



## EXECUTIVE COUNCIL CHAMBERS

Reference: OIA-2018/19-0128

5 October 2018



Dear 

### Official Information Act request: New Zealand Honours System

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) request received on 17 September 2018. You requested:

1. *Emails, memos, letters relating to the continuation of the New Zealand Royal Honours system between the formation of the coalition government in 2017 and June 2018.*
2. *Emails, memo, letters relating to the possibility of ending of the new Zealand Royal Honours system between the formation of the Coalition Government in 2017 and June 2018.*
3. *Briefings to the government on the New Zealand Royal Honours system between the formation of the Coalition Government in 2017 and June 2018"*

We do not hold any information falling into the first two categories, above.

We have interpreted the third part of your request as seeking briefings on the New Zealand Royal Honours system as a whole, rather than particular aspects of that system. We have, for example, briefed the Prime Minister on requests for the acceptance and wear of foreign honours, the establishment of a new medal for the recognition of meritorious service of public servants, each of the regular honours lists, and other specific matters relating to honours. We have not considered those briefings to be within scope of your current request.

When the government was first appointed at the end of last year, we briefed the Prime Minister on the Royal Honours System, and the Prime Minister's role in respect of that system. That briefing note is **enclosed**. A number of redactions have been applied under the following sections of the Act:

- section 9(2)(f)(iv), to maintain the constitutional conventions for the time being which protect the confidentiality of advice tendered by Ministers of the Crown and officials;

- section 9(2)(g)(i), to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinion by or between or to Ministers of the Crown or officials.

In making my decision, I have considered the public interest considerations in section 9(1) of the Act.

This response will be published on the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's website during our regular publication cycle. Typically, information is released quarterly, or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

You have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and review my decision under section 28(3) of the Act.

Yours sincerely



Michael Webster  
**Clerk of the Executive Council**



# EXECUTIVE COUNCIL CHAMBERS

Memo

31 October 2017

**To** Prime Minister

**From** Michael Webster

**Subject** The New Zealand Royal Honours System

**Summary** This note describes the Prime Minister's role in relation to the New Zealand Royal Honours system. The Honours Unit in the Cabinet Office supports you to carry out all aspects of this role.

**Action sought** For noting only. I would be pleased to meet with you to discuss any aspect of this note. [REDACTED]

[s 9(2)(f)(iv)  
s 9(2)(g)(i)]

## The New Zealand Royal Honours system

- 1 The New Zealand Royal Honours system is a uniquely New Zealand system. Its purpose is to formally acknowledge and celebrate the service and achievement of New Zealanders, and of non-New Zealand citizens who have served New Zealand.
- 2 As New Zealand's Head of State, the Queen is the head of the honours system, although in practice, much of this authority is delegated.
- 3 As Prime Minister, you are the primary decision-maker and advisor to the Queen on honours matters. This includes advising her on the nominees for the regular Queen's Birthday and New Year's Honours Lists, and other special lists, as well as having policy responsibility for the overall system.
- 4 The New Zealand Royal Honours system is made up of:
  - 4.1 the Order of New Zealand;
  - 4.2 the New Zealand Order of Merit, which has five levels of honour;



- 4.3 the Queen's Service Order and associated Queen's Service Medal;
  - 4.4 the New Zealand Bravery and Gallantry Awards;
  - 4.5 the New Zealand Distinguished Service Decoration; and
  - 4.6 the New Zealand Antarctic Medal.
- 5 A diagram showing the seniority of the various New Zealand honours is attached at Appendix 1.
- 6 As well as these core elements, the armed forces and uniformed services have medals for their personnel, which are administered by those agencies.

### Part One: Development of the Honours system

- 7 New Zealand made full use of the British honours system from 1848 to 1975, mostly by appointments to the Order of the British Empire, and several other Royal and State orders. Men could also be made Knights Bachelor.

#### The Queen's Service Order

- 8 In 1974, the administration of the honours system moved from the Department of Internal Affairs into the Prime Minister's department. A review resulted in the first distinctively New Zealand element of the New Zealand Royal Honours system, the establishment of the Queen's Service Order (QSO) in 1975 to recognise "*valuable voluntary service to the community or meritorious or faithful services to the Crown or similar services within the public sector, whether in elected or appointed office*". The QSO has an accompanying Queen's Service Medal (QSM). The QSO is a level-four honour, and the QSM a level-six honour (see Appendix 1 for the different levels of honour). Both the QSO and QSM are usually awarded for service over a sustained period of time.

#### The Order of New Zealand

- 9 The Order of New Zealand was established on Waitangi Day 1987 to recognise "outstanding service to the Crown and people of New Zealand in a civil or military capacity". It is New Zealand's most senior honour.
- 10 The Order of New Zealand has a limit of 20 ordinary members. Additional and honorary members can be added to commemorate important Royal, State, or national occasions. While the Order of New Zealand is on par with the Knight or Dame Grand Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit (GNZM), as both are level-one honours, the Order remains special because of its limited membership. Currently, there are 27 members of the Order – 18 ordinary members, 8 additional members, and 1 honorary member.

#### Comprehensive review of the system in 1995

- 11 In 1995, an advisory committee was established to review the New Zealand honours system. The committee sought public submissions on the honours system, receiving over 250 written submissions from individuals and organisations and hearing a number of oral submissions.
- 12 The committee reported back with a number of recommendations. The most significant change was the establishment of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 1996, to replace the use of the British system of honours in New Zealand. Other immediate changes to the system as

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a result of the review were the removal of the civil and military lists, and a number of service-specific awards such as the Queen's Fire Service Medal and Queen's Police Medal.

### New Zealand Order of Merit

- 13 The New Zealand Order of Merit recognises those who have "*rendered meritorious service to the Crown and the nation or who have become distinguished by their eminence, talents, contributions, or other merits.*"
- 14 There are five levels within the Order, as follows:
  - 14.1 Knight or Dame Grand Companion (GNZM);
  - 14.2 Knight or Dame Companion (KNZM or DNZM);
  - 14.3 Companion (CNZM);
  - 14.4 Officer (ONZM);
  - 14.5 Member (MNZM).
- 15 In 2000 the Labour-led government removed titular honours and the top two levels were renamed 'Principal Companion' (PCNZM) and 'Distinguished Companion' (DCNZM). Titles were reinstated by the National-led government in 2009, and the 85 people who had been appointed PCNZM and DCNZM were given the opportunity to be "redesignated" as knights or dames. 72 were redesignated in August 2009.

### New Zealand Gallantry and Bravery Awards

- 16 Some changes that occurred as a result of the 1995 review took longer to take effect. The New Zealand Gallantry and Bravery Awards were established in 1999 to replace a series of more than 20 British awards to recognise gallant and brave acts in times of war and peace.
- 17 Gallantry Awards are given for acts of gallantry - extraordinary, discrete occurrences which involve risk to one's life in a hostile environment. They are awarded to NZDF personnel or civilians affiliated with NZDF. Awards are made infrequently, usually as part of a Special Honours List. The last Gallantry List was published in December 2015.
- 18 The New Zealand Gallantry Awards are as follows:
  - 18.1 Victoria Cross for New Zealand (VC);
  - 18.2 New Zealand Gallantry Star (NZGS);
  - 18.3 New Zealand Gallantry Decoration (NZGD);
  - 18.4 New Zealand Gallantry Medal (NZGM).
- 19 Bravery Awards recognise the actions of people who save or attempt to save the life of another person and in the course of doing so place their own safety or life at risk. Nominations are considered annually, and awards are made either as part of a Special Honours List, or incorporated into one of the regular lists. The most recent Bravery List was published in August 2016.



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20 The New Zealand Bravery Awards are as follows:

- 20.1 The New Zealand Cross (NZC);
- 20.2 New Zealand Bravery Star (NZBS);
- 20.3 New Zealand Bravery Decoration (NZBD);
- 20.4 New Zealand Bravery Medal (NZBM).

### **The New Zealand Antarctic Medal**

21 The New Zealand Antarctic Medal (NZAM) was established in 2006 and replaced the (British) Polar Medal (1904). The NZAM is a level-six award that is awarded infrequently for services to the Antarctic region, or in support of New Zealand's operations in the Antarctic region.

### **The New Zealand Distinguished Service Decoration**

22 The New Zealand Distinguished Service Decoration (DSD) was established in 2006 and is a level-six award for distinguished or meritorious military service.

### **A New Zealand System**

23 With the establishment of the New Zealand Order of Merit, the Gallantry and Bravery Awards, the New Zealand Antarctic Medal, and the New Zealand Distinguished Service Decoration, New Zealand finally had a completely indigenous honours system. Not only does the Queen of New Zealand only award New Zealand honours, but the insignia is also uniquely New Zealand in design.

### **Prime Minister's role in the system**

24 The Prime Minister advises the Queen on appointments of people to the regular Queen's Birthday and New Year's Honours Lists, and other special lists, such as Gallantry and Bravery Lists.

25 You are the Queen's advisor on honours matters relating to the whole Realm of New Zealand. In the case of the Cook Islands, this means making recommendations to the Queen on honours for Cook Island citizens, who are still eligible for appointment to the Order of the British Empire, on the advice of the Cook Islands' Prime Minister.

26 You also have policy responsibility for the overall New Zealand Royal Honours system. Your role extends to a number of lesser-known aspects of the honours system, including making recommendations to the Queen on:

- 26.1 the case for establishing any new honour or award;
- 26.2 changes to any aspects of the suite of Royal Warrants and Regulations that govern the administration of honours and awards;
- 26.3 forfeiture of honours;
- 26.4 the appointment of the Secretary and Registrar of New Zealand's three Orders (in practice this position is held by the Clerk of the Executive Council);

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- 26.5 the grant of New Zealand honours and awards to Royal Family members;
  - 26.6 the appointment of Royal Family members to honorary military positions within the New Zealand Defence Force;
  - 26.7 the appointment of NZDF personnel to honorary appointments within Royal households.
- 27 Some of the Queen's authority on honours matters has, in recent years, been delegated to the Governor-General. Your role therefore also includes making recommendations to the Governor-General on:
- 27.1 changes to the New Zealand Order of Wear;
  - 27.2 grants of the title 'The Honourable' for life, for retiring members of the judiciary and the Executive Council;
  - 27.3 the acceptance and wearing of foreign honours by New Zealand citizens (you have delegated authority to approve the acceptance and wearing of Commonwealth honours by New Zealand citizens).
- 28 Papers relating to numerous other honours matters will also cross your desk from time to time.

[s 9(2)(f)(iv) / s 9(2)(g)(i)]

### Cabinet Appointments and Honours (APH) Committee

- 30 The Prime Minister, by convention (as the primary decision-maker and advisor to the Queen on honours matters), chairs the Cabinet Appointments and Honours (APH) Committee when it considers nominations for inclusion in regular Honours lists. The deliberations of the Committee are, of course, highly confidential and conducted on a need to know basis, and only Cabinet Office Honours Unit staff attend to support the Committee.
- 31 Nominations must be received at least six months prior to the announcement of an honours list for consideration. The Honours Unit usually has 400 to 500 nominations (new and deferred) for consideration by the Committee for each regular honours list.
- 32 For each regular list, the APH Committee holds a series of three meetings over a period of three to four weeks to consider nominations for a list. Once the APH Committee has come to a view, there are a series of steps involving informal approval of the list by the Governor-General, sounding of proposed recipients to see if they will accept the honour, formal approval, and eventual publication of the list.

[Paragraphs 33 - 37 out of scope]



[illegible]

38 I recommend that you **note** the contents of this memo.

M. J. W. J.

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern

Prime Minister

Date: 17 / 1 / 2018

Heather Simpson  
GJ Thompson



Appendix 1: Diagram showing seniority of New Zealand Royal Honours

New Zealand Royal Honours

