for responding to your request by 30 working days under section 15A of the Act, because further consultations were needed before a decision could be made on the request. I am now in a position to respond to the remainder of your questions, which I will do in turn.

1. The minutes, agenda and action points for all meetings of the COVID 19 interagency disinformation and online harms group held since the beginning of April 2022

As noted above, the part of your request for minutes and agendas were addressed in our previous response. With regard to action points held since April 2022, I have decided to release these in part. Please also note that the work plan and action log referenced was produced as an internal record of the key undertakings being taken by agencies and organisations in response to an increase in COVID-19 disinformation and online harms. The coordination of the working group moved to DPMC's National Security Group in July 2022.

Some information is withheld subject to the following section of the Act:

- Section 9(2)(a), to protect the privacy of individuals.

5. I would like to request a copy of the "Landscape Report" Request for Proposal and any other RFX documentation produced for the procurement of this "Landscape Report" (14 February 2022 alternate agenda item 5)

I have decided to release the RFP document related to this procurement in full. This procurement for independent analysis of the disinformation landscape was to support and inform the COVID-19 response. The analysis and insights were used to build a strategic picture of the mis- and disinformation context and to inform our response to mis- and disinformation and approach to building resilience to its harms. Please note that the term of the contract stipulated in the RFP was subsequently identified as extending beyond the COVID-19 Group's requirements. Due to this, the term of the contract was modified to a 1-month period for the disinformation landscape reports.

6 If the procurement of this "Landscape Report" has been awarded I would like to request the identity of the organisation it was awarded to

I can confirm that the procurement was awarded to The Disinformation Project.

7. If the "Landscape Report" has been completed I would like to request a copy of it

I can confirm that the 'Landscape Report' has been completed. The two reports dated 11 July 2022 and 24 July 2022 are both provided in Attachment A.

The Landscape Report dated 11 July 2022 is released to you in part. Some information is withheld subject to the following section of the Act:

- Section 9(2)(a), to protect the privacy of individuals,
- Section 9(2)(ba)(i), to protect the supply of similar information in the future,
- Section 9(2)(c), to protect the health or safety of members of the public, and
- Section 9(2)(g)(i), to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinion.

The Landscape report dated 25 July 2022 is released to you in part. Some information is withheld subject to the following section of the Act:

- Section 6(d), as the making available of that information would be likely to endanger the safety of any person,

- Section 9(2)(a), to protect the privacy of individuals,
- Section 9(2)(ba)(i), to protect the supply of similar information in the future,
- Section 9(2)(c), to protect the health or safety of members of the public, and
- Section 9(2)(g)(i), to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinion.

Whilst these reports provided interesting context for the greater information landscape, only COVID-19 related material was required in line with the RFP. This COVID-19 material was given to the COVID-19 communications team for their requirements

8. I would like to request a copy of the “Work Plan (6 month goals)” referred to in the 14 February 2022 alternate agenda (item 8)

I have decided to release the workplan (6 month goals) in full. This information is provided in Attachment A.

9. If any other “Work Plans” for the group have been produced since the one referred to in 14 February 2022 alternate agenda item 8, I would like to request copies of all these more recent work plans as well.

I can confirm a DRAFT Communications and engagement work plan was produced, titled ‘COVID-19 misinformation, online harms and scams’. This DRAFT workplan is released to you in full. Please note the draft work plan was produced as a briefing tool to demonstrate communications activities underway to address COVID-19 disinformation and online harms. Not all projects listed have been undertaken by the COVID-19 response given the changing environment. Examples of products developed can be found here: <https://covid19.govt.nz/prepare-and-stay-safe/misinformation-scams-and-online-harm/>.

For your reference, a list of acronyms and initialism used in the release material is below:

BAU – Business as usual
 CCB – The COVID-19 Chief Executives Board
 CERT – Computer Emergency Response Team
 CPF – COVID-19 Protection Framework
 CVIP – COVID-19 Vaccine and Immunisation Programme, Ministry of Health
 DIA – The Department of Internal Affairs
 DART – Disinformation Assessment and Response Team, Ministry of Health
 DPMC – The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
 HRC – The Human Rights Commission
 ISD – The Institute of Strategic Dialogue
 MOH – The Ministry of Health
 NAB – The National Assessments Bureau
 TPM – Te Pūnaha Matatini
 TRA – The Research Agency
 UAC – Unite Against COVID-19

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

You have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and review this 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

Serial	Action	Owner	Date set	Target date	Remarks	Status
1	Engagement with platforms and Netsafe on escalating environment	Classification Office	21-Oct-21	w/c 25 Oct 21	DPMC COVID-19 Gp to support as needed. (18/11) IN TRAIN: Teed up zoom with NetSafe to work through composite reporting report they have pulled together. Work on what is useful to us and other agencies.	Complete
2	Follow up on risk areas to ensure DHBs have measures in place (ie targeting/doxing of staff)	MoH CVIP (DART)/Security	21-Oct-21	Ongoing	(18/11) Started but further work and engagement with corporate security/CVIP security still required. 10/2 DART has had discussion on risks, work is ongoing.	ongoing
3	Review TPM on reporting processes	DPMC COVID-19 Gps9(2)(a)	21-Oct-21	By 4 Nov	(18/11) DPMC COVID-19 Group leading follow up. Feedback received from DART, DIA and DPMC. (16/12) Format of reporting has changed. Review underway as part of tender for Ongoing monitoring requirement.	Complete
4	Continued engagement with stakeholders (government and non-government) affected by disinformation related activity.	DPMC COVID-19 Gp Comms and CVIP	21-Oct-21	Closed	(18/11) integrated into CPF and CVIP engagement 16/12 - consideration of engagement with third party provider Transferred to work programme	Closed
5	Paper to be written for Chief Executives on the current environment	DPMC COVID-19 Gp system assurance	4-Nov-21	w/c 22 Nov	(18/11) CCB paper will go off today. Update to Covid Chief Exec board on the landscape as it stands. Attached TPM report.	Closed

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	and the system response					
6	Addressing gaps with key response agencies – consider dry run crisis response	COVID-19 Group	4-Nov-21	13/01/2022	To involve Police, DPMC, DIA and response agencies. Scenarios to be done and carry out dry run on them. Define and document over time. Real life scenarios- need a process for discussing the grey areas. Within Assurance work programme	Closed
7	Comms and engagement planning focussing on social cohesion and addressing anxiety in communities	COVID-19 Group comms	4-Nov-21	w/c 8 Nov	Part of wider piece of work relating to Covid Protection Framework. Comms planning on how we can support de-escalation if needed to those who are directly affected. 16 Dec - HRC campaign life. Dialitdown.co.nz. MBIE has published de-escalation comms. Follow up with HRC planned to highlight issues being seen, comms planning and any further HRC work Closed - in Comms work programme	Closed
8	DART looking into spread of disinformation to identify how wide the reach is into communities	DART	4-Nov-21	13-Jan-22	(18/11) Product will be coming out on this on Friday based on a year's worth of CERT reporting.	Closed
9	Consideration of Netsafe and TPM to be included in WGs or a separate forum	DPMC system assurance	4-Nov-21	18-Nov-21	Smaller focus group with those who work with government.	Closed
10	MoE requires further support	CVIP and DPMC comms to follow up	4-Nov-21	w/c 8 Nov 21	Have been in touch, but needs more work.	Closed

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	to engage with schools					
11	Planning meetings to coordinate information flow, triage and referrals.	DPMC NSG	18-Nov	Update 13/1/22	Also longer term work with Police on response and reporting mechanism Plan process map around where organisation boundaries are and who deals with what. DIA has in hand as a part of current work.	Closed
12	Update on DART to stakeholders to get feedback	DIA	18-Nov	Update 2 Dec 21	Stakeholder update complete. MOU has gone to MOH for signing	Closed
13	Arranging a NATO Centre of Excellence brief on their immunisation to disinformation paper	DIA	2-Dec	Update 13/1/22	Completed	Closed
14	Review funding to consider research and resourcing	COVID-19 Group	2-Dec	Update 16 Dec 21	Research money received. Need to look at plan	Closed
15	Comms approach refresh to be circulated for feedback	COVID-19 Group comms	2-Dec	21-Feb-22	Awaiting sign off	open
16	Circulate to attendees draft paper on the proposal for government	DPMC COVID-19 Gp Analyst	21-Oct-21	w/c 25 Oct 21		Complete

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	response to misinformation					
17	MoE to be sent latest TPM reports where schools are referred to	DPMC COVID-19 Gp Analyst	21-Oct-21	w/c 25 Oct 21		Complete
18	MoE to be invited to working group series	DPMC COVID-19 Gp Comms	21-Oct-21	By 4 Nov	Increase in reporting relating to schools/young people	Complete
20	DIA are engaging with ISD relating to research	DIA	21-Oct-21	Update By 4 Nov	ISD presented 2 nd Nov	Complete
21	DIA have offered support to establishment of DART processes at MOH	DIA/MoH DART	21-Oct-21	By 4 Nov	DIA have followed up with MOH and ongoing support established	Complete
22	Escalation of changing environment to COVID-19 Minister's Office	DPMC COVID-19 Gp Insights	21-Oct-21	By 26 Oct 21	The Evolving Picture of Online/Offline Activism Linked to the COVID-19 Pandemic	Complete
23	Engagement with Netsafe on ensuring platforms are addressing the violation of content	Classification Office	4-Nov-21	w/c 8 Nov		Complete

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25	MoH, CERT, DPMC meeting to manage comms processes	CERT	4-Nov-21	4-Nov-21	(18/11) CERT led meeting. More about media responses and sharing when there are cross interests. Ensuring consistency and consultation across agencies.	Complete
27	Agencies to ensure that activities that may be affected by escalating disinformation (ie vaccination activities, press conferences)	All agencies	4-Nov-21	w/c 8 Nov	Also to be included in CE paper Raising visibility. CE of orgs were looking at risks to their own organisations.	Complete
28	Triage group report	MOH, NAB, Police	13-Jan-22		First report out mid december. Now pulling together resourcing for next one. Next report Feb, then fortnightly. Findings - high level. Consideration for dashboard referecing trends PMO wants this added to agenda for next PM and NSG meeting- s9(2)(a) to provide summary by then.	Closed
30	Terms of reference for this group	DPMC - Assurance	13-Jan-22		TOR to be drafted and then socialised with the group	ongoing
31	Public reporting CERT to DART	CERT and MOH DPMC comms	13-Jan-22		Long term moving from CERT to DART - awaiting memo sign off.	open
32	Safety for public sector staff/ online harms and doxing	DPMC - Assurance	13-Jan-22		Risk assessment from DPMC being undertaken - target completion date = s9(2)(a) to advise]	ongoing
33	Safety for member of the public / small business /	DIA	13-Jan-22		As above - action 32	Closed

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	community groups					
34	NZ Police to attend cross agency meeting	NSG to arrange	27-Jan-22		Police to brief on thresholds for action in next meeting	open
	NZ Maori Council	DPMC	27-Jan-22		Transferred to work plan for DPMC comms	Closed
35	DART to provide DPMC with Brand misuse reports	DART	10-Feb-22		This will inform DPMC memo on future brand misuse management	new
36	Multi agency bulletin on disinformation for senior leaders	NSG NAB and DART	10-Feb-22		On hold	new

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WORK PLAN - Q1 &2 2022. DPMC COVID-19 Group Disinformation and Online harms.

Intended outcome	Activity	Owner	Status / due date
1. Support a whole of society approach			
Coordinated approach across government and into communities	Fortnightly cross-agency working group incl MOE, Police, NSG, NAB, Classifications Office, DIA, DART, DPMC, CERT	DPMC COVID Assurance	Ongoing - but ownership to transfer to NSG
	Set-up regular update to the system on false information key themes, media updates and tools available (noting this would be a lower classification than the bulletin)	DPMC COVID Comms support from NAB and DART	Design: Early March Implementation: Mid March
Collective planning, collaboration and delivery through multi-sector approach that is innovative and inclusive for all	Regular engagement with community panel, Iwi Chairs forum and other government agencies and the Regional Leadership Groups to support community led initiatives.	DPMC COVID Comms	Ongoing
	Working with DART and NSG on a regular update to the system on key themes, media updates and tools available (lower classification than the bulletin)	DPMC COVID Comms	Ongoing
	Establish quarterly stakeholder reference group	DPMC COVID Assurance	Not commenced
2. Increase the public's resilience to disinformation and online harms			
Promote digital literacy and critical thinking	Work with a third party provider that will provide support, guidance and tools through engagement workshops with Regional Leadership Groups.	DPMC COVID Comms	Procurement plan due to be complete: 15/3/22
	Working to support a range of community groups identified within the "Understand the environment" workstream as requiring focussed support to increase resilience (??)	DPMC COVID Comms	
	Promote all of society campaigns (E.g. DIA - Keep it Real, HRC - Dial it Down, Stuff - The Whole Truth)	DPMC COVID Comms	As required

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	Unite Against COVID-19 website content & tools https://covid19.govt.nz/prepare-and-stay-safe/misinformation-scams-and-online-harm/	DPMC COVID Comms	As required
	Coordinate with marketing agency on campaign/activation options to reach those who are most vulnerable to misinformation to provide some balance/wider perspectives.		Initial meeting: Complete Delivery: (??)
	Refinement and evolution of tools available in the Comms pack	DPMC COVID Comms	As required
	Increased work with other agencies on prevention of online harms and counter violent extremism as well as interconnecting with comms planning on the impacts of Russian disinformation given the Ukraine situation	NSG	Meeting 3/3/22
	Thought leadership programme for government	DPMC COVID Comms	Currently being scoped
3. Promote credible information through effective communication			
Rebutting, correcting or countering disinformation with facts	Refresh of key messages pack	DPMC COVID Comms	As required
Promote credible information	Promote the voices experts (academics, scientists) in an engaging way on multiple channels that will reach those more vulnerable to misinformation and conspiracy theories.	DPMC COVID Comms	Proposal: Underway Delivery:
	Equipping trusted voices - providing support to stakeholders (school, businesses, health sector, community, spokespeople, leaders) with guidance on handling false information	[owner]	Ongoing
	Provide credible information through key channels including Unite Against COVID, Ministry of Health etc	DPMC COVID Comms	Ongoing
4. Prevent the propagation of false and damaging content			
Ensure a robust reporting mechanism is communicated	Working with DART and agencies on specific issues response – Worksafe, MBIE, MoH etc.	DPMC COVID Comms	Ongoing
	Develop reporting and management process for misuse of UAC branding	DPMC COVID Comms	Ongoing
	Engagement with Meta and google	[owner]	[status]

Encourage social media platforms to keep their community spaces safe through the management of content	Workshop proposed with government social media leads with experts from Netsafe and platform specialists to manage inauthentic activity, harmful content and review processes.	DPMC COVID Comms	
<i>Underpinning all workstreams:</i>			
Understand the Environment			
Understand the risks, indicators, and levers for offline activity	Response agency assessments	NAB, DART, Police	BAU
Analyse relevant research and insights	The Edge of the Infodemic ongoing research reports	DPMC COVID Comms	Currently being procured
	COVID-19 group sentiment reporting	DPMC COVID Comms	Ongoing
	Monitoring of Unite Against COVID-19 and Ministry of Health social media channels	DART and DPMC	BAU
	Working with engagement leads within government agencies and the health sector to ensure feedback is provided from communities and groups on areas of concern	DPMC COVID Comms(?)	Ongoing
	Regular updates from international partners on their initiatives and emerging narratives	DPMC COVID Comms(?)	Ongoing
	Media reporting in New Zealand and overseas	DPMC COVID Comms	Ongoing
	Bulletin	NAB	BAU
	Third Party landscape reporting	DPMC COVID Assurance	Procurement underway
	Public reporting of potential false or misleading information via CERT NZ/DART	DART	BAU

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**DEPARTMENT OF THE
PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET**
TE TARI O TE PIRIMIA ME TE KOMITI MATUA

Request for Proposal (RFP)

**Reporting of online harms and threats against the
COVID -19 response**

RFP released: 16th February 2022

Deadline for Questions: 25th February 2022

Deadline for Proposals: 18th March 2022

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Level 10, Executive Wing
Parliament Buildings
Wellington 6011
New Zealand

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The opportunity

This RFP is issued by The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), referred to below as “the Buyer” or “we” or “us”.

The Buyer wish to source a supplier that can provide regular research reports on a range of open sources of mainstream and media platforms or other sources to identify online harms and threats against the COVID-19 response.

What we need

We require regular scanning and assessment of the online open-source mis/disinformation landscape to provide us with a system analysis of harmful misinformation relating to the COVID-19 response. This reporting will continually inform the COVID-19 response to support the COVID-19 Protection Framework in protecting and minimising the spread of COVID -19.

What we don't want

The Buyer does not want proposals for methodology that has not been tried before. The Buyer does not want theoretical Proposals about abstract or speculative approaches.

What's important to us?

It is of high importance the provider can supply researchers with high experience in delivering the services required by the Buyer. The Buyer is looking for providers who have the capability, experience and infrastructure to deliver the reporting. They need to have a good track record in delivering similar services. Delivery in full, on time, as per specifications (DIFOTIS) is important to us.

Successful providers will act with integrity and use data collection methods that align with the model standards for information gathering published by the Public Service Commission.

Why should you bid?

This is a unique opportunity to support and inform the COVID-19 response. The analysis and insights that you provide will contribute to building and maintaining a strategic picture of the mis- and disinformation context and inform a strategy to build resilience to the harms of mis- and disinformation.

When the information environment is deliberately confused by mis- and disinformation, this can threaten public safety, fracture community cohesion and undermine the public acceptance of science's role in informing health policy, such as the vaccine programme.

Our primary objective in countering disinformation is to give the public confidence in information available to them so that they are equipped to make fully informed decisions.

A bit about us

DPMC's work is all about ensuring New Zealanders live in a country that is ambitious, resilient and well-governed. DPMC's overall area of responsibility is in helping to provide, at an administrative level, the

'constitutional and institutional glue' that underlies our system of parliamentary democracy. DPMC is a mid-sized agency of eight business units, with approximately 275 staff in Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch. We have a unique role as the trusted advisor, leader, and steward of our system of executive government.

COVID-19 Group is a business unit at DPMC and is guided by a mission to mobilise the collective capacity of government to eliminate COVID-19 while sustaining New Zealand's economy and social cohesion.

The Group's key functions are:

- *Strategy and policy integration* – leadership and coordination of the overarching strategy for response, and coordination and integration of advice on readiness and response activities across agencies;
- *System readiness and planning* – coordination and convening role across delivery agencies to ensure alignment of planning activities;
- *Insights and reporting* – drawing on research and evaluation (both domestic and international) to ensure continuous improvement of the system;
- *Risk and assurance* – assurance that the right work is happening across government, in the right sequence and at the appropriate pace, advising on any emerging risks, and ensuring any gaps are identified and addressed; and
- *Communications and engagement* – leadership and coordination of public communications, and coordination of stakeholder engagement.

Key Information

1.1 Context

- This Request for Proposals (RFP) is an invitation to submit a Proposal for the reporting of online harms and threats against the COVID -19 response contract opportunity.
- This RFP is a single-step procurement process.

1.2 Our timeline

Here is our timeline for this RFP (all are New Zealand times and dates):

Respondent briefing session	W/C 21 st February 2022
Deadline for Questions	4pm 25 th February 2022
Deadline for us to answer questions	3 rd March 2022
Deadline for Proposals	4pm 18 th March 2022
Successful Respondent(s) notified (indicative)	4 th April 2022
Expected start date of Contract (indicative)	14 th April 2022

1.3 How to contact us

- Contact us through our Point of Contact via email.

b. Our Point of Contact:

COVID-19 Procurement

Email address: COVID-19.systemassurance@dpmc.govt

Please put 'Disinformation RFP' at the start of your subject line

c. To apply to register for our Respondent briefing session (week commencing 21st February 2022), contact our Point of Contact via email. In your application for briefing registration please provide a brief description of your organisation and its services, the name/s of those wishing to attend, their phone number and email address.

1.4 Developing and submitting your Proposal

- a. This is a closed, competitive tender process.
- b. Take time to read and understand the RFP.
- c. Take time to understand our Requirements. These are in SECTION 2 of this document.
- d. Take time to understand how your Proposal will be evaluated. See SECTION 3 of this document.
- e. For resources on tendering visit <https://www.procurement.govt.nz/suppliers-2/>
- f. If you have questions, ask our Point of Contact before the Deadline for Questions (see Section 1.2 above).
- g. Use the Response Form to submit your Proposal.
- h. Complete and sign the declaration at the end of the Response Form.
- i. Use the Pricing Schedule included in the Response Form for your pricing information.
- j. Check you have provided all the necessary information in the correct format and order.
- k. Submit your Proposal before the Deadline for Proposals.

1.5 Address for submitting your Proposal

Submit your Proposal to Point of Contact before the Deadline for Questions (see Section 1.2 above).

We will not accept Proposals sent by post or delivered to our office.

1.6 Our RFP Terms

a. **Offer Validity Period**

By submitting a Proposal, the Respondent agrees that their offer will remain open for six (6) calendar months from the Deadline for Proposals.

b. **RFP Terms**

By submitting a proposal, the Respondent agrees to the RFP-Terms described in SECTION 6. Remember, if

a Respondent commits a non-trivial breach of the RFP-Terms, we may exclude them from further participation in the RFP process, whether or not that requirement is contractually binding.

1.7 Later changes to the RFP or RFP process

- a. After publishing the RFP, if we need to change anything or provide additional information, we will let all Respondents know by contacting Respondents by email.

1.8 Defined terms

These are shown using capitals. You can find all definitions at the back of the RFP-Terms (section 6 in this document).

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SECTION 2: Our Requirements

2.1 Background

The current COVID-19 narratives are **mostly related to vaccines** though there are emerging activities relating to the **COVID-19 Protection Framework (CPF)** including **My Vaccine Pass (MVP)** and **vaccine mandates, especially for 5-11-year-old children.**

Many of these narratives are woven into larger themes centred around mistrust of authorities and international businesses and relate to **concerns about side effects, safety and long-term effects of the vaccine** and **perceptions of COVID-19 restrictions.** Most themes originate from outside New Zealand but are tailored to New Zealand audiences.

While most misinformation is not spread intentionally, there are a small group of people and organisations within New Zealand and overseas who **actively share disinformation** and seek to cause harm by **threatening public safety, fracturing community cohesion** and **reduce trust in democracy.**

False information can be spread through **a range of different channels,** including social media, traditional media (television, radio and print), pamphlets, letterbox drops and word of mouth.

Mainstream **social media platforms** (e.g. Facebook and YouTube) are the most common means of disseminating COVID-19 disinformation in Aotearoa though there is increasing use of alternate platforms to coordinate activity.

There are increasing reports of spokespeople, government employees and frontline workers **targeted online and offline.**

A range of government agencies are working to mitigate the consequences of false information.

Our strategic communications approach focuses on providing readily available reliable information while building and strengthening resilience to false information.

2.2 Key outcomes

The outcomes we want to achieve are:

- Regular and objective qualitative and quantitative analysis of the online open-source mis/disinformation landscape, including tracking of a set of consistent, core set of metrics and trends over time, using appropriate data visualisations to ascertain, for example, whether harm is consistently escalating or not.
- To understand changes and risks in the mis and disinformation narratives in a timely way so that proactive action can be taken to protect New Zealanders from online harms
- Prevent the propagation of false and damaging content

2.3 What we require from a Respondent:

We are looking to source regular (e.g. weekly/fortnightly tbc) evidence-driven qualitative and quantitative analysis of the trends and signals in the Aotearoa New Zealand open-source online landscape that indicate changes in the context and nature of online content relating to COVID-19, particularly in regard to mis/disinformation. This includes assessment of global trends and narratives, where they intersect with observations made within the Aotearoa New Zealand landscape.

We are seeking a supplier that can provide actionable insights to inform agency decision making, and raw data on content of concern also needs to be ingestible at a machine-readable level (e.g. in MS Excel).

Reporting should be appropriate to government classification and sharing protocols and use a standard of probabilistic language that is consistent with broader Government agency reporting.

The methods of data collection and the information provided in the monitoring reports should align with the model standards for information gathering published by the Public Service Commission. These model standards provide a set of expectations for information needed to give effect to the responsibilities that agencies have to protect people, information and places, to ensure regulatory compliance, and to detect and prevent criminal offending. These reflect the relevant provisions of the Privacy Act 1993 (now superseded by the Privacy Act 2020).

We will evaluate each tender response on four criteria; Fit for Purpose, Capability, Capacity and Price;

a. Fit for Purpose

We are seeking Respondents that:

- can provide services that meet or exceed our requirements - demonstrate clearly how well they understand our requirements
- provides the level of quality we require
- can provide actionable insights from their analysis of the of the online open-source landscape
- can articulate and mitigate risk
- can provide a equity lens over the analysis
- can give assurance that they will keep the information they collect secure and in accordance with the Privacy Act 2020.

b. capability

We are seeking Respondents that can:

- provide information that demonstrates their track record
- allocate the right people to deliver the services
- demonstrate how key personnel (and subcontractors) develop and maintain a high skill set in the delivery of the requirements

- provide a description of their understanding of likely challenges and key success factors in providing these services.
- articulate how they support the Government's [Broader Outcomes](#) policy
- demonstrate understanding of the effects of misinformation and disinformation on public safety, social cohesion
- Demonstrate that data collection methods will be carried out in line with the terms and conditions of the platforms they monitor (i.e. no assumed/false identities).

c. capacity

We are seeking Respondents that can:

- deliver in Full on Time in Spec (DIFOTIS) in New Zealand – as per our Requirements.
- provide the sufficient resources to work on the delivery
- support their delivery with good infrastructure (operational and financial systems to manage delivery).

2.4 Other information

- a. The supplier may be handling confidential and sensitive information, this will be covered by the contract.
- b. Payment will be monthly on invoice.
- c. Work completed as part of this RFP is to remain confidential, this will be covered by the contract. Any findings will be the property of DPMC. This means that if the supplier wishes to publish reports or updates, or tweets or social media posts, this first must be approved by DPMC. Any disclosure must be pre-approved and in a format that is acceptable to government (for example a robust report).
- d. [NZ-Online-Extremism-Findings-Report.pdf \(dia.govt.nz\)](#)

2.5 Contract term

We anticipate that the Contract will commence 14th April 2022. The anticipated Contract term is 1 year with the option of extending with a further 2x6 months. In total 2 years.

2.6 Contract value

We estimate the value of this Contract to be \$105,000 plus GST for the initial term, and 210,000 plus GST in aggregate if all renewals and extensions are taken up.

2.7 Key deliverables

Description	Indicative date for delivery
Regular landscape analysis reports (e.g., weekly/monthly)	Frequency to be agree with successful vendor

2.8 Other tender documents

- a. RFP Response form.
- b. Contract for services template

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SECTION 3: Our Evaluation Approach

This section sets out the Evaluation Approach that will be used to assess Proposals.

3.1 Evaluation model

The evaluation model that will be used is weighted attribute (weighted criteria)]. Price is a weighted criterion. This means that all proposals that are capable of full delivery on time will be evaluated. The response that scores the highest will likely be selected as the Successful Respondent.

3.2 Evaluation criteria

We will evaluate Proposals according to the following criteria and weightings.

Criteria	Weighting
Fit for Purpose.	20%
Capability of the Respondent to deliver.	25%
Capacity of the Respondent to deliver.	30%
Public value (based on whole-of-life cost)	25%
Total weightings	100%

DPMC will expect respondents to offer a cost-effective bid. Pricing is not, though, the decisive consideration.

3.3 Scoring

In scoring responses, the evaluation panel will use the following scoring scale:

Rating	Definition	Score
EXCELLENT	Respondent demonstrates exceptional ability, understanding, experience and skills. The Proposal identifies factors that will offer potential added value, with supporting evidence.	9-10
GOOD	Respondent demonstrates above average ability, understanding, experience and skills. The Proposal identifies minor additional benefits, with supporting evidence.	7-8
ACCEPTABLE	Respondent demonstrates the ability to meet the criteria, with supporting evidence.	5-6
RESERVATIONS	Satisfies only a minimum of the criteria but not all. Reservations about the Respondent to adequately meet the criteria. Little supporting evidence.	3-4

SERIOUS RESERVATIONS	Extremely limited or no supporting evidence to meet the criteria. Minimum effort made to meet the criteria.	1-2
UNACCEPTABLE	Does not comply or meet the criteria at all. Insufficient information to demonstrate the criteria.	0

3.4 Price

We wish to obtain the best value-for-money over the whole-of-life of the Contract. This means achieving the right combination of fit for purpose, quality, on time delivery, quantity and price.

If a Respondent offers a substantially lower price than other Proposals, we may make enquiries or require additional evidence to verify that the Respondent can meet all the Requirements and conditions of the Proposed Contract for the price quoted. Note: Any claims made about price must be clear, accurate and unambiguous. Prices must include or be clear about Goods and Services Tax (GST).

3.5 Due diligence

In addition to the above, we may undertake further due diligence. The findings will be taken into account in the evaluation process. This could be:

- a. reference check the Respondent organisation
- b. We expect suppliers to comply with the Health and Safety requirements as stated in the New Zealand Government supplier code of conduct <https://www.procurement.govt.nz/assets/procurement-property/documents/supplier-code-of-conduct.pdf>

This code of conduct, under Labour and Human Rights – states ‘Suppliers must adhere to international human rights standards in their workplace and monitor and address these standards within their supply chain’.

DPMC may ask respondents for evidence of them complying with this supplier code of conduct.

- c. make other checks against the Respondent e.g. a search of the Companies Office or NZBN
- d. interview Respondents
- e. request Respondents make a presentation
- f. inspect audited accounts for the last 2 financial years
- g. undertake a credit check
- h. undertake a Police check for all named personnel

SECTION 4: Pricing information

4.1 Pricing information provided by Respondents

- a. Respondents must use the Pricing Schedule (section 3.3) provided in the RFP Response Form.
- b. The Pricing Schedule must show a breakdown of all costs, fees, expenses and charges.
- c. Where the price is based on fee rates, specify all rates, either hourly or daily or both as required.
- d. Respondents must show how they will manage risks and contingencies related to the delivery of the Requirements.
- e. Respondents must document all assumptions and dependencies that affect its pricing and/or the total cost to us. In other words, if the Respondent would expect us to pay more than the quoted price or estimate if particular assumptions or dependencies are not satisfied, the Respondent must call out those assumptions and dependencies.
- f. Respondents must tender prices in NZ\$. Unless otherwise agreed, we will arrange contractual payments in NZ\$. If there are foreign exchange implications explain how risk in foreign exchange will be dealt with here.
- g. any anticipated expenses (such as travel costs for resources) should be clearly identified; and
- h. all pricing is to be exclusive of GST and other local taxes and duties. If other taxes or duties apply these should be indicated.
- i. Respondents may submit a pricing approach that is different to the Pricing Schedule, however, the Respondent must also submit a Pricing Schedule that conforms.
- j. If two or more Respondents intend to submit a joint Proposal, the Pricing Schedule must include all costs, fees, expenses and charges chargeable by all Respondents. If this is the case, only the lead in the consortium will issue invoices.

SECTION 5: Our Proposed Contract

5.1 Proposed Contract

The Government Model Contract for Services will be the proposed contract. The contract template is attached with the issue of this RFP. The Terms and Conditions are available [HERE](#).

If the successful respondent is member of the All of Government Consultancy Supplier Panel, a Consultancy Service Order will be the proposed contract.

In submitting your tender response, you must let us know if you wish to question and/or negotiate any of the terms or conditions in the Proposed Contract, or wish to negotiate new terms and/or conditions. The Response Form contains a section for you to state your position. If you do not state your position, you will be deemed to have accepted the terms and conditions in the Proposed Contract in full.

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SECTION 6: RFP Terms

View the [RFP Terms](#) dated V.2. June 2021.

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SENSITIVE: Not for public distribution

**Reporting of online harms and threats against the Covid-19 Response:
Fortnightly Update**

SENSITIVE
11 July 2022

For the period 27 June to 7 July 2022

Kate Hannah, Sanjana Hattotuwa, Kayli Taylor
The Disinformation Project (TDP)

For further inquiries or should this report fall within the scope of an Official information Act request, contact the Disinformation project Director, Kate Hannah
katehannah@thedisinfoproject.org or s9(2)(a)

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Executive Summary

- The ever-changing mis- and disinformation landscape continues to evolve and shift, with impacts on democracy, stable governance, and human lives.
- Social media groups and channels studied have subscriber numbers in the hundreds of thousands: 380,000 subscribers across 161 channels on Telegram; 956,685 followers across 95 Facebook pages; 220,442 followers over 47 Instagram accounts.
- The Ministry of Health's communications are providing another tool for mis- and disinformation producers to use to stir up fear and mistrust in public health institutions and responses.
- The overturning of Roe v Wade and unveiling of anti-abortion sentiment could have an effect on the safety of abortion providers (both individuals and infrastructure), and to those seeking abortion services in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- QAnon rhetoric, further propelled by the recent re-emergence of Q, is present, embedded, and growing in the ecologies we study.
- 9(2)(c)
- Mis- and disinformation subscribers rely on racism to blame and ostracize. This has implications for social cohesion and contributes to a muddying of conversations about 'free speech'.
- Frames and themes of misogyny dominate ecologies we study – with effects on norm-shifting and changing what is 'acceptable' in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- Queerphobia and harms against the LGBTQ+ community are commonplace, with religious and nationalist frames being used to scapegoat.
- Sov-Cit rhetoric and the use of 'paper terrorism' are increasing in Aotearoa New Zealand – which will have effects on frontline Police, and the way Justice and other agencies operate.
- The genuine cost of living crisis and fuel increases are having an impact on the way New Zealanders feel and live – something that is being weaponised by mis- and disinformation producers.
- The belief that the Christchurch Terror Attack was a 'false flag' continue to grow in prominence in the ecologies we study, with effects on whānau of victims, the Muslim community, mistrust in government, and de-sensitisation to violence.

Introduction

Disinformation is a threat to democracy,¹ stable governance,² and human life.³ Since the start of the Covid19 pandemic and its associated infodemic,⁴ disinformation and its impact on people and society in Aotearoa New Zealand has grown. The Disinformation Project (TDP) has analysed this since February 2020, paying particular attention to the volume, velocity, and vector of information. We use daily data collection and analysis (which form the basis of this summary report), use computational and manual tools to scan open-source social media post and commentary across a wide range of social media platforms, websites, and media/alternative media organisations. The information landscape studied is developed using 'snowball' techniques, which means that we have expanded the inclusion of pages, groups, and channels only when they are signalled by existing locations of study.

Within the social media ecologies studied, key individuals and groups producing mis- and disinformation capitalise on growing uncertainty and anxiety amongst communities, related to Covid-19 public health interventions, including vaccination and lockdowns, to build fear, disenfranchisement, and division. Mis- and disinformation is also particularly targeting and scapegoating already marginalised or vulnerable communities – for whom distrust of the state is the result of intergenerational trauma and lived experience of discrimination or harm, which can increase engagement with conspiratorial explanations and disinformation. Over the past two and a half years of research, TDP has developed a thorough and balanced understanding of the harms that mis- and disinformation and 'dangerous speech' present to social cohesion, freedom of expression, inclusion, and safety. (See Appendix One for our definitions of these terms).

The landscape studied – Covid-19

The landscape studied originated as locations engaged in mis- and disinformation related to Covid-19 and the Covid-19 response, and our study, the type of content produced and shared within this landscape has shifted over time, so other narratives and themes within this landscape now form part of our analysis.

For example, on September 26, 2021, the Telegram channels we studied totalled 44,267 subscribers; as of July 1, 2022, we analyse daily 161 Telegram channels with 380,000 subscribers. While there is no feasible ethical method for de-duplication, the growth – and similar growth of both locations (pages, groups, accounts) and followers on Facebook and Instagram – signals increasing interest in these ideas, and continued engagement with content despite the shifts in narrative and theme we note above.

For the purposes of this reporting, we focus on online harms and threats against the Covid-19 response, including people and places associated with the Covid-19 response. This includes covid denialism, covid minimisation, anti-vaccination messaging (which is increasingly spilling

¹ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/653635/EXPO_STU\(2021\)653635_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/653635/EXPO_STU(2021)653635_EN.pdf)

² Ibid.

³ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/covid-misinformation-is-killing-people1/>;
<https://www.axios.com/2022/04/21/barack-obama-disinformation-social-media>

⁴ <https://www.who.int/health-topics/infodemic>

from vaccination against Covid-19 into other types of vaccination, including vaccination for tamariki), and anti-mandate/anti-public health measures messaging. These are the four dominant types of messaging that TDP observes in its study of the mis- and disinformation ecologies within Aotearoa New Zealand.

The landscape studied – shifts and developments

As the pandemic has, and continues to, shift and adapt; so too do the focuses of mis- and disinformation producers and their subscribers. We outline these more thoroughly in our two most recent public reports.⁵ A short summary below.

- In our paper published November 2021, we warned about the way Covid-19 related mis- and disinformation were being used as a kind of Trojan Horse to push followers and subscribers towards far-right and extremist ideologies.
- The Parliament Protest saw a large and ideologically diverse group of people brought together to advocate for highly divergent causes. Protestors had highly divergent understandings of the protest, its intentions, and its reception within non-protestors. There is also a high chance that protestors were radicalised during the protest. For example, they may have gone to protest one issue, e.g. vaccine mandates; and instead find themselves exposed to a wide array of extremist ideology.
- The causes advocated for and against by mis- and disinformation producers is constantly shifting. Current concerns include Three Waters reform, abortion law (in the wake of the overturning of Roe v Wade in the US), the rise of Sovereign Citizen rhetoric, support for the invasion of Ukraine, and the rights of LGBTQ+ people in Aotearoa New Zealand. As the media and social landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand continues to pivot and highlight diverse issues, so too do mis- and disinformation producers and their subscribers adopt new concerns.
- The end of the Parliament Protest does not symbolise a neat ending to conspiratorial thought in Aotearoa New Zealand. Such ideologies continue, adapting and growing at pace. The responsibility falls to renewing our efforts for social cohesion, honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and reflecting critically on our past, shared present, and collective hopes for the future.

⁵ Hannah, Kate, Sanjana Hattotuwa, and Kayli Taylor. "Mis- and Disinformation in Aotearoa New Zealand from 17 August to 5 November 2021." 2021.: <https://thedisinfoproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/2021-11-09-FINAL-working-paper-disinformation..pdf>; Hannah, Kate, Sanjana Hattotuwa, and Kayli Taylor. "The Murmuration of Information Disorders: Aotearoa New Zealand's Mis- and Disinformation Ecologies and the Parliament Protest." 2022.: <https://thedisinfoproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/The-murmuration-of-information-disorders-May-2022-Report-FULL-VERSION.pdf>

Health disinformation

Health disinformation, and the responses to Covid-19 and other disease, form the bulk of the focus on mis- and disinformation producers within Aotearoa New Zealand – and thus TDP’s research focus.

One narrative that proliferates within the ecologies studied by TDP is that Covid-19 isn’t as bad as the media, public health officials, and Governments say. This narrative emerged in 2020 and grew over 2021. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Delta outbreak from August 2021 and onset of Omicron have fueled this narrative. This leads to the undermining of public health messaging from MoH and UAC in attempts to get (1) children vaccinated against Covid-19, (2) getting people, especially children, vaccinated against the flu, (3) getting adults boosted, and (4) getting eligible adults boosted again.⁶

Public health commentary is consistently misinterpreted. For example, an interview from Professor Michael Baker on increased mortality is repackaged by alternative media organization Counterspin Media blaming harm related to the vaccine. This conceptualization is normative in the landscape studied.

Against the backdrop of rising case numbers and the increase of deaths across the country, Counterspin Media’s decontextualization is dangerous and completely at odds with the thrust of the interview. This is sophisticated disinformation – using professional media productions in service of Counterspin Media’s conspiratorial and disinformation narrative production. Such disinformation production has consequences for how people interact with, and trust, mainstream media, and public health messaging.

s9(2)(g)(i)

⁷ The wilful misinterpretation of this messaging is promoted by the most influential producers, such as Voices for Freedom, with widespread social media and direct marketing reach to over 200,000 New Zealanders, and likely impact on further vaccination campaigns for childhood vaccines.

Newshub Journalist Michael Morrar’s piece on the poor estimation on testing capacity in the early Omicron peak,⁸ and the claims of one union representative that the Ministry’s stance amounted to ‘misinformation’ was flagged in the ecologies we study. This labelling is now instrumentalised in a number of ways: (1) to deem the term meaningless, (2) that the government was promoting misinformation (with negative effects on public trust), (3) and that

⁶ For an example of this, see the section on harassment of Dr Jin Russell.

⁷ <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/470282/significant-second-wave-of-omicron-may-already-be-here>

⁸ <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/new-zealand/2022/06/omicron-testing-backlog-review-finds-ministry-of-health-failed-to-accurately-estimate-nz-s-lab-capacity.html>

research on mis- and disinformation (such as TDP) doesn't look at such 'misinformation' because of hidden agendas to silence mis- and disinformation producers and/or to silence truth.

Trust in institutions is important, particularly during a pandemic. We are observing across the ecologies we study *and* from groups with previously high trust, that trust in Government, public health institutions, and the Ministry of Health is waning. Continuation of the current erosion of trust will have dangerous implications for the way the Ministry of Health and other public-health related government organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand interact with its peoples.

International contexts

Roe vs Wade

Following the overturning of Roe vs Wade and the removal of constitutional right to abortion for people with uterus in the United States, mis- and disinformation ecologies studied by TDP celebrated the decision, and pivoted attention to abortion laws in Aotearoa. This attitude is widespread and consistent across the diverse groups and individuals represented in our location of study. For example, a video posted to YouTube, critiquing the PM's response⁹ to SCOTUS's decision by a prominent Christchurch disinformation producer has been viewed, at time of writing, over 1700 times with 240 likes and over 100 comments. The video uses graphic and inaccurate frames designed to antagonize and incite.

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[Redacted text block]

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9(2)(c)
[Redacted text block]

⁹ PM Jacinda Ardern slams US abortion ruling, but Chris Luxon avoids reaction, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/129080107/pm-jacinda-ardern-slams-us-abortion-ruling-but-chris-luxon-avoids-reaction>

¹⁰ 9(2)(c)
[Redacted text block]

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QAnon

QAnon is a wide-ranging and baseless internet conspiracy with origins in the United States and global influence.¹¹ Broadly, adherents to the conspiracy theory believe that a collection of Satan-worshipping political leaders, celebrities and billionaires rule the world – including engaging in paedophilia, human trafficking, and the harvesting of blood from children. Supporters of QAnon were involved in the attempting coup at the US Capitol building on 6 January 2021.¹²

QAnon ideas are common in the mis- and disinformation ecologies studied. The return of anonymous poster 'Q', instigator of the QAnon conspiracy theory the same weekend as the overturning of *Roe v Wade* saw an increase in the discussion of QAnon discourses here. One local disinformation producer posted celebrated the overturning of *Roe v Wade*, claiming that abortion is one way the organ trade operated in the US.

The presence of QAnon ideas is of concern in Aotearoa New Zealand for several reasons:

- QAnon, and the sentiment it encourages represents a militant and anti-establishment ideology and is associated with declining trust in institutions in the United States.
- Radicalisation, the erosion of trust in social and democratic institutions, and reductions in social cohesion are some of the effects we may see as a result of the spread of QAnon related ideologies and ideals across Aotearoa New Zealand.
- QAnon frames align closely with Russian disinformation, queerphobia, misogyny; as well as content that goes against democracy. Such content is aimed at public institutions in the United States, but is toxic to domestic cultures, communities, and contexts.

QAnon is not just limited to social media (Telegram, but present across Meta and Twitter), but takes place in offline settings, such as public meetings across the country called 'Save the Children', which bring the QAnon conspiracy here and place it into a local context for the audience –framed around abuse in state care, and specifically targeting Oranga Tamariki, Police, and other agencies as perpetrators of the harms that the conspiracy focuses on.

QAnon social media content and frames, shared into and on NZ-based accounts, groups, and channels is consistently the *most violent content* we discover in our research.

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¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/aug/25/qanon-conspiracy-theory-explained-trump-what-is>

¹² <https://www.bbc.com/news/53498434>

National impacts

TDP is observing the effects of an *information void* as Covid-19 and its impacts are less focused on by institutions, including government agencies. In the absence of narrative frames, an information void develops, one that mis- and disinformation producers are now filling with alternative narrative frames which rely on racism, misogyny, queerphobia, and pseudo-law. In an environment with less counter-messaging, these are growing at pace.

Racism

Disinformation producers rely on frames that articulate, amplify, and normalise racism – and establish the right to offend and be offensive as a *pillar of free speech*. Hate speech and harmful speech are framed as free speech – allowing the generation of logic that any criticism is an attempt to ‘cancel’ or censor them.

This is further emphasised by requests from disinformation producers to ‘chat’, ‘discuss ideas’, or ‘debate’ ideas with public figures. When their requests are denied or ignored, it can be framed as a refusal to engage in ‘free debate’ or an attempt at cancelling.

One example of the anti-Māori racism that saturates mis- and disinformation ecosystems is the response to Matariki. 24 June 2022, Aotearoa New Zealand’s first public holiday to acknowledge Matariki, the Māori New Year, generated criticism and anti-Māori racism within the ecologies studied by TDP. The public holiday saw common and widespread themes re-articulated, including He Puapua, Three Waters, Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, co-governance, and denial of Māori indigeneity. These themes target Māori (both collectively and individually, such as Foreign Minister Nanaia Matuha) with harassment and violence. The widespread rejection of the premise of the new holiday has impacts for social cohesion.

Misogyny

Themes and frames of toxic masculinity and misogyny are commonly and normatively expressed mis- and disinformation ecologies studied by TDP. Critically, these frames are used to recruit further subscribers and to target women’s participation in public life. Effects of these widespread frames are already being felt by women and gender minorities, and resulting in norm-shifting, where the use of misogyny and language of threats and violence is accepted in Aotearoa New Zealand. Misogynistic framing – particularly around the roles of men and women in families and public life – is the most common unifying frame we observe in the ecosystems studied. Examples during the period of analysis focus on abortion rights, motherhood, and the role of men, and continue to provide both tools for recruitment and for targeted harassment of women and gender minorities.

Queerphobia¹³

The publicity around Bethlehem College in Tauranga¹⁴ and burning of Rainbow Youth¹⁵ continue to provide narrative frames about LGBTQ+ people in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In the last fortnight, an Auckland-based misinformation producer whose main platform is Facebook attacked the visibility of LGBTQ+ people in public life, saying:

“I am so glad that New Zealand has not stooped as low as the United States when it comes to children and sexual ideology. This seems crazy to me that people are okay with children being around hyper sexualised environments. I would love to have some LGBTQ members on the podcast with me to talk about the difference between celebrating ourselves and where the lines should be when it comes to children. If you would like to join me and chat then let’s sit down for an open and honest conversation.”

Another Auckland-based producer, mainly present on Telegram, was motivated by Spark’s new campaign aiming to create inclusion for non-binary people¹⁶ has attacked non-binary people. He claims Spark’s campaign is “using [minorities’] stories to create falsehoods and distort social realities” which will damage the “great nation”. His original post is shared into over 25 Telegram channels.

A Christchurch-based disinformation producer active on Facebook and YouTube strategically and intentionally misappropriates a Biblical passage (Pride goes before destruction, Proverbs 16:18), thus targeting Pride and LGBTQ+ communities as ‘sin’. The PM’s attendance at a Pride festival from years ago is highlighted, drawing her into the ‘sin of Pride’.

In June, ‘online’ harms and discrimination against the Queer community¹⁷ became a real display of violence with the burning of Rainbow Youth offices in Tauranga.¹⁸ Safety, and feelings of safety, for the LGBTQ+ community are placed at risk every time dangerous, hateful, and harmful rhetoric is posited against them.¹⁹

Anti-establishment / sov-cit

Since 2021, TDP has analyzed the domestic growth of Sovereign Citizen (Sov-Cit) ideologies. The Sov-Cit movement emerged in the United States in the mid-1970s. Adherents view governments as illegitimate and corrupt and view themselves and living outside of the required confines of the law.²⁰ Since the Covid-19 pandemic, Sov-Cits in the US have pivoted into sharing Covid-19 related mis- and disinformation – including attending anti-vaccination and anti-mask events.²¹ One tool of Sov-Cit rhetoric is ‘paper terrorism’, meaning when they get frustrated with the authorities or public institutions they retaliate with bogus legal claims that waste time and resources.²² Sov-Cits have also been known to use violence and threats of harm. TDP is observing Sov-Cit rhetoric in Aotearoa New Zealand’s mis- and disinformation ecologies – which will have negative effects on public safety, including that of frontline Police officers.

¹³ TDP is using ‘queerphobia’ as an umbrella term to describe harms against members of the LGBTQ+ community.

¹⁴ <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/bay-of-plenty-times/news/taurangas-bethlehem-college-criticised-for-discriminatory-marriage-belief/ACKCSXMNTDGO5CRCLF7AMTWZXY/>

¹⁵ <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/469221/rainbow-youth-tauranga-drop-in-centre-destroyed-in-suspicious-fire>

¹⁶ <https://www.spark.co.nz/online/beyondbinarycode/about/>

¹⁷ <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/bay-of-plenty-times/news/taurangas-bethlehem-college-criticised-for-discriminatory-marriage-belief/ACKCSXMNTDGO5CRCLF7AMTWZXY/>

¹⁸ <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/469221/rainbow-youth-tauranga-drop-in-centre-destroyed-in-suspicious-fire>

¹⁹ For more, read TDP researcher Kayli Taylor’s short piece on hate speech: <https://thedisinfoproject.org/2022/06/18/hate-speech-in-aotearoa-new-zealand-reflecting-and-resisting/>

²⁰ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53654318>

²¹ <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/sovereign-citizens-movement>

²² <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/sovereign-citizens-movement>

In the last fortnight TDP has observed repeated posting on Telegram by an individual regarding their interactions with Police, and other content espoused by this person. In one visit, the individual records an interaction with Police, who advise him to take down two videos which feature graphic violence that were posted to his Telegram channel in April. The video shows two entirely separate worldviews: one connected to domestic laws and policing, and one that is inextricably entwined with and based on Sov-Cit vocabularies and beliefs.

A faux 'sheriff' van, inspired by the local 'sheriff' movement (which itself is inspired by Sov-Cit rhetoric) is celebrated on Telegram. The van says 'Stop 3 Waters', and has pictures of Chris Hipkins, James Shaw, Nanaia Mahuta, Trevor Mallard, Ashley Bloomfield, Chris Luxon, Andrew Little, Jacinda Ardern, and Grant Robertson.



TDP also analysed a letter sent to a Judge of the Supreme Court²³, and featured in the Nuremburg NZ Telegram channel, featuring a range of pseudo-science links and urging them to support their efforts to bring people in NZ who have been involved with the Covid-19 response to justice. This is the perfect example of paper terrorism. Not only is the letter, in its harassing nature and with its ridiculous demands a form of paper terrorism; but it makes reference to other behaviours that could be interpreted as the same: repeated emails to government and public health officials.

Sov-Cit rhetoric and its dismissal of Police jurisdiction could have serious effects on social cohesion, and the safety of individuals across police, government, elections, and public health. The rise in 'paper terrorism', and bombardment of law and other agencies with pseudo-legal claims will have impacts on the way these agencies operate and function.

Christchurch Terror Attack

Content warning: Discussions of the Christchurch Terror Attack

The harmful and disturbing lie that the Christchurch Terror Attack was a 'False Flag'²⁴ is present within the mis- and disinformation ecologies studied by TDP. *The Three Faced Killer*, a 'documentary' in three parts by Michael O'Bernicia trivialises the attacks and includes video footage from the attack – which is classified in Aotearoa New Zealand as objectionable material.²⁵ The second part has been released and features extended cuts from the Christchurch killer's livestream - just like Part One, which was also deemed objectionable by the Classification Office.²⁶ Like Part One, Part Two of the

²³ The letter is addressed to Chief Justice William Young, who left the Supreme Court in April 2022. The email address however, is for Chief Justice Helen Winkelmann, who is now the Chief Justice. For the purposes of this analysis, we shall label as 'a justice of the Supreme Court'.

²⁴ <https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/2022/what-is-a-false-flag/>

²⁵ <https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/news/news-items/christchurch-mosque-attack-livestream-classification-decision/>

²⁶ Chief Censor Bans The Three Faced Terrorist, a 'documentary' about the March 15 Mosque attacks, <https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/news/news-items/chief-censor-bans-the-three-faced-terrorist-a-documentary-about-the-march-15-mosque-attacks/>

'documentary' has been banned.²⁷ While Part Two has been banned, like Part One and the original video footage of the attack 9(2)(c) [REDACTED]

While TDP and Te Mana Whakaatu – Classification Office brace for Part Three, we note that subscribers to mis- and disinformation ecologies who posted the video will likely have observed it – deeply disturbing material that displays, at least in part, the attack of 15 March. The impacts on mental health, on perceptions of violence, and desensitisation²⁸ are myriad.

The lie that the terrorist attack was a false flag is harmful to the communities and whānau most affected by the violence, further generating harm against the Muslim community for an event that has already caused significant harm. The continued accusation that the terrorist attack was orchestrated by the Government serves only to cement distrust of the state and institutions. This will have long-tail effects on the way subscribers to mis- and disinformation ecologies interact with public institutions.

²⁷ <https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/news/news-items/acting-chief-censor-bans-video-featuring-the-march-15-mosque-attacks/>

²⁸ <https://www.apa.org/topics/video-games/violence-harmful-effects>

Appendix One: Definitions

Misinformation: “false information that people didn’t create with the intent to hurt others”

Disinformation: “false information created with the intention of harming a person, group, or organization, or even a company”

Malinformation: “true information used with ill intent”²⁹

Conspiracy theory: purported explanations which cite a conspiracy at the salient cause of some event or phenomenon.³⁰

Dangerous speech: “dangerous speech is any form of expression (e.g., speech, text, or images) that can increase the chances that its audience will condone or participate in violence against members of another group.”³¹

Hallmarks of dangerous speech:

- Dehumanisation
- Coded language
- Accusation in a mirror
- Threat to group integrity or purity
- Assertion of attack against women and girls
- Questioning in-group loyalty

²⁹ Berentson-Shaw J and Elliot M. *Misinformation and Covid-19: a briefing for media*. Wellington: The Workshop; (2020).

³⁰ Dentith MRX. Conspiracy theories and philosophy: bringing the epistemology of a freighted term into the social sciences. In JE Uscinki (ed.) *Conspiracy Theories and the People Who Believe Them*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; (2018).

³¹ The Dangerous Speech Project, *Dangerous Speech: A Practical Guide*: 19 April 2021 <https://dangerousspeech.org/guide/>

**Reporting of online harms and threats against the Covid-19 Response:
Fortnightly Update**

SENSITIVE
25 July 2022

For the period 8 July to 22 July 2022

Kate Hannah, Sanjana Hattotuwa, Kayli Taylor
The Disinformation Project (TDP)

For further inquiries or should this report fall within the scope of an Official information Act request, contact the Disinformation project Director, Kate Hannah
katehannah@thedisinproject.org or s9(2)(a)

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SENSITIVE

Executive Summary


- Aotearoa New Zealand's disinformation ecologies are a complex and shifting phenomena that is having and will continue to have impacts on human and national security.
- Social media groups and channels studied have subscriber numbers in the hundreds of thousands: 380,000 subscribers across 161 channels on Telegram; 956,685 followers across 95 Facebook pages; 220,442 followers over 47 Instagram accounts.
- Disinformation producers continue to target vaccinations as harmful, masks as ineffective, and all public health measures as ridiculous.
- Monkeypox has been imbricated into conspiratorial thinking and denialism.
- The image of the PM, other senior government officials, and youth MPs unmasked is a gift to disinformation ecologies and is an accelerant for worsening information disorders in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- Identity-based harassment, including racism and misogyny, continue to rise in the ecologies studied by TDP.
- TDP witnessed more Sov-Cit rhetoric this fortnight, including threats to bring the PM to trial.
- TDP is increasingly concerned about the threat of stochastic terrorism in NZ.
- The white supremacist 'Great Replacement Theory' is referenced without critique in domestic Telegram channels by NZ-based producers.
- TDP notes how easy it is to move from domestic anti-vaccination and anti-mandate Telegram channels to channels promoting violent extremism and other harms.
- Sri Lanka's unrest has captured the attention of mis- and disinformation ecologies studied by TDP. The protest activity is held up as an example of how to revolt against government – including in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- Former Japanese President Abe's assassination was reported on Telegram faster than many mainstream media outlets picked it up, and later framed conspiratorially.
- Mis- and disinformation producers oppose Three Waters reform, muddy the issue, and protest visibly.
- Russian disinformation continues to be shared amongst ecologies studied by TDP, including domestically produced content in Russian.
- Mainstream media has promoted misinformation, and thus bolstered its producers.
- Schools are, as we have described over the past year, increasingly contested sites where efforts to increase social cohesion such as the new history curriculum are poised to become embattled.

Health disinformation

TDP observes in studied ecologies health disinformation related to Covid-19 denialism and minimisation, anti-public health rhetoric, and anti-vaccination messaging. The emergence of Monkeypox has also drawn the attention of mis- and disinformation ecologies.

A large and popular disinformation group which focuses on women and families' features another disinformation narrator claiming "You can statistically show that the vaccines have been increasing the deaths" and represents the Covid-19 vaccine as a "device that changes the way our immune system works." These represent explicit claims that what is being named as Covid-19 related deaths are instead vaccine-related. Another high profile and popular woman disinformation producer posts videos alleging that Covid-19 vaccines cause myocarditis, heart issues, heart attacks and essentially, kill people. This denial of the effects of Covid-19 is highly palatable as it offers a neat explanation for excess death.

s9(2)(g)(i)

A large rectangular area of the document is redacted with grey bars, obscuring several lines of text.

Anti-mask discourses and the promotion of the misuse of mask exemptions are widespread. Multiple disinformation producers appear to be building up to a crescendo that will be unleashed in its full force if/when stronger mask mandates are announced by Government. Any capitulation is also packaged as evidence of their power and influence – ie the strong advice to schools that falls short of an actual mask mandate is understood within the location of study as evidence of the fear of their growing movement.

Media reporting on Monkeypox cases in Aotearoa New Zealand¹ has been recognised within the ecosystems studied by TDP. Monkeypox has been immediately drawn into anti-public health measures across mis- and disinformation ecologies studied by TDP. A poll on Telegram from an alternative 'news' organisation which produces and promotes disinformation highlights resistance to a lockdown, as well as the belief that the New Zealand government will introduce a lockdown as a system for control (of both people, and virus). Broadly, Telegram's reception to Monkeypox discourse is exclusively ridicule and rejection. The thrust of comment responses to this poll includes anti-vaccination, anti-mandate, anti-government, Covid-19 denialism, and Monkeypox denialism. Monkeypox has been drawn into the same operation of conspiratorial thought in which Covid-19 is viewed.

This graph compares interactions of the Unite Against Covid-19 Facebook page against that of the high-profile woman disinformation producer whose livestream content was the most popular during the Parliamentary occupation.

¹ New Zealand's first case of monkeypox detected in Auckland, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/300633595/new-zealands-first-case-of-monkeypox-detected-in-auckland>

As the graph shows, since January 2022 the misinformation producer has received nearly *four times* the number of engagements than the Unite Against Covid-19 page. While the majority of this was over February-March 2022, this individual remains slightly higher interactions in May and June 2022.



A maskless Prime Minister

Against a backdrop of worsening information disorders, rising Covid-19 infections and re-infections, and a health system on the verge of collapse,² an image of a mask-less Prime Minister, Governor General, other MPS, and youth MPs is a *gift* to mis- disinformation ecosystems and an accelerant for worsening information disorders in Aotearoa New Zealand.

TDP has written over 30 pages, summarising the response from both mis- and disinformation ecologies and those not subscribed, including politicians – current and former – and academics. In the interest of brevity, we will summarise a few points below.

Mis- and disinformation ecologies latched on immediately, and significantly, with a variety of responses. Some labelled the Prime Minister hypocritical, others used it as an opportunity to allege that masking is not effective, some highlighted other posts from Youth MPs in which individuals are seen mask-less, and some labelled the PM’s rhetoric as “Do as I say, not do as I do”. No mis- and disinformation producer has achieved the level of undermining of public health measures as this image has. Within mis- and disinformation ecologies, it has further undermined the government’s own public health guidelines, policies, and communications in ways that TDP expects to have longtail effects.

Discourse on Twitter shows 221 tweets on the subject, reaching a potential 46,920 followers. These tweets generated 2662 retweets (including quote tweets). TDP noted last week that trust in government and public health organisations from those *with previously high trust* in these groups is being eroded. This image further erodes this trust – with implications on how future public health responses are likely to be received.

Disinformation ecologies already had anti-public health measure views, which manifested into anti-masking rhetoric. TDP stresses that all future expressions of anti-mask sentiment will be appreciated by the PM’s maskless photo on social media. Thus, pushback against mask use is *strengthened* by the PM’s own actions.

² Covid-19 NZ: Why the rising tide of cases doesn't tell the whole story, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/explained/129256918/covid19-nz-why-the-rising-tide-of-cases-doesnt-tell-the-whole-story>

In sum, the image presents a serious and unprecedented issue in domestic information disorders – the magnitude of which is yet to fully be seen. This image, alongside decreasing public and official communication creates a new foundation for mis- and disinformation to thrive.

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Beyond health disinformation – other trends of the ecosystem

Identity-based targeting and harassment

TDP has repeatedly pointed to the ways in which Covid-19 mis- and disinformation ecosystems are drawing people towards conservative ideologies, far-right views, and racism.

This fortnight, disinformation producers across Telegram and Facebook promoted an online petition against calling this country Aotearoa, which was hosted on the anti-Māori Hobsons Pledge website. Racism is deeply intertwined with the disinformation ecologies studied by TDP – with impacts on all of Aotearoa New Zealand and its efforts for social cohesion. There has been a notable increase in both antisemitic and Islamophobic content in commentary in the period of study.

Additionally, themes and frames of toxic masculinity and the operations of misogyny are present and highly volatile across the mis- and disinformation ecologies studied by TDP. For example, the Freedom and Rights Coalition promotes “real men” joining a “Million-Man March” in Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch with language such as “Men of this nation will gather up their wives, sons and daughters and say, “Let’s make history and stand for our freedoms, our rights and let’s get our nation back.” The language is heteronormative, erases gender diverse identities, and frames a highly misogynistic expectation that men need to “fight” to save the nation from its current “collapse”. Disinformation producers who are women are also involved in the production and promotion of material with harms to gender equality and the lives and safety of women and gender minorities.

Sovereign Citizen

Since 2021, TDP has borne witness to the domestic growth of Sovereign Citizen (Sov-Cit). The Sov-Cit movement emerged in the United States in the mid-1970s. Adherents view governments as illegitimate and corrupt and view themselves and living outside of the required confines of the law.³ Since the Covid-19 pandemic, Sov-Cits in the US have pivoted into sharing Covid-19 related mis- and disinformation – including attending anti-vaccination and anti-mask events.⁴ One tool of Sov-Cit rhetoric is ‘paper terrorism’, meaning when they get frustrated with the authorities or public institutions they retaliate with bogus legal claims that waste time and resources.⁵ Sov-Cits have also been known to use violence and threats of harm. TDP is observing Sov-Cit rhetoric in Aotearoa New Zealand’s mis- and disinformation ecologies – which will have negative effects on public safety, including that of frontline Police officers. TDP notes that Sov-Cit rhetoric is now strong enough offline to make mainstream media news.⁶

s9(2)(a)

Other disinformation producers continue to travel the country promoting Sov-Cit ideas and spreading conspiratorial thought.

³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53654318>

⁴ <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/sovereign-citizens-movement>

⁵ <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/sovereign-citizens-movement>

⁶ <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/crime/129313220/trials-and-tribulations-during-mans-troubled-court-appearance>

A high profile former mainstream journalist disinformation producer interviews another a fringe disinformation producer who has been promoting Sov-Cit rhetoric and his encounters with Police on his Telegram channel. This narrator and second speaker 'interview' technique provides and powerful form of dangerous speech that validates fringe ideas through the medium of a 'news' style interview conducted by someone with status within that space.

In the post accompanying the video, the interviewer says "we must create change at a local level... Take out your cameras, and make a lot of noise! Demand Change!" The video itself amplifies Russian disinformation, vaccine related disinformation, and re-features previous content from the interviewer alleging children are dying from the Covid-19 vaccine. Towards the end of the video, the interviewee questions the Police, vaccine clinics, and anyone associated with power. When asked to say something to PM Ardern, the interviewee says, "Resign and get ready for trial."

Methods of engagement and protest

TDP observes a variety of methods of engagement and protest within the disinformation ecologies we study. Some of these are tools currently being implemented, like public protest and use of the mainstream media. Some are hinted at – realities that TDP is increasingly concerned we will witness in Aotearoa New Zealand. One example of this is stochastic terrorism.

On 8 July, following the release of a publication called 'The Hard Reset', the Counterterrorism Group (CTG) in the United States released a flash alert warning that the publication would "almost certainly" increase extremist violent attacks across the country.⁷ They noted that the motive behind the publication was to encourage white supremacists and anti-government individuals to take violent action.

9(2)(c) . TDP has read the document and agrees with CTG regarding the tone and thrust of the content. We cannot make an assessment about potential offline consequences of the availability of the document in a domestic context. However, given the content of the document and the irrigated path dependencies established by prior TVEC content, 9(2)(c)

We are observing the very real threat of stochastic violence and terrorism. The ease of access to 'The Hard Reset' and other materials 9(2)(c) highlight that Aotearoa New Zealand is reaching a point where kinetic harms including, but not limited to, stochastic terrorism are inevitable.

The Great Replacement Theory in Aotearoa New Zealand

One disinformation producer, 9(2)(c) , signals The Great Replacement Theory's central thesis: that the white population, suffering from declining birth rates, is being 'replaced'

⁷ <https://www.counterterrorismgroup.com/post/flash-alert-high-risk-of-violence-with-the-publication-of-the-hard-reset-a-terrorgram-publication>

by immigrants. He names it in the context of the Dutch farmers protests, alleging he heard about dropping birth rates amongst white people in the Netherlands, and high immigration flows. The Great Replacement Theory (GRT) inspired the Christchurch terrorist and the Buffalo mass-shooter. This disinformation producer's rhetoric and framing is the same ideological framework, and vocabulary, as the aforementioned terrorists.

Domestic Telegram ecologies are one step from violent extremist promotion

TDP's study focuses on 9(2)(c) who cluster around anti-vaccination and anti-mandate messaging. These channels regularly link to, share, or direct people towards terrorist and violent extremist content, violent extremist, child sexual abuse material, and The Great Replacement Theory repositories. There is no guard, friction, oversight, or control over the production and propagation of this material – and no geographical containment. What is produced in the United States is instantly discoverable by those in Aotearoa New Zealand who are imbricated within mis- and disinformation ecologies.

Sri Lanka

The socio-political developments in Sri Lanka have caught the attention of disinformation ecologies studied by TDP. The events are held up as an example of how people could revolt against the government in Aotearoa New Zealand, how food shortages in Sri Lanka preface the same here, and how civil unrest in Sri Lanka will also be experienced in Aotearoa New Zealand. Sri Lanka's conundrums and issues are instrumentalised without context or historic framing to suggest civil and political unrest could be achieved in Aotearoa New Zealand in the same way.

President Abe's assassination, represented on Telegram

Former Japanese President Abe's deadly shooting was captured quickly by ecologies studied by TDP. The first post on Telegram was posted several minutes prior to any wire report seen by TDP on Twitter, or before reporting from the *New York Times*. Consequently, TDP views Telegram as a real time news network, reporting entirely independently from wire news reporting and mainstream media. Later framing of the assassination is dominated by tropes that he was close to Putin and opposed vaccine mandates, the World Economic Forum, globalists, and the World Health Organisation, and that his assassination is therefore the work of pro-vaccine conspirators.

Opposition to Three Waters

Multiple content producers within disinformation ecologies studied by TDP have strong opposition to Three Waters reform. This includes organising physical protest outside the Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) meeting in Palmerston North – which was shared across multiple clusters within our ecologies. Three Waters reform is almost exclusively framed as concerns of Māori control or ownership over water – a sign of the racism present within ecologies, as well as the way the *debate* about Three Waters has overshadowed the actual issue.⁸

⁸ <https://thespinoff.co.nz/live-updates/21-07-2022/commentary-around-three-waters-has-overshadowed-need-for-change-ardern>

The spread of Russian disinformation

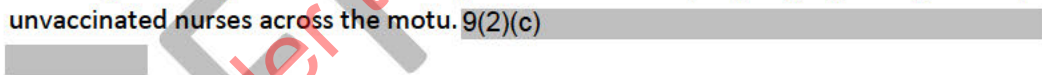
TDP has noted the spread of Russian disinformation and propaganda throughout Aotearoa New Zealand's information ecosystems, particularly since the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In a paper released in May, we described how, by the end of March 2022, every domestic Telegram channel studied by TDP had pivoted to a nearly exclusive framing of the Ukraine war through pro-Putin and pro-Kremlin frames. This reflects trends observed by Microsoft, who reported in June that after December 2021, Russian propaganda consumption in New Zealand increased by over 30% relative to consumption in Australia and New Zealand. Critically, pro-Kremlin and pro-Putin content in the Russian language is being produced in New Zealand, via open channels and closed groups such as <https://www.facebook.com/groups/VladimirPutinFanClubNZ/discussion/preview>. This includes content which seeks to fundraise for Russian causes, potentially in violation of sanctions and terrorism laws.

9(2)(c)



Mainstream media promoting misinformation

This fortnight, the mainstream media promoted a puff piece for a group of unvaccinated nurses begging to return to work amidst the collapsing health system.⁹ The piece failed to recognise the cluster was organised by a prominent disinformation group, which has conspiratorial ideas about the New World Order, believes the vaccine will cull the population, and advocates for Nuremberg trials for doctors, academics, and politicians. The group of nurses and its parent network, following the success of the piece have scaled up rapidly, organising action plans for unvaccinated nurses across the motu. 9(2)(c)

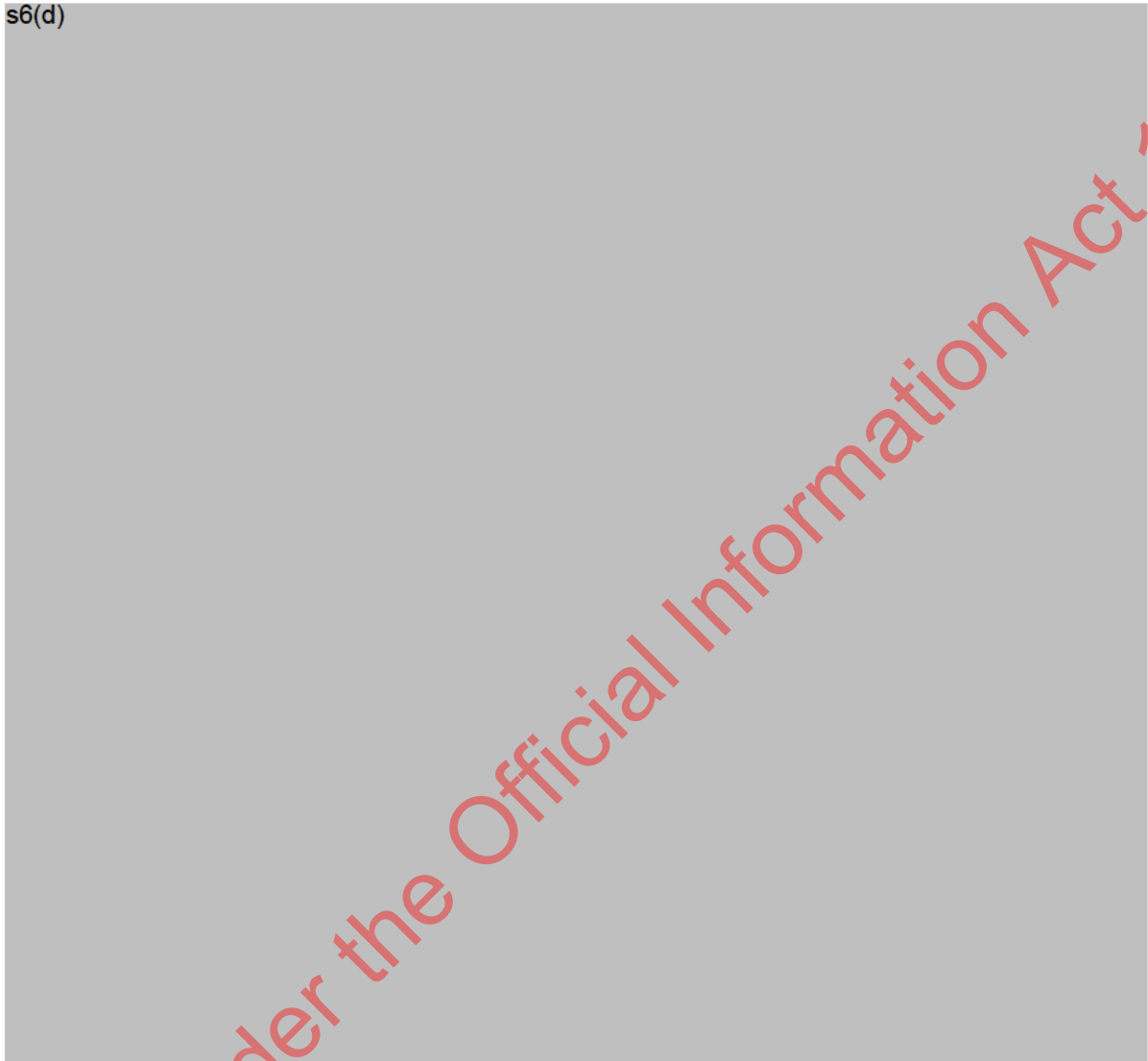


s6(d)



⁹ <https://www.stuff.co.nz/southland-times/news/129197272/plea-by-unvaccinated-nurses-to-return-to-work>

s6(d)



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Appendix One: The Disinformation Project and our field of study

Disinformation is a threat to democracy,¹⁰ stable governance,¹¹ and human life.¹² Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and its associated infodemic,¹³ disinformation and its impact on people and society in Aotearoa New Zealand has grown. The Disinformation Project (TDP) has been analysing this since February 2020, paying particular attention to the volume, velocity, and vector of information. We use daily data collection and analysis (which form the basis of this summary report), use computational and manual tools to scan open-source social media post and commentary across a wide range of social media platforms, websites, and media/alternative media organisations. The information landscape studied is developed using 'snowball' techniques, which means that we have expanded the inclusion of pages, groups, and channels only when they are signalled by existing locations of study.

Within the social media ecologies studied, key individuals and groups producing mis- and disinformation capitalise on growing uncertainty and anxiety amongst communities, related to Covid-19 public health interventions, including vaccination and lockdowns, to build fear, disenfranchisement, and division. Mis- and disinformation is also particularly targeting and scapegoating already marginalised or vulnerable communities – for whom distrust of the state is the result of intergenerational trauma and lived experience of discrimination or harm, which can increase engagement with conspiratorial explanations and disinformation. Over the past two and a half years of research, TDP has developed a thorough and balanced understanding of the harms that mis- and disinformation and 'dangerous speech' present to social cohesion, freedom of expression, inclusion, and safety. (See Appendix One for our definitions of these terms).

The landscape studied – Covid-19

The landscape studied originated as locations engaged in mis- and disinformation related to Covid-19 and the Covid-19 response, and our study, the type of content produced and shared within this landscape has shifted over time, so other narratives and themes within this landscape now form part of our analysis. For the purposes of this reporting, we focus on online harms and threats against the Covid-19 response, including people and places associated with the Covid-19 response. This includes covid denialism, covid minimisation, anti-vaccination messaging (which is increasingly spilling from vaccination against Covid-19 into other types of vaccination, including vaccination for tamariki), and anti-mandate/anti-public health measures messaging. These are the four dominant types of messaging that TDP observes in its study of the mis- and disinformation ecologies within Aotearoa New Zealand.

¹⁰ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/653635/EXPO_STU\(2021\)653635_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/653635/EXPO_STU(2021)653635_EN.pdf)

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/covid-misinformation-is-killing-people1/>;
<https://www.axios.com/2022/04/21/barack-obama-disinformation-social-media>

¹³ <https://www.who.int/health-topics/infodemic>

Appendix Two: Definitions

Misinformation: “false information that people didn’t create with the intent to hurt others”

Disinformation: “false information created with the intention of harming a person, group, or organization, or even a company”

Malinformation: “true information used with ill intent”¹⁴

Conspiracy theory: purported explanations which cite a conspiracy at the salient cause of some event or phenomenon.¹⁵

Dangerous speech: “dangerous speech is any form of expression (e.g., speech, text, or images) that can increase the chances that its audience will condone or participate in violence against members of another group.”¹⁶

Hallmarks of dangerous speech:¹⁷

- Dehumanisation
- Coded language
- Accusation in a mirror
- Threat to group integrity or purity
- Assertion of attack against women and girls
- Questioning in-group loyalty

¹⁴ Berentson-Shaw J and Elliot M. *Misinformation and Covid-19: a briefing for media*. Wellington: The Workshop; (2020).

¹⁵ Dentith MRX. Conspiracy theories and philosophy: bringing the epistemology of a freighted term into the social sciences. In JE Uscinki (ed.) *Conspiracy Theories and the People Who Believe Them*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; (2018).

¹⁶ The Dangerous Speech Project, *Dangerous Speech: A Practical Guide*: 19 April 2021 <https://dangerousspeech.org/guide/>

¹⁷ Ibid.

Appendix Three: TDP's work to report and flag content to minimise harm to New Zealanders

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[Redacted]

[Redacted]

- [Redacted]
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DRAFT Communications and engagement work plan

COVID-19 misinformation, online harms and scams

Latest sentiment research (22 May 2022)

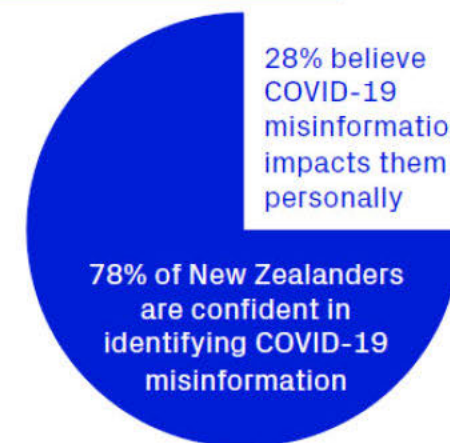
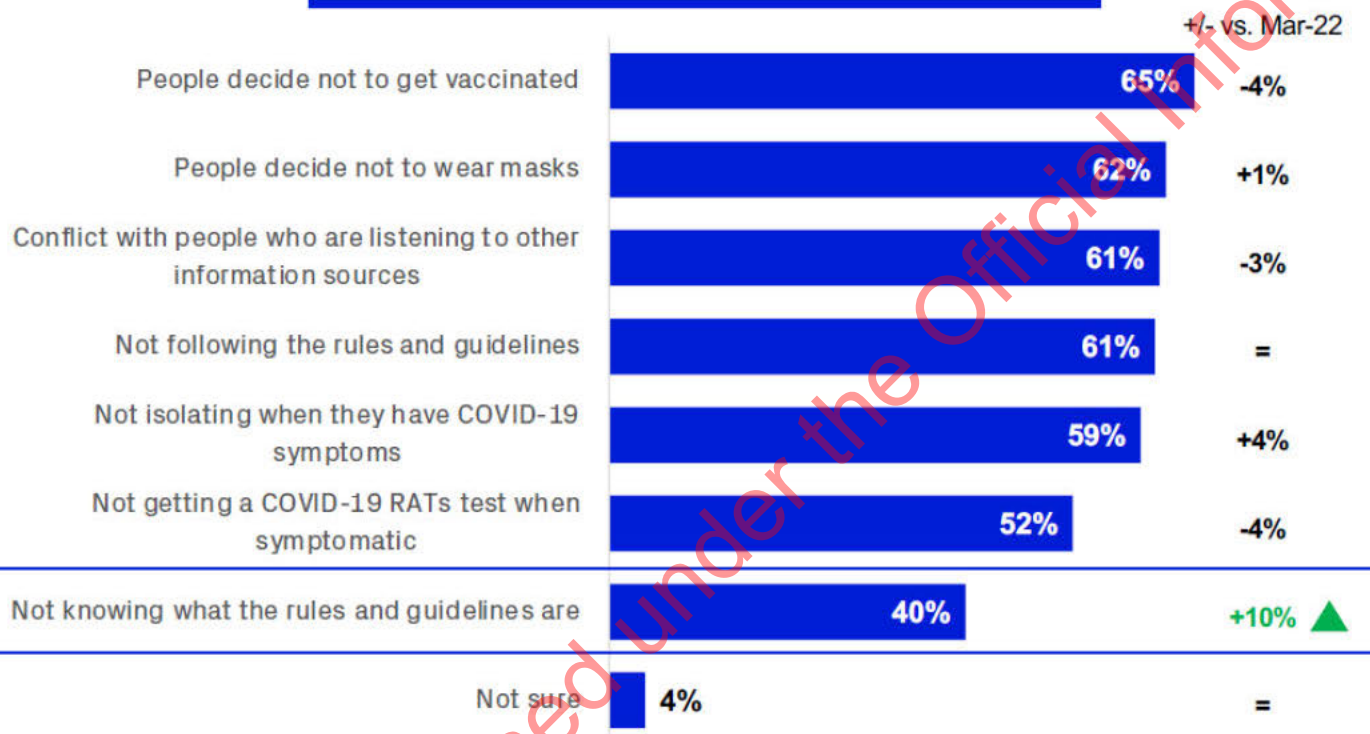
Summary insights

- 28% of New Zealanders believe misinformation impacts them personally
- 34% of people feel that Misinformation about COVID-19 or the vaccine is a barrier for others to test for COVID-19, while 32% feel it presents a barrier for others to self isolate.
- 78% of New Zealanders are confident in identifying COVID-19 misinformation
- New Zealanders are becoming more likely to think that misinformation affects knowing the COVID-19 rules and guidelines.
- 26% of New Zealanders feel the COVID-19 response is heading in the wrong direction. This group is overrepresented by people who are less concerned about catching covid, less likely to have been boosted, and significantly more likely to state they 'definitely' not get the booster in the future.

Latest sentiment research (22 May 2022)

NZers are increasingly thinking that misinformation affects not knowing what the rules and guidelines are

HOW DOES MISINFORMATION AFFECT NZers?

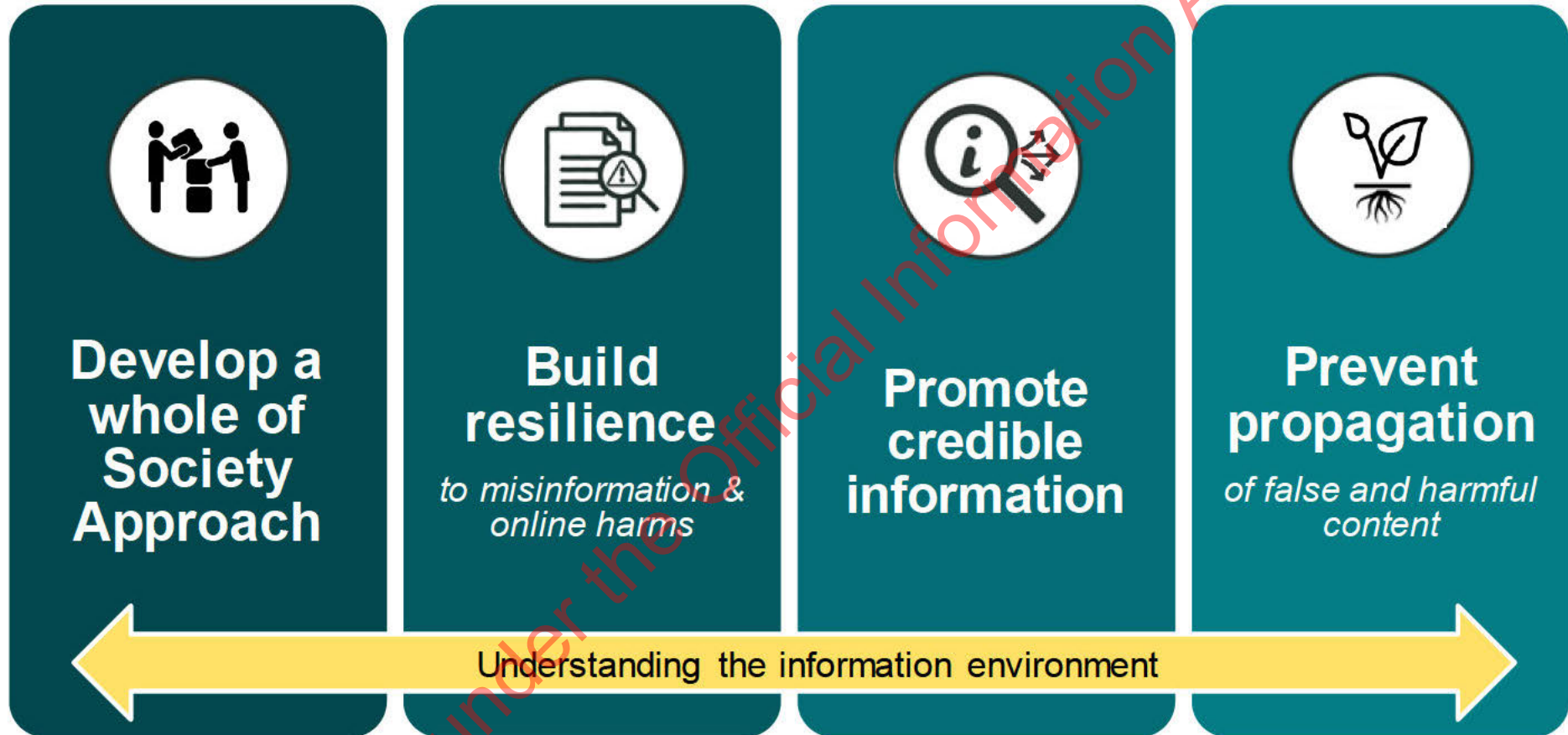


We continue to see that NZers most likely believe that misinformation affects people's decisions around vaccinations and mask wearing.

In May, we see a significant increase in not knowing what the rules and guidelines are.

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Strategic Objectives



Understanding the Information Environment

These items are used to understand the up-to-date disinformation landscape to ensure effective delivery on strategic objectives.

Whole of society approach

Resilience to disinformation

Promote credible information

Prevent propagation of disinformation














Understanding the Information Environment

- Quarterly disinformation specific sentiment research through Kantar
- Regular COVID-19 group sentiment reporting through TRA
- Monitoring of Unite Against COVID-19 and Ministry of Health social media channels
- Working with engagement leads within government agencies and the health sector to ensure feedback is provided from communities and groups on areas of concern
- Regular updates from international partners on their initiatives and emerging disinformation narratives
- Media reporting about disinformation in New Zealand and overseas
- Reporting from agencies and organisations
- Public reporting via CERT NZ

DRAFT Work Plan

	Whole of Society Approach	Build resilience to misinformation & harms	Promote credible information through effective communication	Prevent propagation of false & harmful content
Short-term/ ongoing work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with agencies and organisation to promote all of society approach (E.g. DIA – Keep it Real Online, Stuff: The Whole Truth) • Provide updates to stakeholders on key themes, media updates and tools available to mitigate impacts of COVID-19 misinformation • Support to agencies to respond to COVID-19 misinformation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unite Against COVID-19 website content on misinformation refresh • Potential digital campaign to reach those targeted by disinformation (primarily vaccine) (Led by MoH) • Refinement and evolution of tools available to communities • Awareness and development disinformation issues and comms best practice – series of workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Input to COVID-19 comms and campaign planning where misinformation is likely to circulate (ie COVID-19 Protection Framework planning) • Provide credible information to address key COVID-19 disinformation themes (UAC/MOH) • Equip trusted voices – support agencies to provide tools to stakeholders (school, businesses, health sector, community, spokespeople, leaders) with guidance on handling misinformation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preventative communication to address emerging themes (including pre bunking) • Public education on how to reduce the spread of misinformation • Engagement with platforms and organisations ie Netsafe • Report misinformation on UAC
Medium – term work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Input comms and engagement lessons learnt to development of wider government policy work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with a third party provider to review support, guidance and tools through engagement workshops with communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the voices of experts (academics, scientists) in an engaging way on multiple channels that will reach those targeted by disinformation and conspiracy theories. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops with government comms teams and stakeholders to manage inauthentic activity, misinformation, harmful content and discuss processes.
Ongoing activity to support work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reactive comms response to emerging risks and narratives • Communications approach sets the ongoing strategy • Regularly updated key messages produced (agency specific messaging held by agencies) • Regular cross-agency disinformation meetings to ensure alignment • Regular engagement with community panel, Iwi Chairs forum and other agencies • Support to longer term strategic programme development – social cohesion, digital literacy etc 			

Measures of effectiveness – proposed template

Objectives	Audiences	Trends
Whole of Society Approach	  	
Build resilience to mis-information & harms	  	
Promote credible information through effective communication	 	
Prevent propagation of false & harmful content		

Key: Audiences

-  *New Zealand population*
-  *Targeted Groups*
-  *Community Leaders*