

22 October 2026

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Personal details removed for proactive release

OIA 31239

Thank you for your email of 19 September 2026, in which you request the following under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA):

I am requesting information under the Official Information Act 1982 concerning any foreign military, foreign government or allied helicopter operating in New Zealand on Saturday 24 August 2024, particularly any aircraft operating through Christchurch Airport/Harewood and the Rotorua or Bay of Plenty region.

This request concerns the governmental clearance and coordination records for any such aircraft. I am not requesting classified technical capabilities, operational tactics or information about weapons.

1. Flight-specific diplomatic clearances

Please provide any diplomatic clearance request, approval or related record for a foreign military or foreign state helicopter that, on 24 August 2024:

- landed in or overflew New Zealand;*
- operated domestically within New Zealand;*
- arrived at, departed from, staged through or was supported at Christchurch Airport/Harewood;*
- travelled to, from or through the Rotorua or Bay of Plenty region; or*
- operated in the area around Hamurana, Rotorua.*
- This includes any:*
 - Third Person Note;*
 - Aircraft Diplomatic Clearance Form;*
 - landing or overflight request;*
 - diplomatic clearance approval;*
 - foreign embassy or high commission communication;*
 - clearance number or reference;*
 - amendment to an existing clearance;*
 - notification made under a standing or annual clearance; and*
 - record confirming whether the proposed flight was approved.*

For each responsive aircraft, please provide any recorded:

- country and operating organisation;*
- military service or government agency;*

- *aircraft type and model;*
- *registration, serial number, tail number or callsign;*
- *date and time of the flight;*
- *point of entry into New Zealand;*
- *departure point and destination;*
- *New Zealand operating or staging location;*
- *proposed domestic route;*
- *recorded purpose or mission category; and*
- *period for which the clearance was valid.*

Please include aircraft operated by contractors on behalf of a foreign military or foreign government where they were treated as state or military aircraft for clearance purposes.

2. United States aircraft

Please specifically search for records concerning helicopters operated by or on behalf of:

- *the United States Air Force;*
- *the United States Army;*
- *the United States Navy;*
- *the United States Marine Corps;*
- *the United States Coast Guard;*
- *the United States Department of Defense;*
- *another United States government agency; or*
- *a contractor undertaking work for the United States Government.*

Please provide any record showing whether a United States military, government or contracted helicopter was present in New Zealand on 24 August 2024, including whether it operated through Christchurch Airport/Harewood.

If the aircraft was connected with the United States Antarctic Program, an exercise, training activity, diplomatic movement, logistical operation or another government programme, please identify the programme or recorded purpose.

3. Other allied or foreign aircraft

Please provide equivalent information for any responsive helicopter operated by:

- *Australia;*
- *Canada;*
- *the United Kingdom;*
- *another Five Eyes partner;*
- *another foreign defence force or government; or*
- *a foreign defence contractor.*

This part is limited to aircraft operating through Christchurch/Harewood or within the Rotorua or Bay of Plenty region on 24 August 2024. I am not requesting records concerning unrelated foreign aircraft elsewhere in New Zealand.

4. Annual, standing or category-based clearances

If a responsive aircraft did not require an individual flight-specific clearance because it was covered by an annual, standing or category-based approval, please provide:

- *the title and reference number of that approval;*

- *the approving authority;*
- *the date it was approved;*
- *the countries, organisations and aircraft categories covered;*
- *the conditions or limitations applying to it;*
- *its period of validity;*
- *the procedure for notifying New Zealand of individual aircraft movements under the approval; and*
- *any notification or movement record showing that it was used on or around 24 August 2024.*

Please provide any annual or standing clearance that was in force on 24 August 2024 and was capable of covering a United States or other allied military helicopter operating through Christchurch/Harewood or the Rotorua region.

5. Statutory approval records

Please provide relevant non-sensitive records of any approval applicable to the identified aircraft under sections 9, 10 or 11 of the New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament, and Arms Control Act 1987.

This includes any applicable:

- *ministerial or Prime Ministerial approval;*
- *annual or category-based approval;*
- *recommendation or decision record;*
- *certification or assurance provided by the foreign government;*
- *advice establishing that the aircraft came within an approved category; and*
- *record identifying which approval covered the aircraft.*

I am not requesting sensitive information about the carriage or non-carriage of any particular weapon. Where parts of a document are sensitive, please release the aircraft-identifying, clearance and administrative information that can reasonably be separated.

6. Government and foreign liaison records

Please provide relevant records of communication or coordination concerning a responsive aircraft between MFAT and any of the following:

- *the United States Embassy or another foreign diplomatic mission;*
- *a foreign defence representative or military liaison officer;*
- *New Zealand Defence Force;*
- *Ministry of Defence;*
- *Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet or the Office of the Prime Minister;*
- *Airways New Zealand;*
- *Civil Aviation Authority;*
- *New Zealand Customs Service;*
- *Immigration New Zealand;*
- *Christchurch Airport; or*
- *another New Zealand agency involved in approving or supporting the flight.*

This includes emails, memoranda, clearance notifications, liaison records and administrative correspondence sufficient to establish the identity of the aircraft, the approval under which it operated and its recorded purpose.

7. Search period

The operational date covered by this request is 24 August 2024.

For flight-specific requests, correspondence and notifications, please search records created or received between 1 August and 31 August 2024.

For annual or standing approvals, please search for any approval created before 24 August 2024 that remained in force on that date.

8. If no records are found

If MFAT holds no responsive information, please state:

- which divisions, databases, document-management systems and diplomatic-clearance records were searched;*
- the date ranges and search terms used;*
- whether records were checked under both individual-flight and annual or standing-clearance systems;*
- whether the relevant records would ordinarily have existed;*
- the applicable retention period; and*
- whether any potentially responsive records were transferred, archived, deleted or destroyed.*

Please distinguish between:

- no responsive foreign aircraft being identified;*
- no individual clearance being required because a standing approval applied;*
- MFAT not holding the requested records; and*
- relevant records once existing but no longer being retained.*

We also acknowledge your supplementary clarification email received on the 2 October 2026:

I refer to my existing Official Information Act request submitted on 19 September 2026 concerning foreign military or state aircraft potentially relevant to helicopter activity in the Rotorua/Hamurana area on 24 August 2024.

I would like to provide the following supplementary clarification to ensure that potentially relevant diplomatic-clearance records are not unintentionally excluded. I understand from MFAT's published diplomatic-clearance guidance that foreign military aircraft landing in or overflying New Zealand require diplomatic clearance.

Accordingly, please ensure that the search for my existing request includes the following information, to the extent it is held by MFAT.

1. Foreign military rotary-wing diplomatic clearances

Please identify any diplomatic clearance that was valid, effective or capable of authorising a foreign military helicopter or other rotary-wing aircraft to land in or overfly New Zealand on 24 August 2024.

This should include clearances issued before 24 August but remaining valid on that date.

For each responsive clearance, please provide, where recorded:

- country;*
- military service or government organisation;*
- aircraft type/model;*

- *registration, military serial or tail number;*
- *callsign;*
- *diplomatic-clearance number or reference;*
- *dates for which the clearance was valid;*
- *proposed or approved route;*
- *New Zealand entry and exit points;*
- *landing locations;*
- *operating locations or destinations;*
- *purpose of the visit or flight; and*
- *relevant scheduled dates and times.*

I am principally seeking information sufficient to identify the aircraft and its authorised movements. Personal information unrelated to that purpose may be redacted.

2. Standing, annual, category or class approvals

Please do not limit the search to a flight-specific diplomatic-clearance request.

Please identify any standing, annual, recurring, blanket, category, class or other approval that was valid on 24 August 2024 and capable of authorising the landing or overflight of a foreign military helicopter or rotary-wing aircraft.

This includes any approval made under or relevant to section 10(3) of the New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament, and Arms Control Act 1987, under which approval may relate to a category or class of foreign military aircraft.

For any such approval, please provide the approval itself or information sufficient to identify:

- *the country or military concerned;*
- *aircraft categories/classes covered;*
- *period of validity;*
- *geographical or operational limitations;*
- *conditions applying to the approval; and*
- *whether an individual aircraft operating under it would also generate a separate MFAT clearance record.*

3. Diplomatic-clearance requests and Third Person Notes

- *Please include any responsive:*
- *Third Person Note;*
- *diplomatic note;*
- *diplomatic-clearance application;*
- *aircraft diplomatic-clearance form;*
- *amendment;*
- *renewal;*
- *notification;*
- *embassy or High Commission correspondence; or*
- *other request for clearance*

relating to foreign military rotary-wing aircraft capable of operating in New Zealand on 24 August 2024.

Where complete diplomatic correspondence cannot be released, please provide the aircraft-identifying and clearance information that can reasonably be separated and released.

4. Prime Ministerial landing approvals

Please provide records sufficient to identify any approval under section 10 of the New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament, and Arms Control Act 1987 that permitted a foreign military rotary-wing aircraft to land in New Zealand on 24 August 2024.

This includes an approval issued specifically for an individual aircraft as well as any category or class approval relied upon.

If the formal approval is held by another agency or Minister, please provide any MFAT-held record identifying the approval, its reference, date, country, aircraft/category and validity period, and consider transfer of the relevant part of the request where required under section 14 of the OIA.

5. MFAT coordination records

Please search for MFAT records concerning any responsive foreign military or state rotary-wing aircraft involving communications with:

- the foreign embassy or High Commission concerned;*
- New Zealand Defence Force;*
- Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet;*
- the Prime Minister's Office;*
- Civil Aviation Authority;*
- Airways New Zealand;*
- New Zealand Police;*
- Ministry of Defence; or*
- another New Zealand agency involved in approving, coordinating or facilitating the aircraft.*

This includes records concerning diplomatic clearance, route or landing approval, operational coordination or changes to an approved visit.

6. Foreign non-military state helicopters

Please also identify any foreign non-military State helicopter or other rotary-wing aircraft that had diplomatic clearance to land in New Zealand on 24 August 2024. I understand that MFAT's published guidance distinguishes foreign military aircraft from non-military State aircraft, including that non-military State aircraft landing in New Zealand require diplomatic clearance.

For any responsive aircraft, I seek the same basic identification and clearance information requested above.

7. Search methodology if no responsive records are located

If no responsive information is found, please identify at a general level:

- the MFAT business unit(s) searched, including whether Protocol Division/diplomatic-clearance records were searched;*
- the databases, registers or repositories searched;*
- whether searches covered clearances issued before 24 August but still valid on that date;*
- whether standing/category/class approvals were searched as well as individual flight clearances;*
- whether both military and non-military State rotary-wing aircraft were considered; and*

- *whether any relevant records have been archived, transferred or disposed of.*

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Please distinguish between:

- *no relevant diplomatic clearance ever having existed;*
- *no responsive record currently being held;*
- *a record having existed but no longer being retained; and*
- *responsive information existing but being withheld under an OIA provision.*

Search context

The observation underlying my original request concerned a large helicopter near Central Road, Hamurana/Rotorua, at approximately:

2030 NZST on 24 August 2024

equivalent to

0830 UTC / 0830Z on 24 August 2024.

The aircraft's operator is unknown. References to foreign military or state aircraft are investigative possibilities only and should not be treated as assertions about the aircraft's identity.

I am providing this clarification because I want the search to capture the relevant MFAT diplomatic-clearance record classes without unnecessarily broadening my original request.

Response to your request

Parts one and two

There were four 2024 annual clearances granted that would have been capable of authorising foreign military helicopters or other rotary-winged aircraft to land in or overfly New Zealand on 24 August 2024.

- The 2024 French annual clearance (reference: DIP/2023/15) permitted embarked helicopters on naval vessels to overfly or land in New Zealand from 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2024.
- The 2024 Canadian annual clearance (reference DIP/2023/14) permitted embarked helicopters on naval vessels to overfly or land in New Zealand from 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2024.
- The 2024 United Kingdom annual clearance (reference DIP/2023/18) permitted embarked helicopters on naval vessels to overfly or land in New Zealand from 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2024.
- The 2024 United States annual clearance (reference DIP/2023/19) permitted embarked helicopters on naval vessels to overfly or land in New Zealand from 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2024.

While these annual clearances in place would have covered the period of 24 August 2024, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (the Ministry) holds no records or notifications to say that a foreign military helicopter or rotary-winged aircraft was operating in New Zealand on 24 August 2024.

Part three

The Ministry received no notification or request for any foreign vessel capable of holding embarked aircraft or rotary-winged aircraft to be in New Zealand's territorial waters on 24 August 2024.

Parts four, five, and six

These parts of your request are refused under section 18(e) of the OIA, as the information requested does not exist. The Ministry holds no details of any specific request for diplomatic clearance, or approval granted, no records or communications in relation to any foreign military or state helicopters or rotary-wing aircraft operating or landing in New Zealand on 24 August 2024. Please note that the Prime Minister does not grant diplomatic clearance.

Part seven

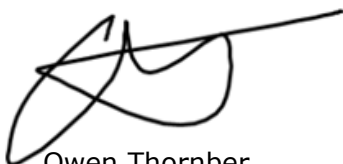
The Ministry searched relevant records, including diplomatic clearance records and diplomatic clearance email archives identified as likely to contain information within scope.

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 'Owen Thornber', written over a horizontal line.

Owen Thornber
for Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade