

21 August 2023

195 Lambton Quay
Private Bag 18–901
Wellington 6160
New Zealand

Requesters name redacted for proactive release

T +64 4 439 8000
F +64 4 472 9596

OIA 28729

Tēnā koe Requesters name redacted for proactive release

I refer to your email of 7 July 2023 in which you request the following under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA):

- 1. RNZ requests full details of why embassy staff and other New Zealanders, such as contractors, based in Moscow were not evacuated in late June prior to the Wagner group beginning its march on Moscow.*
- 2. Pls advise if anyone or any group was evacuated or moved out due to this development.*

The following requests relate to the fact it appears there was not any general evac of the embassy

RNZ requests release in full and in fully searchable and copyable format:

- 3. Copy/ies of any and all reports, notes, records or anything else in writing that involve MFAT and embassy staff, about the fact there was no evacuation*
- 4. Copy/ies of any and all communications and correspondence or similar between the NZ ambassador and/or their proxy/ies, and senior officials in NZ about:
 - a. Whether to evacuate anyone – i.e. prior to the Wagner march*
 - b. The fact there was not an evacuation**
- 5. Full details of any and all concerns identified by the NZ ambassador and/or their proxy/ies or any senior officials about the protocols/triggers that were in place around evacuation*
- 6. If NZ was waiting to see if other countries' embassies, such as UK or Canada, evacuated, pls detail why that was a trigger point*
- 7. Full details of any and all changes made to those protocols/triggers - regards the security of sharing such info, pls provide at least a summary given the public interest of this*
- 8. Any and all ministerial briefings about the above*

If any of the above has previously been publicly released, pls provide links to that forthwith. If any of the above has previously been released under the OIA, pls release it now to RNZ as per the OIA regs and SOP.

We have numbered your request for administrative convenience.

On 7 August 2023, the timeframes for responding to your request were extended by an additional 20 working days due to the consultations necessary to make a decision on your request. (section 15A(1)(b) of the OIA refers).

Regarding the first part of your request for *"full details of why embassy staff and other New Zealanders, such as contractors, based in Moscow were not evacuated in late June prior to the Wagner group beginning its march on Moscow."* The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (the Ministry) prepares contingency plans for its posts to refer to should an event unfold that poses a risk to Ministry staff and operations. We are unable to share the specifics of these plans, as disclosing information within them could endanger our staff should a situation eventuate. Therefore, we are withholding this information under section 6(d) of the OIA. Generally, evacuation of staff and other New Zealanders, such as contractors, is not our process unless there is specific knowledge of sufficient risk to justify this step. In the case of the Wagner group beginning its march on Moscow on 24 June 2023, we did not have information that suggested this was necessary.

Regarding the second part of your request which asks *"if anyone or any group was evacuated or moved out due to this development."* No group was evacuated or moved out after the Wagner group began its march on Moscow.

Information relating to parts three and four of your request are set out in a document schedule attached as **Appendix A**.

Regarding the fifth part of your request for *"Full details of any and all concerns identified by the NZ ambassador and/or their proxy/ies or any senior officials about the protocols/triggers that were in place around evacuation."* The Ministry holds no information in scope of this part of your request. This question is therefore refused under section 18(e) of the OIA, as the information requested does not exist.

Regarding the sixth part of your request for *"If NZ was waiting to see if other countries' embassies, such as UK or Canada, evacuated, pls detail why that was a trigger point."* The Ministry generally learns from and shares information with our counterparts. Each country has a different risk tolerance and profiles, so although the movements of other embassies is considered, their evacuation is not necessarily a trigger for New Zealand to do the same.

Regarding the seventh part of your request for *"Full details of any and all changes made to those protocols/triggers - regards the security of sharing such info, pls provide at least a summary given the public interest of this."* To inform our response to an event, the Ministry considers a range of triggers across different criteria. Identified triggers reflect the fact that the health, safety and wellbeing of our staff is a priority. For security reasons, we are unable to disclose specific triggers or changes made to them. Disclosure of this information would risk endangering Ministry staff in the event they are relied upon. Therefore, we are withholding this information under section 6(d) of the OIA.

Following the Wagner event, the Ministry revisited the triggers that were in place to consider whether any changes should be made. While we cannot disclose their specific details, triggers fall into the following categories:

- Political Climate;
- Health, Goods and Services (including access to food, medicines and banking);
- Critical Infrastructure (including access to power, water, communications and transport);
- Security Climate (including the physical security environment).

Regarding the eighth part of your request for "*Any and all ministerial briefings about the above.*" The Ministry holds no information in scope of this part of your request. This question is therefore refused under section 18(e) of the OIA, as the information requested does not exist.

The remaining information relevant to your request can be found in Appendices A, B and C, (attached). We have withheld some information under the following sections of the OIA:

- 6(a): to avoid prejudicing the security or defence of New Zealand or the international relations of the New Zealand Government;
- 6(b)(i): to protect the passing of information from another government on a confidential basis;
- 6(d): to avoid endangering the safety of any person;
- 9(2)(a): to protect individuals' privacy;
- 9(2)(g)(ii): to protect officers and employees from improper pressure or harassment; and
- 9(2)(k): to prevent the disclosure or use of official information for improper gain or improper advantage.

We have withheld some documents in full under the following sections of the OIA:

- 6(a): to avoid prejudicing the security or defence of New Zealand or the international relations of the New Zealand Government;
- 6(b)(i): to protect the passing of information from another government on a confidential basis;
- 9(2)(a): to protect individuals' privacy;
- 9(2)(g)(i): to protect the free and frank expression of opinions by departments;
- 9(2)(g)(ii): to protect officers and employees from improper pressure or harassment; and
- 9(2)(k): to prevent the disclosure or use of official information for improper gain or improper advantage.

Where the information has been withheld under section 9 of the OIA, we have identified no public interest in releasing the information that would override the reasons for withholding it.

Please note that we may publish this letter (with your personal details redacted) and enclosed documents on the Ministry's website.

If you have any questions about this decision, you can contact us by email at: DM-ESD@mfat.govt.nz.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision by contacting www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā



Sarah Corbett
for Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Appendix A – Document Schedule

Document Schedule				
#	Date	Document Type	Title	Applicable OIA grounds
1	24 June 2023	Internal communication	Russia: today's events	<p>Withheld in full under the following OIA grounds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 6(a); - 6(b)(i); - 9(2)(a); - 9(2)(g)(i); - 9(2)(g)(ii); and - 9(2)(k) <p>A summary is provided in Appendix B (section 16(1)(e) of the OIA refers)</p>
2	25 June 2023	Internal communication	Title withheld under 6(a)	<p>Withheld in full under the following OIA grounds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 6(a); - 6(b)(i); - 9(2)(g)(ii); and - 9(2)(k) <p>A summary is provided in Appendix B (section 16(1)(e) of the OIA refers)</p>
3	24 June 2023	Internal communication	Microsoft Teams Chat	<p>Released in part, located page 1 of collated documents. Some information is withheld under the following OIA grounds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 9(2)(a); - 9(2)(g)(ii); - 6(a); - 6(b)(i)
4	25 June 2023	Internal communication	Russia: today's events	<p>Released in part, located page 2 of collated documents. Some information is withheld under the following OIA grounds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 9(2)(g)(ii); - 6(a); - 6(b)(i); - 6(d)
5	30 June 2023	Formal Message	FORMAL MESSAGE: WEEKLY ISSUES UPDATE - WEEK ENDING 30 JUNE	<p>Extract released in part, located page 3 of the collated documents.</p> <p>Some information is withheld under the following OIA grounds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 9(2)(k); - 6(a); - 6(b)(i);

Appendix B – Summary of documents 1-2

Document 1:

Email chain titled:

"Russia:today's events" dated Saturday 24 June 2023 from 6:04pm to 11:13pm NZT.

Summary of contents:

- Internal communication between the following Ministry divisions: Security and Organisational Resilience Division (SORD), Europe (EUR), Moscow (MOS) and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).
- This document is communication with Russia based officials regarding their safety within Moscow regarding the evolving situation.

Document 2:

Email chain titled:

The title is withheld under 6(a) – dated Sunday 25 June 2023 at 12:57am NZT.

Summary of contents:

- Internal communication between the following Ministry divisions: SORD, EUR, MOS and SLT.
- This document is communication with Russia based officials regarding other countries approach.

Microsoft Teams Chat

[24/06 10:27 pm] s9(2)(g)(ii)

thanks mate - just as an FYI, we are s6(b)(i) it
might not be but we should keep a watch on whether that is sensible

[24/06 10:28 pm] s9(2)(g)(ii)

Yes you are right, s9(2)(a)

[24/06 10:28 pm] s9(2)(g)(ii)

s9(2)(a)

[24/06 10:30 pm] s9(2)(g)(ii)

s9(2)(g)(ii)

s9(2)(a)

s6(a)

[24/06 10:33 pm] s9(2)(g)(ii)

s6(a)

[24/06 10:35 pm] s9(2)(g)(ii)

s6(a)

[24/06 10:35 pm] s9(2)(g)(ii)

I'll chat it through if I can with s9(2)(g)(ii) first thing

From: s9(2)(g)(ii)
To: s9(2)(g)(ii)
Cc: s9(2)(g)(ii) [TAYLOR, Rob \(DCE PO\)](#); [KING, Ben \(DCE\)](#); s9(2)(g)(ii)
[SEED, Chris \(CEO\)](#); [MACPHERSON, Iana \(DS EMA\)](#); s9(2)(g)(ii)
Subject: RE: Russia: todays events
Date: Sunday, 25 June 2023 6:59:23 am

[RESTRICTED]

Hi s9(2)(g)(ii)

Cognisant that s6(a), s6(d) and the team are well
on top of that approach, but s6(a), s6(d)

Consequently, whilst the plan can remain fundamentally extant s6(b)(i), s6(a), s6(d)
s6(a), s6(d)

I know s9(2)(g)(ii) has a close eye on the ball and will keep things updated from that perspective, but
can I suggest that some consideration goes into s6(d), s6(a)
and I can certainly help devise a 'plan B' extension to the current approach,
if you need/wish me to do so.

In addition to that, and to what has already been outlined in this chain, if the s6(d), s6(b)(i)

I appreciate that there will be a lot on at the moment, and plenty of communication rolling in
from all directions, so I'll fall back into the central SORD comms rather than add to that burden.
However, if you do wish for any planning support or assistance in revising/refreshing/or
consolidating what is already in place, then please don't hesitate to shout out.

I am in PRE at the moment, but will look to prioritise any engagement as required, and if it is just
a catch up on zoom, to cover off or sanity check any aspect, then I am only too happy for that to
occur. I am in a similar time-zone, but will fit to any time that suits your needs.

Best to the team, take care, and talk soon.

Nga Mihi

s9(2)(g)(ii)

Extract from the 30 June 2023 Weekly Report

Russia: MFAT response planning

1. As events in Russia quickly unfolded on Saturday morning NZT, Ministry processes were triggered. The Embassy in Moscow initiated its contingency planning and Europe Division remained in close contact with the Embassy as the situation evolved. Following a lessons learned exercise this week, the Ministry is updating emergency plans for the Embassy in Moscow and related coordination processes, with a focus on staff and dependent well-being should the domestic security situation in Russia further deteriorate. The Ministry and relevant agencies are proactively monitoring the situation. ^{s6(a), s9(2)(k)}

s6(b)(l)

Currently 43 New

Zealanders are registered as being in Russia (this includes Embassy staff and dependents). The Ministry has not been contacted by any New Zealander seeking advice or help to leave Russia.

Released under the Official Information Act 1982