



Te Pā Whakamarumarū
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Intelligence Service

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8 June 2023

§ 9(2)(a)

Tēnā koe § 9(2)(a)

Official information request

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) requests of 11 May 2023 to the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (NZSIS). Your first request asked:

"Which states the NZSIS has recorded as responsible for spreading disinformation, that then gets circulated in New Zealand, that poses a threat to national security.

And the number of times these security threats have occurred in the past year."

Your second request asked:

"Has the NZSIS recorded any cases of online interference by the botnet, Fronton, or its web-based dashboard SANA, that could mobilise violence or impact state security?

If so, how many times, where and what was the interference?"

Following clarification with you on 11 May 2023, your second request was amended to:

"1. Has the NZSIS recorded any information being distributed online by the botnet, Fronton, or its web-based dashboard SANA, that could mobilise violence or impact state security?

2. Has the NZSIS recorded any security breaches by the botnet, Fronton, or its web-based dashboard SANA, that could mobilise violence or impact state security?"

It may be helpful if I begin by outlining our role. The NZSIS is New Zealand's domestic security agency and lead organisation for human intelligence (HUMINT). Unlike more cyber-oriented agencies and organisations, our work tends to take a people-oriented lens, collecting and analysing intelligence in line with the Government's National Security Intelligence Priorities (NSIPs). Our scope within the NSIPs is typically on protecting New Zealand from terrorism, violent extremism, espionage and foreign interference. Further information about our role and focus can be found online at: <https://www.nzsis.govt.nz/>, along with some information about how we collect information relevant to our mandate.

As implied in your requests, our concern in relation to disinformation is only when there is a national security nexus, for example, a violent extremism component, or the disinformation is state-sponsored. The Intelligence and Security Act 2017 is clear on the role of the security and intelligence agencies with respect to freedom of expression, including views influenced

by mis- and disinformation. The NZSIS does not conduct mass surveillance of the internet, and has no role in monitoring ordinary political discussion.

State-backed disinformation does not need to be targeted specifically at the New Zealand context to have an effect; New Zealanders will still be able to come across it. For example, Russia's international disinformation campaigns relating to the Russian invasion of Ukraine have not targeted New Zealand specifically, but are understood to have reached some New Zealanders. If you are not already aware of the wider work underway to strengthen New Zealand's resilience to disinformation, you may find the following to be of interest: <https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/national-security/strengthening-resilience-disinformation>.

With regard to the specific information you asked for in your first request, I must withhold these details under section 6(a) of the OIA, as the making available of the information would be likely to prejudice the security or defence of New Zealand or the international relations of the Government of New Zealand.

Regarding to your second request relating to the botnet Fronton, I note your request falls more within the domain of cyber-oriented agencies and organisations than with the NZSIS. While the NZSIS aims to be as open as possible about our work, we are sometimes in a position where we can neither confirm nor deny the existence or non-existence of information. Due to the sensitive nature of what we do, however, revealing details about information we do or do not hold can have security implications. We therefore make decision on requests such as yours on a case-by-case basis, taking into account all relevant security considerations.

With regard to any information held by the NZSIS in scope of your second request, I can neither confirm nor deny the existence or non-existence of any relevant information. This reply is given within the terms of section 10 of the OIA, as disclosing the existence or non-existence of the information requested is likely to prejudice the interests protected by section 6(a) of the OIA, namely the security or defence of New Zealand.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602. If you wish to discuss this decision with us, please feel free to contact uia.privacy@nzsis.govt.nz.

Please note that the NZSIS proactively publishes OIA responses in accordance with the expectations of Te Kawa Mataaho/the Public Service Commission. We intend to publish this letter (with your personal information removed) on the NZSIS website. Publication of such responses is done on a quarterly basis.

Ngā mihi



Andrew Hampton

Te Tumu Whakarae mō Te Pā Whakamarumarū
Director-General of Security