

4 October 2023

Personal details removed for proactive release

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Tēnā koe Personal details removed for proactive release

I refer to your email of 31 August 2023 in which you requested the following under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA):

I just reviewed all the documents and there's just one piece that's missing for my analysis. There was a restructure of the 'Safehand Diplomatic Courier Function' in late 2020. I have received the decision document for this process, dated 1st March 2021. I can't find the consultation document for this restructure in previous releases. The consultation began on the 24th November 2020. Could you please send through this consultation document? Then my data set is complete.


On 28 September 2023, the timeframes for responding to your request were extended by an additional 20 working days because responding to your request necessitated the review of a large quantity of information, (section 15A(1)(a) of the OIA refers).

The information relevant to your request is attached. We have withheld some information under section 6(a) of the OIA, to avoid prejudicing the security or defence of New Zealand or the international relations of the New Zealand Government.

Please note that it is our policy to proactively release our responses to official information requests where possible. Therefore, our response to your request (with your personal information removed) may be published on the Ministry website: www.mfat.govt.nz/en/about-us/contact-us/official-information-act-responses/

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

Diplomatic Courier Safehand Function

Consultation Document

24 November 2020

Released under the Official Information Act

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Foreword from the Deputy Chief Executive, People and Operations

Kia ora koutou katoa

As Deputy Chief Executive People and Operations, I am the person who is ultimately accountable for the People and Operations Group delivering results. In the last 8-9 months, I have observed the commitment our teams demonstrate every day, as well as the energy and passion we all bring for our commitments to the Ministry's purpose and strategic direction. COVID has tested all of us and we have shined. However, it wasn't always easy. I want to make life simpler for you, for me, and for the wider Ministry.

When P&O was established, we committed to:

- Simplification – making it easy for our customers and continuously improve the way we work
- Enablement – supporting the Ministry to deliver on its strategic goals
- Leadership – empowering people within our group

This hasn't changed. My focus is still on enhancing the way we work together, setting new standards and working smarter to achieve the Ministry's vision and strategy. We need to openly challenge ourselves to ask what impact we are having and how we stay relevant in an increasingly challenging environment.

Given the current global situation and the impact on the Ministry's inability to deliver the International Diplomatic Safe Hand Courier Service the way it used to, it is timely to consider the way ahead. This classified document details a proposal for the realignment of the 'Safehand' Diplomatic Courier function within People & Operations Group.

I fully appreciate that it can be unsettling and concerning for people when there is change to structure and team activities, regardless of whether you are directly or indirectly affected. There is a process and timetable that this consultation is following which gives you an opportunity to provide feedback before the finalisation of any proposed changes. I look forward to hearing your thoughts about this proposal. Details on how to provide feedback are included in this document.

I know these decisions and discussions can be unsettling. Please look after yourself and if you have any questions or require some additional support to help you through the proposed changes, please let us know. Our employee assistance provider can be contacted on 0800 327 669 at any time.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions or if you would like to discuss any aspect of this proposal. If you require any specific support please get in touch with me or your manager. We are here to answer any questions you might have.

Thank you for your continued contribution and commitment to MFAT and to our team.

Audrey Sonerson

Deputy Chief Executive, People and Operations

Introduction

The international Diplomatic Safe Hand Courier Service is administered on behalf of the New Zealand Government by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) under Articles 27 and 40 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic relations (1961), for the secure transportation of official material classified CONFIDENTIAL and above. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, our international diplomatic courier network facilitated the secure, routine delivery of classified consignments worldwide. This was the preferred means of transporting all classified information outside of New Zealand.

Since late March 2020, New Zealand's border has been closed to non-citizens / permanent residents, isolation/quarantine regulations have been implemented at the border and a *do not travel* advisory has been in place for all New Zealanders due to the outbreak of COVID-19, associated health risks and travel restrictions.

Strict travel restrictions have been imposed around the world and many air routes are no longer commercially viable, which has meant that options for New Zealanders offshore to return home have been reduced significantly.

The complexity and rapidly changing nature of the global situation has had a significant impact on the ability of the two Diplomatic Safehand Couriers to undertake their roles.

Because the two incumbents have been unable to travel offshore, they have been engaged as temporary additional resources in a number of areas within the People and Operations Group over the last eight months.

Given the current global situation and the impact on the diplomatic couriers' ability to successfully complete their duties, it is timely to consider the way ahead. It is unlikely that these roles will be able to undertake their substantive function offshore in the near future.

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The Case for Change

s6(a)

The Ministry's Security Division is responsible for Safehand policy, training and tactical operations, s6(a)

Specific Security Division responsibilities include Safehand training, issuing Aviation Security cards, liaising with partners on complex Safehand issues, answering queries on transactional matters, carrying Safehand items to post(s) when travelling, s6(a)

Traditionally, the Diplomatic Courier roles, which sit within the Facilities and Business Services Division in the People & Operations Group, are responsible for the secure transportation of official material classified CONFIDENTIAL and above to and from our partners offshore. These roles facilitate this process by ensuring the processing, carriage, protection and security of classified mail and other items between the Ministry's Head Office in Wellington and its overseas posts. s6(a)

Since late March 2020, the outbreak of COVID-19 and the resulting border closures, quarantine regulations, *do not travel* advisories and lack of viable air routes have had a significant impact on the ability of the two Diplomatic Couriers to undertake their roles.

The Ministry has had to adapt its approach to Safehand as the two incumbents have been unable to travel offshore. The Security Division have been training cleared staff who are returning to post or commencing relief assignments or new postings offshore, to undertake the Safehand function for small consignments. s6(a)

As the Diplomatic Couriers are unable to undertake their substantive roles, they have been redeployed in other parts of the People and Operations Group since late March 2020.

While the future model of New Zealand's Safehand responsibilities is still unclear, it is anticipated that the future state will differ from pre-COVID arrangements. s6(a)

s6(a)

Proposed Change

These changes to the way the Ministry administers the International Diplomatic Safe Hand Courier Service on behalf of the New Zealand Government in a COVID-19 environment, and the likely ongoing nature of the COVID-19 pandemic are the drivers for change.

The Ministry is therefore proposing to shift the full range of responsibilities for the Safehand function back into the Security Division, which would streamline the delivery and management model in the complex and rapidly changing global context. This would also mean formalising the way the Ministry has operated the Safehand function in the COVID environment.

In the event that these recommended changes proceed, it will result in the disestablishment of the two Diplomatic Courier roles within the Facilities and Business Services Division.

Feedback and Decision Timings

You are invited to submit written feedback by email. There is a feedback form on page 8 that you may like to use to help structure your response.

Please email your feedback to pofeedback@mfat.govt.nz by 5pm on Tuesday, 8 December 2020.

Your feedback is valued and appreciated. Guidance on how to provide feedback is outlined in the feedback form.

If you are a union member, you may want to discuss this proposal with your union representative. Your union representative can assist you with your submission, or make a submission on your behalf.

Your feedback will be considered over the period from 9 December to 14 December 2020 and we expect that a decision on the proposal will be possible at that time and that we should be able to communicate that decision to you by or before 15 December 2020. This is, however, dependent on the nature of the feedback and decisions taken as a result of this. If significant changes are made to the proposal, it may be necessary to embark on further engagement on a further proposal.

If you have any questions, please ask your manager or email pofeedback@mfat.govt.nz.

The timeframes for feedback and decisions are as follows:

Milestone	Start
Change proposal announced	24 November 2020
Consultation Period	24 November - 8 December 2020
Collation & consideration of Feedback	9 December – 14 December 2020
Decisions advised	15 December 2020

Change Support

If you find any aspects of the proposal unsettling, you are encouraged to access the personal support you need. Some of the mechanisms available are:

- your line manager,
- EAP on 0800 327 669, and
- Union representatives

You are encouraged to take the opportunity to utilise any of the above listed options, or your own support network, to ensure you are receiving the support you may require.

Transition and Implementation Process

In the event that the recommended changes to the Safehand function proceed, those staff who are affected would be managed in accordance with the provisions of their employment agreements.

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Enclosure: Feedback Submission Form

You may like to use this template to provide feedback. When giving feedback you can cover any issues you see with the proposal, alternative options, the aspects of the proposal you agree with and any that require further consideration. Please explain your rationale and provide any relevant supporting information.

Please email your submission to pofeedback@mfat.govt.nz by 5pm 8 December 2020.

In considering this proposal, you are encouraged to seek independent advice and support.

Name	
Individual or Group Submission <i>(if group please list all names)</i>	Individual / Group <i>(please delete one)</i>
Proposal: Diplomatic Courier Function	
<p>What aspects of the proposal do you agree with?</p> <p>What aspects do you disagree with and why?</p> <p>Do you have any recommendations that would enhance the proposal?</p>	
Other feedback	
<p>Is there any other feedback you think is important for us to know?</p>	