

1 July 2026

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OIA 30984

Thank you for your email of 3 June 2026 in which you request the following under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA):

"Under the Official Information Act, please supply the following briefings produced during April 2026:

- A brief for travel entitled, "Minister of Foreign Affairs Visit to Washington DC 6-8 April 2026", dated 2 April 2026.*
- A brief for meeting entitled, "Minister Peters Meeting Brief: President Whipps Jr Working Lunch", dated 10 April 2026.*
- A submission entitled, "Update on Middle East Crisis Response – Pacific", dated 17 April 2026.*
- An informal note entitled, "Informal Note — US offer to send fuel to the Pacific", dated 20 April 2026.*
- A submission entitled, "Pacific Islands Forum: Invoking the Biketawa Declaration in response to the Middle East fuel crisis", dated 28 April 2026.*
- A submission entitled, "Cook Islands and New Zealand relationship normalisation", dated 29 April 2026."*

Please see the following table for a list of documents in scope of your request:

#	Title	Date	Decision
1.	Minister of Foreign Affairs Visit to Washington DC 6-8 April 2026	2 April 2026	Some information withheld under section 6(a)
2.	Minister Peters Meeting Brief: President Whipps Jr Working Lunch	10 April 2026	Some information withheld under sections 6(a) and 9(2)(g)(ii)
3.	Update on Middle East Crisis Response – Pacific	17 April 2026	This part of your request is refused under section 18(d) of the OIA, as the information will soon be publicly available.
4.	Informal Note — US offer to send fuel to the Pacific	17 April 2026	Some information withheld under section 6(a)

#	Title	Date	Decision
5.	Pacific Islands Forum: Invoking the Biketawa Declaration in response to the Middle East fuel crisis	20 April 2026	Some information withheld under sections 6(a), 6(b)(ii), 9(2)(a)
6.	Cook Islands and New Zealand relationship normalisation	29 April 2026	Some information withheld under sections 6(a), 7(b)(i), 7(b)(ii), 9(2)(a)

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;
- 6(b)(ii): to protect the passing of information from an international organisation on a confidential basis;
- 7(b)(i)/7(b)(ii): to avoid prejudicing relations between any of the Governments of New Zealand; and the self-governing State of the Cook Islands;
- 9(2)(a): to protect individuals' privacy; and
- 9(2)(g)(ii): to protect officers and employees from improper pressure or harassment.

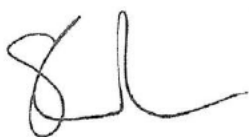
Where the information has been withheld under section 9 of the OIA, no public interest in releasing the information has been identified that would override the reasons for withholding it.

Your request for the document titled, *Update on Middle East Crisis Response – Pacific*, is refused under section 18(d) of the OIA, as the information will soon be publicly available on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (the Ministry) website as part of the publication of another OIA response (OIA 30885 refers): www.mfat.govt.nz/en/about-us/contact-us/official-information-act-responses

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



NEW ZEALAND
FOREIGN AFFAIRS & TRADE
Manatū Aorere

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Visit to Washington DC

6-8 April 2026



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Overview and Objectives

Secretary Rubio has invited you to Washington DC. This is the first time in recent memory that a proactive invitation from the Secretary of State has been advanced to a New Zealand Foreign Minister to visit Washington DC. The meeting gives New Zealand access to the highest accessible level to influence the US on issues of strong interest to New Zealand. You will also meet Deputy Secretary of State Landau, Stephen Vaughn, a well-placed commentator on the US whom you met in 2024, and possibly call on Senate and House representatives, though the Easter recess means many are out of town.

s6(a)

VISIT OBJECTIVES

- ^{s6(a)}
- **Iran** – convey the seriousness of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz for New Zealand's economy ^{s6(a)}
- **Indo-Pacific** – ^{s6(a)}
- **Pacific** – ^{s6(a)}

- **Trade** – advocate for the lowest possible tariff rate on New Zealand, once current US trade investigations conclude.

s6(a) - 1 page withheld

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s6(a)

Failure
to reopen the Strait of Hormuz profoundly impacts energy supply to New Zealand and Pacific economies, with growth and inflation consequences. Flow-on impacts from energy on Asian economic growth also influence New Zealand. It will be important to present the impacts of the crisis on New Zealand ^{s6(a)}

s6(a)

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Trade and Economic

Following the US Supreme Court ruling that President Trump's 'reciprocal' tariff policies under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) were unlawful, the US repealed those tariffs and announced a new worldwide 'temporary import surcharge' of 10 percent under different legislation. These tariffs, imposed under the Trade Act 1974, can only be imposed for 150 days, unless extended by Congress (which is unlikely to occur) – meaning they are likely to expire on 24 July 2026.

Around 60 percent of New Zealand's goods trade with the US are now subject to this 10 percent baseline, in addition to standard US tariffs. For now, with this applied on a near-global basis, New Zealand is essentially on a level playing field with most countries, improving our position relative to competitors. Existing exemptions, including on beef and kiwifruit, mean one third of New Zealand's goods trade into the US is subject only to the standard US tariffs.

The Administration is pursuing other mechanisms to rebuild the "tariff wall" through more durable means, to recreate both the tariff revenue and leverage central to President Trump's deal-making agenda. One of these that affects New Zealand is an investigation under Section 301 of the Trade Act into 'Failures to Take Action on Forced Labor'. Further key risks for New Zealand include the potential for a safeguard investigation, and future tariffs, on imported lamb. Other investigations are pending which may also affect New Zealand exports.

We continue to register that our trade is open, fair in terms of low tariffs of 0.3%, complementary and supports US supply chains.

While the State Department does not play a leading role in trade policy, you should register with Secretary Rubio and with Members of Congress New Zealand concerns and explain our position on bilateral trade.

Secretary Rubio may ask about New Zealand's intentions regarding the invitation to sign a Critical Minerals Framework with the US. Cabinet is considering this issue.

Last year you raised with the US New Zealand's concerns about the impact of US regulatory controls for defence, space and sensitive technology items. Since then, the State Department has engaged with us, and New Zealand is doing work to update Export Controls legislation and to provide detailed information on the challenges facing New Zealand companies. Cooperation is on track in the area.

*Americas Division
April 2026*

Meeting with Secretary of State Marco Rubio

Time and date: 10.00 – 10:35 am, 7 April



Born in Miami, Florida in 1971, Rubio is the son of Cuban immigrants. In 2010, he won a seat in the US Senate and served until 2025. Nominated to serve as Secretary of State, he received a historic unanimous vote of 99-0 in the US Senate. Since the departure of Mike Waltz in May 2025, Rubio has also served as National Security Advisor.

s6(a)

Key objectives

-
- **Indo-Pacific** – s6(a)
- **Pacific** – s6(a)
- **Iran** – convey the seriousness of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz for New Zealand's economy s6(a)
- **Trade** – advocate for the lowest possible tariff rate on New Zealand, once current US trade investigations conclude.

Discussion points

- s6(a) - 2 pages withheld

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s6(a)

Trade – points to make

- Minister McClay and US Trade Representative Greer continue to engage regularly on trade matters and met recently in Cameroon.
- When the US concludes its current trade investigations and resets tariff rates, we want to be no worse off than other competitors. That would reflect our fair treatment of US business and be in keeping with our strategic partnership.
- There are virtually no barriers to trade for US exports to New Zealand and the applied tariff on US goods is 0.3 percent.

s6(a)

s6(a)

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US/New Zealand Defence and tech – points if required

- Bilateral trade and investment in defence, space and other sensitive technologies continues to deliver security and economic benefits to New Zealand and the US.

- Officials are working closely with the State Department on this. We also have a process underway to reform New Zealand's export controls system, s6(a)

Americas Division/New Zealand Embassy in Washington DC

April, 2026

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Meeting with Deputy Secretary of State, Christopher Landau

Time and date: 1.00pm – 1.30pm, 7 April



Landau commenced his role in March 2025. He previously served as US Ambassador to Mexico from 2019 to 2021. In that position, he oversaw the ratification and entry into force of the US-Mexico-Canada FTA. Prior to his diplomatic service, he practiced law for thirty years at Kirkland & Ellis LLP. He also clerked twice at the US Supreme Court. Landau graduated from Harvard College and Harvard Law School. He was born in Spain as the son of a career Foreign Service Officer, and grew up in Paraguay, Chile, and Venezuela. He is fluent in Spanish and proficient in French.

s6(a)

You met Landau in Port Moresby in September 2025 during PNG's 50th anniversary of independence and then spoke by phone a few weeks later in October. Landau co-hosted the Pacific Investment Summit in February and then traveled to Fiji, Samoa and Tonga in February.

Key objectives

- s6(a)
- **Pacific** – s6(a)
- **Iran** – convey the impact of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz on small, import-dependent Pacific economies.

Discussion points

Bilateral

- s6(a)
- Thank Landau for his personal attendance at the recent senior officials' level Strategic Dialogue – a significant time commitment.

s6(a)

s6(a)

- Congratulate Landau on the US Pacific Infrastructure Summit in Honolulu, which a New Zealand Minister attended (Minister Costello).

s6(a)

Transnational and Organised Crime – points to make

- s6(a)

• s6(a)

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- New Zealand has responded to protect our region through enhanced law enforcement cooperation, supporting border security and law enforcement capacity and increased support to address the impacts of drugs on communities.

Impact of the Iran War on New Zealand and the Pacific – points to raise

- We and our Indo Pacific and Pacific neighbours have already been severely affected by the Iran crisis, due to the inflationary impact it has caused, and the likely hit to our GDP.

s6(a) - 1 page withheld

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s6(a)

Space and tech – if time

- Thank Deputy Secretary Landau for the ongoing assistance the State Department is providing to support New Zealand companies to deepen trade and investment in strategic sectors.
- Note that interagency work is ongoing to collate case studies of instances where New Zealand companies have faced regulatory barriers and to identify pathways for them to access existing exemptions. ^{s6(a)}

Americas Division/New Zealand Embassy in Washington DC
April, 2026

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Meeting with Stephen Vaughn, former USTR General Council

Time and date: 4.15pm – 5.15pm, 7 April



Stephen Vaughn is a Partner in the International Trade Team of King & Spalding who works primarily on international trade litigation and policy matters. He was General Counsel for the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) during the first Trump Administration working closely with current USTR Greer, with whom he remains close.

Vaughn was on the shortlist for USTR under the second Trump Administration. He is a believer in the MAGA theory that the US, and especially the manufacturing sector, lost out from unfair global trade practices. He supports the Administration's leveraging of US economic weight and using tariffs to reset the US goods trade balance.

s6(a)

You met Vaughn during your April

2024 visit to the US.

Topics to raise:

- US domestic politics
- US economic and trade policy
- Impact of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz for New Zealand's economy

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United States of America Facts and Figures

Geography/Demographics			
Land Area	9,147,593 sq. km (excluding territories)		
Population	345.4 million (Sep 2024 est.)		
Capital City	Washington, DC		
Languages	English with large Spanish-speaking minority (approx. 13%)		
Political			
Political system	Federal Republic		
Government	Executive Branch; Legislative Branch (Congress) comprising the House of Representatives and the United States Senate.		
Legislature	Bicameral legislature (Congress) comprises: Senate of 100 members; and House of Representatives of 435 members. Senators are elected for a six-year term. House representatives are elected for a two-year term.		
Last election	5 November 2024		
Next elections	7 November 2028		
Head of State	President Donald Trump		
Head of Government	President Donald Trump		
Economic (2025)			
GDP	US\$31.44 trillion (NZ\$53.1T)	GDP per capita	US\$89,500 (NZ\$155,000)
Real GDP growth	0.7% annualised (Q4 2025)	Inflation	2.4% 12 months (February 2026)
Trade Profile			
Trade as % of GDP (est. 2024)	25%	Tourism receipts (YE 2025)	US\$250 billion (NZ\$428 B – down 0.6% on 2024)
Main exports	Fuel related products, aircraft and parts, pharmaceuticals, and machinery	Main imports	Computers, telecommunications & electronics, vehicles
New Zealand Goods and Services Trade with United States (year ended December 2025)			
Total two-way trade	NZ\$30.44 billion	Ranking	3
NZ exports	NZ\$17.62 billion	NZ imports	NZ\$12.81 billion
Main exports	Meat, travel, business services, dairy, and beverages.	Main imports	Mechanical machinery products, aircraft, telecommunications services, insurance and pension services, and other business services.

Americas Division, March 2026

Background Brief: Transnational Serious and Organised Crime in the Pacific

Nomenclature

1. The shift in naming convention from Transnational Organised Crime to Transnational, Serious and Organised Crime (TNOC to TSOC) reflects the shift in the Government's strategic approach to incorporate domestic offending and the harm perpetrated in communities. However, TNOC is widely used in the Pacific and elsewhere.

Problem Summary

2. TNOC is now cited by some Pacific leaders as being among their most significant security challenges, and this concern has been raised with New Zealand at leaders' level in bilateral meetings and at the Pacific Islands Forum. TNOC is highlighted both in the Pacific Islands Forum's 2018 Boe Declaration on Regional Security and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific.

3. ^{s6(a)}

4. Throughout the region, but most acutely in Fiji, Tonga and Samoa, illicit drugs (predominantly methamphetamine) are fuelling harm to communities including through crime, violence, addiction, and health impacts. In Fiji, injected drug use is fuelling the rapid spread of HIV, with new cases more than tripling between 2023 and 2024 and up to 75 percent of recent cases linked to illicit drugs.

5. Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Samoa, and Vanuatu, have also reported unprecedented drug seizures in recent years, reflecting both increased trafficking activity and strengthened enforcement efforts. These developments reinforce the assessment that illicit drug trafficking now constitutes a systemic, region-wide TNOC challenge, rather than an isolated transit phenomenon.

6. Additionally, the recent discovery of three narco-submarines in the Solomon Islands in 2025, if proved to have been used to transport drugs into the region, demonstrates an increasing sophistication being employed by TNOC actors to avoid detection.

7. Australia and New Zealand are the intended final destinations of most of the illicit drugs transiting the Pacific. ^{s6(a)}

Metrics

8. Fiji has emerged as a major transshipment hub and an expanding domestic consumption market, recording over 2,400 drug-related cases in 2025, with youth comprising the majority. In January 2024, Fijian authorities seized 4.8 tonnes of methamphetamine, followed by the seizure of more than 2.6 tonnes of cocaine from 2025-2026.

9. Across the wider Pacific, New Zealand's combined onshore and offshore seizures increased from 3,967kg in 2023 to 5,437kg in 2024, while Australian maritime operation in December 2024 intercepted 2.34 tonnes of cocaine.

10. French Polynesia has also emerged as a critical interdiction zone, with nearly twelve tonnes of cocaine seized in its waters between January and February 2026 alone, including multiple multi-tonne maritime interceptions assessed as destined for Australia and New Zealand. These seizures underscore the strategic use of Polynesian routes by organised criminal groups and reinforce the regionalised and interconnected nature of the illicit drug threat.

11. It is important to recognise that rising seizure volumes should not be interpreted solely as evidence of increased trafficking flows. In some jurisdictions, higher seizure volumes may reflect improved interdiction capability, intelligence-led operations, and strengthened multi-agency cooperation.

Co-ordination structures for New Zealand engagement with the Pacific on TNOC?

12. The Government's refreshed Transnational, Serious and Organised Crime (TNOC) Strategy 2026-2030 envisages that *"New Zealand is recognised as a trusted Pacific and international partner in the global response to TNOC."*

13. In 2025, the TNOC Ministerial Advisory Group and Meth Sprint Group process informed the development of a TNOC Strategy refresh and Action Plan.^{s6(a)}

14. MFAT officials are working on a scaled-up response to increased TNOC activity in the Pacific. IDC funding allocated \$70.07 million towards Pacific security activities between 2024-2027. A further \$77.0 million is forecast to support policing initiatives between 2025-2028 and \$10.0 million is earmarked for initiatives to respond to drug harm in the Pacific.

15. Recognising the regional nature of the TNOC challenge in the Pacific, NZ will continue to work to support regional policing and border institutions as they work to develop regional solutions. IDC funds the Pacific work of the multi-agency New Zealand Transnational Crime Unit (NZTCU). The NZTCU collaborates with Pacific Transnational

Crime Units to build capability and use of intelligence to monitor and disrupt transnational crime. New Zealand engages with the Pacific Islands Forum at Leaders' and Senior Officials' level, as well as at the Forum Sub-committee on Regional Security to discuss shared regional security threats including TNOC and options for a regional approach to the challenge.

Operation KIWA

16. The New Zealand Customs Service, New Zealand Defence Force, and the Government Communications Security Bureau are implementing an intelligence-led work programme called Operation KIWA.

17. Operation KIWA combines the capabilities of these agencies to deliver enhanced intelligence operations, maritime surveillance and disruption activities to identify drug smuggling maritime ventures and combat cartel and TNOC activity across the Pacific.

18. Operation Kiwa will be implemented through phases. Initially, the focus is on establishing how these agencies work together, and intensifying New Zealand's collective operational responses to known and suspected maritime threats.

19. ^{s6(a)}

Pacific Regional Division, MFAT, April 2026

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US Fact Sheet

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Minister Peters Meeting Brief: President Whipps Jr Working Lunch

Time and date: 11.30am – 1.00pm, Tuesday 14 April

Location: Harbour Society, Britomart, Auckland



President Surangel Whipps Jr has been President of Palau since 2020. He was re-elected in 2024 for a second four-year term. Constitutionally, he will not be eligible to run for the Presidency again in the 2028 election. Whipps also temporarily holds the finance and education portfolios while his nominations are held up in the Senate. You last met with President Whipps during your January visit to Palau.

Runsheets:

11.25am – MFA arrives
 11.30am – Palau delegation arrives
 11.35am - lunch served
 12.50pm (approx.) – lunch concludes and photo
 1.00pm – departure

Attendees:

Palau: President Whipps, Hon. Jennifer Olegeriil (Minister of Justice) Hon. Warren Umetaro (Floor Leader of the House of Delegates) Landisang Kotaro (Chief of Staff)

NZ: Stu Horne (Ambassador to Palau), Bernadette Cavanagh (Deputy Secretary) Sarah Walsh (Chief of Protocol), s9(2)(g)(ii)

Checklist of issues

- Acknowledge the significance of the **first official visit of a Palauan President** to New Zealand and our appreciation for President Whipps' hospitality during our two visits.

Pacific region/PIF

- s6(a)
- Seek President Whipps' views on the **upcoming meeting of the PIF Troika in Nadi** on 17 April, s6(a)
- s6(a)

New Zealand's overriding priority remains putting the Forum in the driving seat: we want the Forum to drive the agenda, timing, and outcomes of our engagements with Partners, s6(a)

- Reiterate New Zealand's support **Palau's 2026 leadership of PIF** and seek an update on Palau's views s6(a)
- NZ has considered Palau's request for financial support for its hosting responsibilities and will increase our **financial support to Palau from NZ\$350,000 to NZ\$500,000.**
- s6(a)

New Zealand – Palau bilateral relationship

- Share that New Zealand is pleased to provide a **NZ\$2 million contribution to Palau's ongoing economic reform programme**, delivered in partnership with the Asian Development Bank.
- s6(a)

PACER Plus

- Enquire about **Palau's interest in joining PACER Plus**. We are interested to understand any specific issues or reservations for Palau.
- Offer to task officials to support Palau's investigations into joining PACER Plus and encourage the eventual signing of the Agreement.

Climate change

- Enquire about Palau's priorities for its **special climate event in conjunction with the PIF Leaders' Meeting**. Note NZ supports Fiji's hosting of the pre-COP31 and the special Leaders' event in Tuvalu in October. s6(a)
we have offered logistical support to Tuvalu.

s6(a)

- s6(a)

Biographies of other participants

	Minister of Justice Hon. Jennifer Olegeriil (pronounced: Oh-lehg-reel) was sworn into office as the Minister of Justice in May 2025. Prior to entering politics, she served as a public servant for thirty years in the Department of Conservation, the National Police Force (first woman to serve as the Deputy Director), and the Presidential Cabinet on national security and law enforcement.
	Floor Leader of the House of Delegate Hon. Warren Umetaro (pronounced: Ooh-me-tah-row) was chosen as the Floor Leader for the House of Delegates (Lower House) in January 2025. Umetaro often accompanies the President to international engagements.
	Chief of Staff Landisang Kotaro (pronounced: Lan-dee-sung Koh-tah-row) has been in the role since being chosen by the President in 2021. She is the youngest person and the first woman to hold the position.

Seating plan for lunch

s9(2)(g)(ii)

Bernadette Cavanagh, Deputy Secretary Pacific and Development Group, MFAT

Rt Hon. Winston Peters, Minister of Foreign Affairs

Stu Horne, Ambassador to Palau

Landisang Kotaro, Chief Of Staff

Hon. Jennifer Olegeriil, Minister of Justice

H.E. President Surangel Whipps Jr

Hon. Warren Umetaro, House of Delegates Floor Leader

Informal Note — US offer to send fuel to the Pacific

- Following MFA's April visit to Washington DC, MFAT officials s6(a) through existing A/NZ/US Pacific fuel crisis coordination mechanism in Canberra.
- s6(a)
- s6(a)
- s6(a)
- s6(a)
- s6(a)
- s6(a)
- The same group (Australia, New Zealand, the US and possibly Japan and France) will meet again this Thursday 23 April. We will provide an update once we have received further information.

Proposed Media Lines

- When I met with Senator Rubio, I raised the challenges the Pacific face and welcomed any support the US could provide. My officials are in discussions with the US about how they can best do this.

DS PDG
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
20 April 2026



28 April 2026

Minister of Foreign Affairs

For action by

30 April 2026

Pacific Islands Forum: Invoking the Biketawa Declaration in response to the Middle East fuel crisis

BRIEFING Decision Submission

PURPOSE To seek your approval of a response in support s6(b)(ii) to invoke the Biketawa Declaration.

Recommended referrals

Prime Minister	For concurrence by	30 April 2026
Associate Minister of Foreign Affairs	For information by	30 April 2026

Contact details

NAME	ROLE	DIVISION	WORK PHONE
Mark Ramsden	Divisional Manager	Pacific Regional Division	s9(2)(a)
Tharron McIvor	Unit Manager	Pacific Regional Division	

Minister's Office to complete

☐ Approved	☐ Noted	☐ Referred
☐ Needs amendment	☐ Declined	☐ Withdrawn
☐ Overtaken by events	☐ See Minister's notes	

Comments

Pacific Islands Forum: Invoking the Biketawa Declaration

Key points

- Following the recent Pacific Islands Forum Troika Leaders meeting in Nadi, s6(b)(ii) proposal to invoke the Biketawa Declaration¹ s6(b)(ii)
- s6(b)(ii) a regional mechanism under the auspices of the Biketawa Declaration would ensure Forum Leaders' oversight of the process. Subject to the views of Leaders, s6(b)(ii) convene a special session of the Forum Foreign Ministers in May (most likely virtually) to consider a dedicated regional response. Leaders are invited to respond by 30 April, with silence assumed as assent.
- New Zealand is concerned about the implications for the Pacific from the conflict in the Middle East. We have interests in ensuring our Pacific partners maintain access to fuel supply chains to minimise negative economic consequences, s6(a)
- s6(b)(ii)
- Officials recommend New Zealand supports s6(b)(ii) The Biketawa Declaration provides a well-understood process to respond to Members' request for assistance, on the basis of all Members being part of the Pacific family. With the expanded concept of security under the Boe Declaration,² Biketawa can apply not only to internal political crises but also to systemic shocks with humanitarian, economic, and security dimensions where collective regional action is necessary to protect stability and resilience. Invoking Biketawa would provide an opportunity to reinforce the norm of regional approaches to security issues, giving further credibility to the centrality of the Forum in regional affairs.
- s6(b)(ii) Given our imminent membership of the Troika, it is in our interests to support regional solidarity on this initiative.
- There are a range of actions that could be taken under Biketawa. We recommend focusing any response on where the Forum can add value, such as bringing collective political weight to bear on the problem, as was done in response to COVID. This would allow the Forum to coordinate and to ensure Pacific interests are communicated internationally. On the former, this would include working with the Pacific Community's (SPC) region-wide fuel security audit and using the Pacific Regional Energy and Transport Ministers meeting in early May.
- We provide a draft letter for the Prime Minister's consideration.

Bernadette Cavanagh
for Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade

¹ The Biketawa Declaration allows the Secretary-General, through Leaders and Foreign Ministers, to take actions such as issue a statement representing the views of Forum Members; create a Ministerial Action Group; or convene a special meeting of Forum Foreign Ministers. It has been invoked on four occasions; the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (2003-17); the Forum's response to Fiji (2006-14); the Pacific Regional Assistance to Nauru in response to Nauru facing insolvency (2004-09), and most recently to establish the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway for COVID-19 in 2020.

² Alongside traditional security, the Boe Declaration includes climate change, human security, environmental and resource security, transnational crime, and cyber security.

Pacific Islands Forum: Invoking the Biketawa Declaration

Recommendations

It is recommended that you:

- | | | |
|---|---|-----------------|
| 1 | Note s6(b) (ii) | Yes / No |
| | seeking views by 30 April with
concurrence assumed if no response is received. | |
| 2 | Note that a special session of the Forum Foreign Ministers will likely be convened in May to consider and establish a dedicated regional response mechanism. | Yes / No |
| 3 | Agree to forward the attached draft letter in response to the Prime Minister for consideration. | |
| 4 | Refer a copy of this submission to the Prime Minister for concurrence and Associate Minister of Foreign Affairs for information. | Yes / No |

Rt Hon Winston Peters
Minister of Foreign Affairs

Date: / /

Rt Hon Christopher Luxon
Prime Minister

Date: / /

Released under the Official Information Act 1982



30 April 2026

Minister of Foreign Affairs

For approval by

7 May 2026

Cook Islands and New Zealand relationship normalisation

BRIEFING Decision Submission

PURPOSE To seek approval of the strategy for normalisation of the Cook Islands and New Zealand bilateral relationship following the signing of the Declaration on Defence and Security.

Recommended referrals

Prime Minister	For concurrence by	7 May 2026
Minister of Defence	For information by	7 May 2026
s6(a)	For information by	7 May 2026
	For information by	7 May 2026

Contact details

NAME	ROLE	DIVISION	WORK PHONE
David Evans	Divisional Manager	Polynesia and French Pacific	s9(2)(a)

Minister's Office to complete

☐ Approved	☐ Noted	☐ Referred
☐ Needs amendment	☐ Declined	☐ Withdrawn
☐ Overtaken by events	☐ See Minister's notes	

Comments

Cook Islands and New Zealand relationship normalisation

Key points

- The signing of the Cook Islands and New Zealand Declaration on Defence and Security (the Declaration) marks a significant moment in the 60-year free association relationship, following the last 18 months of tension and division in the relationship.
- The Cook Islands' affirmation of fundamental aspects of the free association relationship, specifically in the areas of defence and security, enables a pathway for normalisation of the bilateral relationship including the resumption of political engagement, and of the paused International Development Cooperation (IDC) support.
- s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)
 - a) s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)
 - b)
 - c)
- s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)
- - s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)
 - s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)
 - s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) the payment of paused budget support payments of NZ\$20 million, delivery of the paused Public Sector Strengthening activity of NZ\$9.8 million, s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)
 - s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

Bernadette Cavanagh
for Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade

¹ Submission 'Cook Islands and New Zealand relationship- next steps' 6 June 2025.

Cook Islands and New Zealand relationship normalisation Recommendations

It is recommended that you:

- | | | |
|---|--|----------|
| 1 | s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) | Yes / No |
| | a) s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) | |
| | b) | |
| | c) | |
| 2 | s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) | Yes / No |
| | a) s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) | |
| | b) The resumption of paused International Development Cooperation : NZ\$20 million for budget support payments; NZ\$9.8 million for Public Sector Strengthening; s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) | |
| | c) s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) | |
| 3 | s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) | |
| 4 | | Yes / No |
| 5 | Refer a copy of this submission to the Prime Minister for concurrence and the Minister of Defence and s6(a) and the NZSIS for information. | Yes / No |

Rt Hon Winston Peters
Minister of Foreign Affairs

Rt Hon Christopher Luxon
Prime Minister

Date: / /

Date: / /

Cook Islands and New Zealand relationship normalisation Report

1. The signing of the Cook Islands and New Zealand Declaration on Defence and Security (the Declaration) s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)
2. The Declaration affirms s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)
sets out good faith consultation requirements and gives New Zealand a 'first right of refusal' on any requests for defence and security before engagement with other partners. The Declaration also includes a range of commitments across the New Zealand system. This includes being more open about New Zealand's foreign policy plans, as well as increasing our defence and security support.
3. s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)
4. The Declaration provides a basis to normalise the bilateral relationship including the resumption of political engagement and of the paused International Development Cooperation (IDC) support. s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

5. s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

5.1. s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

5.2.

5.3.

6. s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

² Submission 'Cook Islands and New Zealand relationship – next steps' 6 June 2025.

Cook Islands and New Zealand relationship normalisation

7. s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

8.

9. New Zealand is already prominent across the Cook Islands security sectors through the IDC programme, as well as through the wide-ranging and strong agency-to-agency relationships New Zealand agencies have with Cook Islands' counterparts. s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

10. s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

Next steps to normalise the relationship

11. With these strategic objectives in mind, we propose the following lines of effort to normalise the relationship and s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

Engagement

12. s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

the level of concern over the series of actions by the CIG, including the proposal for a Cook Islands passport, the Cook Islands shipping registry supporting the shadow fleet and elevating its partnership with China without consultation with New Zealand.

s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

13. s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

14. Ministerial engagement usually takes place annually through the Joint Ministerial Forum (JMF), typically around May. This is primarily a foreign minister meeting, but you have invited other ministerial colleagues in the past to participate including the Minister of Health

Cook Islands and New Zealand relationship normalisation
and Minister for Pacific Peoples. s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

15. s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

16. s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

a) Joint Dialogue on Defence and Security (JDAS). This was set up in 2024 to encourage Cook Islands cross-agency engagement on matters of defence and security with New Zealand. s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

b) s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

17. s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

International Development Programme

18. Following the signing of the Declaration, you publicly announced the normalisation of the bilateral relationship with the Cook Islands, including the restoration of IDC funding. The previous funding pause included existing development activities, as well as consideration of new initiatives. The delivery of IDC funding through regional activities continued.
19. To normalise the delivery of the IDC programme, we propose to disburse the NZ\$20 million of paused budget support payments (2024/25 and 2025/26 allocations of NZ\$10 million each) to the CIG Budget of 2025/26. This resumption payment would be paid by early May 2026 s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

Cook Islands and New Zealand relationship normalisation

20. We are working with the CIG to resume the Public Sector Strengthening activity, which had previously paused payments totalling NZ\$9.8 million. A new agreed work plan is required, and the CIG has noted a preference this is paid in their 2026/27 budget (rather than this year) to give them time to line up technical assistance projects.
21. s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

22. s6(a), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

23.

24.

Resourcing

25. The proposed IDC funding recommendations will not have any financial implications beyond the existing approved IDC allocations for the Pacific. Officials will revert should further approvals be needed.
26. The delivery of the recommended approach can be met within existing financial and human resources. This work continues to be a priority deliverable.