



8 December 2022

[Redacted]

Ref: OIA-2022/23-0240

Dear [Redacted]

**Official Information Act request for materials related to The Disinformation Project and COVID-19 Interagency Disinformation Group**

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) request received on 17 October 2022.

You have requested:

*“Thank you for your response. I would like to make a follow up request for the following:*

*ONE: In response to an OIA requested I submitted to DPMC earlier this year (Ref: OIA-2021/22-1563), I was told:*

*“In the last month, DPMC contracted The Disinformation Project... for two landscape reports and one deep dive report on a topic of choice.”*

*Quote from this response letter:*

<https://fyi.org.nz/request/20099/response/76770/attach/4/4600004%201%20OIA%20202122%201563%20Harold.pdf>

*If this “deep dive report on a topic of choice” has been completed, I would like to request a copy of it.*

*TWO: I would like to request copies of the agenda and minutes (if any) for all meetings of the COVID 19 interagency disinformation and online harms group held since 28 July 2022.*

*THREE: I would like to request a copy of the current COVID 19 interagency disinformation and online harms group action log. For clarity, I mean the action log released to me in your 5 October response, here (pages 1 to 6):*

<https://fyi.org.nz/request/19609/response/78142/attach/5/Release%20Document%205%2010%2022.pdf>

*But the action log as it currently stands, including closed and completed action points.*

*FOUR: On page 3 of the above document a “draft paper on the proposal for government response to misinformation” is referred to (action point 16):*

*“21-October-2021: Circulate to attendees draft paper on the proposal for government response to misinformation”*

*I would like to request a copy of the “draft paper” referred to here.*

*FIVE: On page 7 of the above document a “regular update to the system on false information key themes, media updates and tools available” is referred to, scheduled to be implemented by DPMC COVID-19 Group Comms Team beginning mid-March 2022. If these “regular updates” were produced, I would like to request the dates that they were issued.*

*SIX: On page 8 of the above document, “comms planning on the impacts of Russian disinformation given the Ukraine situation” by DPMC National Security Group is referred to. I would like to request a copy of this Russian disinformation-related “comms planning”.*

As you are aware, I responded to parts two and three of your request on 8 November 2022.

#### **Part One – the “deep dive report on a topic of choice”**

The Disinformation Project has been the subject of ongoing harassment, abuse, and death threats as a result of their work, including reporting prepared for DPMC. I can advise that this particular report also contains free and frank expressions of opinion.

As such, this report is being withheld in full under sections 6(d) and 9(2)(g)(i) of the Act, as the making available of that information would be likely to endanger the safety of any person, and to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions.

#### **Part Four – the “draft paper on the proposal for government response to misinformation”**

I have taken to understand that the “draft paper on the proposal for government response to misinformation” refers to the initial working draft “*Strategic Framework for Strengthening New Zealand’s Resilience to Mis- & Disinformation*”.

I note that the same paper is the subject of an official information complaint you have made to the Ombudsman (ref: OMB 589153). I can advise that this document will be provided to you in due course, subject to information being withheld under the Act.

I reiterate that while a strategic framework was initially proposed, our focus has since shifted to ensuring connection and consistency across different work programmes in addressing misinformation and disinformation. For example, our work narrowed to focus on approaches to address COVID-19 misinformation and disinformation for a period of time.

I also refer you to the document “Communications approach for managing COVID-19 disinformation, online harm, and scams” which was released to you in full on 11 July 2022.

**Part Five – the dates of the “regular update[s] to the system on false information key themes, media updates and tools available”.**

Regular media reports on COVID-19 disinformation were included in the daily COVID-19 media summaries, as media reporting is already in the public domain these reports are being not being separately released.

In addition, COVID-19 Insights reports on themes identified were circulated to key stakeholders and have since been released publicly on the Unite Against COVID-19 (UAC) website, at: [www.covid19.govt.nz/about-our-covid-19-response/proactive-releases/covid-19-reviews-and-audits/](http://www.covid19.govt.nz/about-our-covid-19-response/proactive-releases/covid-19-reviews-and-audits/).

Communications addressing COVID-19 disinformation and online harms are referred to within the workplan which was included in your previous OIA query, an example of this is publicly available on the UAC website, at: [www.covid19.govt.nz/prepare-and-stay-safe/misinformation-scams-and-online-harm/](http://www.covid19.govt.nz/prepare-and-stay-safe/misinformation-scams-and-online-harm/).

**Part Six – a copy of the “comms planning on the impacts of Russian disinformation given the Ukraine situation” document**

I can advise that the “comms planning on the impacts of Russian disinformation given the Ukraine situation” the National Security Group referred to was not a document, but a standalone meeting. The meeting was to discuss if any misinformation and/or disinformation had been seen out of the Ukraine conflict. No agenda, notes, or action was taken at that meeting as it was an informal discussion.

As such, I am refusing Part Six of your request under section 18(e) as the document alleged to contain the requested information does not exist.

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 my decision under section 28(3) of the Act.

This response may be published on the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet’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



Tony Lynch  
**Deputy Chief Executive  
National Security Group**