



15 September 2023



Ref: OIA-2023/24-0153

Dear

Official Information Act request relating to the development of COVID-19 alert levels in early 2020

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) request received on 24 August 2023. You requested:

"The available proactive releases do not answer my request they merely provide background to my request. I suspect I need to reiterate the request and its scope for you more clearly.

I'm specifically asking for:

- any documentation or communications (including and not limited to emails, meeting notes, messages via any type of messenger service or associated recordings of meetings) that relate to the development of what was presented as the 4 alert levels on the 21st of March 2020 to New Zealand by the Prime Minister.

I'm seeking to answer the question: How did the alert system become an idea and how was it developed?

This might support you finding this information - the below NZ Herald link quotes the then Prime Minister on the 18th of March deciding on an alert system (based on those proactively released documents) and "tasked officials" to create it:

https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/covid-19-coronavirus-a-calculated-risk-jacinda-ardern-and-winston-peters-tell-of-the-battle-inside-the-covid-bunker/5UR45U4CYF33GFDPL3HSKC2SY4/?c_id=1&objectid=12342847

On the 20th of March they were developed as a 1 pager and feedback was requested on them from the Covid Technical Advisory group.

A further OIA on the DPMC website sees that the Alert Levels were then 'designed' or further 'refined' on the morning of Saturday the 21st of March that the then Prime Minister presented later that same day:

<https://www.dPMC.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2022-03/dPMC-roia-oia-2020-21-0688-material-re-clemengerbbod-omd.pdf>

Based on the above, I'm happy to reduce the initial date part of my request to just the 10th of March to the 21st of March to support searching for how this became an idea and how it was developed into what we understood the 4 alert levels to be.

I hope this information helps fulfil my request."

As advised in our letter of 16 August 2023, your request for any documentation or communications relating to the development of alert levels and mitigation strategies would necessitate a search across a large range of sources. I note your offer to refine your initial request to a reduced timeframe of 10 - 21 March 2020, however I remain unsatisfied that this reduction in scope would allow for collation of the material without unduly impacting efficient public administration.

It is important to note that a portion of the information you seek relates to, or was produced by, a range of Ministers and officials, many whom do not hold the positions they did at the time in question. As such, the information is not held centrally and would require a wide-ranging search across a number of systems, databases and sources.

As such I am reconfirming my original decision to refuse your request in line with section 18(f) of the Act, as to provide the requested information would require substantial collation and research.

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

Further information

As previously advised, some information relating to your request is already publicly available online. Specifically, I would refer you to the following pages and documents:

- www.covid19.govt.nz/assets/Proactive-Releases/proactive-release/COVID-19-Moving-to-Alert-Level-3-and-Level-4.pdf
- <https://covid19.govt.nz/assets/Proactive-Releases/proactive-release/COVID-19-Response-Urgent-Management-Measures-Legislation-Bill -Approval-for-Introduction.pdf>
- <https://covid19.govt.nz/about-our-covid-19-response/history-of-the-covid-19-alert-system/#alert-levels>
- <https://covid19.govt.nz/about-our-covid-19-response/proactive-releases/alert-levels-and-restrictions/>

This response will 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



Clare Ward
Executive Director
Strategy, Governance and Engagement