

12 June 2025

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

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

Personal details removed for proactive release

OIA 30165

Thank you for your email of 16 May 2025, transferred from the Office of the Prime Minister to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (the Ministry) on 27 May 2025, in which you request the following under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA):

"Under the Official Information Act, and with particular reference to the New Zealand Nuclear-Free Zone Disarmament and Arms Control Act 1987, please supply me with the follow information;

- 1. any and all USA government information you relied upon in making your decision as NZ Prime Minister to grant entry to the American naval ship which entered New Zealand's Nuclear Free Zone and docked in Wellington today? [16 May 2025]*
- 2. What information has been released to advise the NZ public of the nuclear capacity, if any, of this ship's entry into our Nuclear Free Zone?*
- 3. If you did not request verification of the US Navy vessel's nuclear weapon capabilities before granting entry to the Nuclear Free Zone, please advise why you did not.*

I would appreciate your prompt response to this request, especially as there is little information or detail in the public domain about this naval visit."

Within the scope of part 1 of your request is a document titled *"Diplomatic Note from the Embassy of the United States of America in New Zealand"*, dated 16 April 2025. Some information is withheld 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; and
- 6(b)(i): to protect the passing of information from another government on a confidential basis.

Part 2 of your request is refused under section 18(e) of the OIA, as no advice was made public on the nuclear capability of the Blue Ridge.

In response to part 3 of your request, there is no requirement for officials to request "verification of the US Navy vessel's nuclear weapon capabilities before granting entry to

the Nuclear Free Zone". Officials make an independent assessment of the vessel's capabilities using a range of information sources.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SC' or similar, written in a cursive style.

Sarah Corbett
for Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade



NO: 45-25

The Embassy of the United States of America presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and, in addition to TPN 39-25 dated March 19, 2025, has the honor to request the United States Ship, *USS Blue Ridge*, designation LCC 19, port visit to New Zealand.

PORT:	ARRIVE:	DEPART:
Wellington, New Zealand	17 May 2025	21 May 2025

Further request a plus/minus 72-hour window to facilitate weather and/or mechanical delays.

The *USS Blue Ridge* ^{s6(a) s6(b)(i)} The *USS Blue Ridge* is an Amphibious Command ship of the United States Navy and has a length of 190M, beam of 32M, draft of 28.9M, and displacement of 18,874 tons.

The ship's Commanding Officer is Captain Nicholas DeLeo, ^{s6(a), s6(b)(i)}

DIPLOMATIC NOTE

The Embassy of the United States of America avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade the assurances of its highest consideration.

Enclosures:

- (1) – Vessel Diplomatic clearance request
- (2) – USS Blue Ridge Vessel Fact Sheet

s6(a)

Embassy of the United States of America,

Wellington, April 16, 2025.

Released under the
Official Information Act

DIPLOMATIC CLEARANCE FOR VESSELS

Required Information

Requesting Country	Point of Contact Name	Point of Contact Email	Point of Contact Phone
USA	s6(a)	s6(a)	s6(a)
Purpose of Visit			
Routine visit			

Vessel			
Type	Name	Hull Number	Call Sign
U.S. Navy Amphibious Command Ship	Blue Ridge	19	LCC 19 (Warship 19)

Dimensions			
Length	Breadth (extreme)	Draught	Displacement
190 Meters	32 Meters	28.9 Meters	18,874 Tons (19,176.89 metric tons)

s6(a), s6(b)(i)

DIPLOMATIC CLEARANCE FOR VESSELS

Required Information

s6(a), s6(b)(i)

Embarked aircraft or Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs)			Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Type	Registration		Call Sign	
N/A – No aircraft onboard	N/A		N/A	

Are flying operations planned during port visit?		Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Details			
s6(a)			

Additional Information	
Additional Information	

Required information guidance

Requesting Country – Please indicate the country applying for clearance

Point of Contact – Please add the name, email address and phone number of the draftee or best contact to discuss any further information regarding the flight.

Purpose – Please indicate the purpose of flight, i.e. VIP transport, cargo transport etc. If the aircraft is supporting or participating in an exercise or operation please indicate the name of the exercise or operation.

Vessel– Please provide the type of vessel, name, hull number and call sign the vessel will be using within New Zealand waters.

To New Zealand – These are the details for the sail to New Zealand. Please indicate the last port prior to arrival in New Zealand with the estimated time and date of departure and the point of entry into New Zealand waters with the estimated time and date of entry. Times and dates should be in UTC (Coordinated Universal Time).

Itinerary– Please detail all landing ports within New Zealand with the estimated time and date of arrival and departure from these ports. Times and dates should be in UTC.

From New Zealand - These are the details for the sail from New Zealand. Please indicate the point of exit from New Zealand waters with the estimated time and date of exit and the first port after departure for New Zealand with the estimated time and date of entry. Times and dates should be in UTC.

Captain – Please indicate captain's title (or rank), first and last name.

DIPLOMATIC CLEARANCE FOR VESSELS

Required Information

Crew and Passengers – Please provide crew numbers (less the captain/s named above) and passenger numbers (less the VIP/s named below).

VIP – Please provide any VIP details. Where the VIP is only on board for part of the mission, the legs in which they will be travelling should be specified in the additional information section of the form.

Frequencies requested – To enable frequency clearance approval or denial advice to be provided, individual radio and radar frequencies intended to be used during the proposed visit must be advised.

Clearance diving – Please advise date and details if any hull sweeps or other diving operations are planned while vessel is berthed in port

Embarked aircraft or Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) – Please advise of any aircraft or UAVs embarked on the vessel and advise date and details of any flying operations planned.

Additional Information – This section has been provided for any additional information on the voyage, i.e. cargo information which will assist ground support staff prepare for vessel arrival.

Note: Any electronic or photo sensory equipment which will be on board and in use should be detailed in this section.



Amphibious Command Ships - LCC

Last updated: 27 Nov 2018

Amphibious Command ships provide command and control for fleet commanders. The two Blue Ridge-class LCCs are the only ships designed from the keel up for an amphibious/command ship role. After entering service, both ships largely have served as fleet flagships.



Description

Amphibious Command ships provide command and control for fleet commanders. The two Blue Ridge-class LCCs are the only ships designed from the keel up for an amphibious/command ship role. After entering service, both ships largely have served as fleet flagships.

Blue Ridge became the Seventh Fleet flagship in 1979 and is forward deployed to Yokosuka, Japan.

Mount Whitney serves as Sixth Fleet flagship, after having operated since 1981 as Second Fleet flagship. Mount Whitney underwent an MSC conversion in fiscal 2005 and operates with a hybrid crew of Civilian Mariners (CIVMARs) and active Navy personnel. The ship participates in a number of fleet and multinational exercises and operations in the European theater. It remains a commissioned ship with an active-duty Navy commanding officer.

Background

Commissioned in 1971, these are the only ships to be designed initially for an amphibious command ship role. Earlier amphibious command ships lacked sufficient speed to keep up with a 20-knot amphibious force.

USS Blue Ridge and USS Mount Whitney's service lives were extended in 2011 by the chief of Naval Operations to 2039. An Extended Service Life Program (ESLP) is being executed jointly by Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA) and Military Sealift Command. ESLP is focused on ensuring the platforms can support the full range of mission requirements for an embarked numbered fleet commander. The

program provides for the repair and overhaul of systems/equipment, replacement of obsolete equipment and modernization of selected systems, spaces and equipment to be included in an extended service life program. Major areas of improvement will be shipboard electrical generation and distribution, HVAC upgrades, operational space optimization, habitability and safety modifications, and corrosion control.

General Characteristics Ships:

General Characteristics, Blue Ridge Class Builder: Philadelphia Naval Shipyard (LCC 19)

Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Co. (LCC 20).

Propulsion: One geared turbine, two boilers, one shaft, 22,000 horsepower

Length: 634 feet (190 meters)

Beam: 108 feet (32 meters)

Displacement: 18,874 tons (19,176.89 metric tons) full load

Speed: 23 knots (26.5 miles, 42.4 km, per hour)

Crew: 34 officers, 564 enlisted

Armament: 2 Phalanx CIWS, 2 25mm Mk38 guns

Aircraft: None (helicopter landing area only)

Ships:

[USS Blue Ridge \(LCC 19\)](#), Yokosuka, Japan

[USS Mount Whitney \(LCC 20\)](#), Gaeta, Italy

Point of Contact

Naval Sea Systems Command

Office of Corporate Communication (SEA 00D)

Washington, D.C. 20376