



22 June 2023

§ 9(2)(a)

Tēnā koe § 9(2)(a)

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) dated 3 April 2023, transferred from the office of Hon Andrew Little to the Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB) on 12 April 2023, seeking information about the Whenuapai Data Centre. Your request asked the following:

- “1. What is the official name of the data centre?*
- 2. Where will it be located within the Whenuapai base? Please provide a map showing the location.*
- 3. Why were a) Auckland and b) Whenuapai chosen for the data centre?*
- 4. Will the data centre be part to any GCSB surveillance operations?*
- 5. For instance, will the data centre be involved in any GCSB operations related to the nearby undersea cables?*
- 6. Where and when did the plan for the data centre arise? Which review(s), events and agencies initiated the plan?*
- 7. Is the data centre a) modeled on and/or b) linked to a similar Australian centre?*
- 8. How many square meters will the floor area be of the data centre?*
- 9. Why are GCSB staff running the centre? Will they be entirely from GCSB's information information/computer security/network security sections?”*

You were advised on 5 May 2023 that the time limit for responding to your request had been extended to 23 June 2023 because the consultations necessary to make a decision on your request were such that a proper response could not reasonably be made within the original time limit. Following this, please find my response below.

It may be helpful if I begin by providing some background about why the data centre is being built. There are a number of public sector agencies in New Zealand whose work intersects with national security considerations, and can therefore be considered as part of Aotearoa New Zealand's security and intelligence sector. The Government's National Security Intelligence Priorities (Whakaarotau Marumaru Aotearoa) range from countering foreign interference and espionage, to countering malicious cyber activity, to New Zealand's

strategic interests in the Pacific region. The information involved in this mahi can require specific data considerations around handling and storage. Accordingly, this facility is being built for New Zealand agencies to securely store their most protected information.

Response

With regard to question 1, an official name has not yet been assigned to the data centre, however, we are working with mana whenua and other key stakeholders to determine an appropriate one. We anticipate that an announcement will be made in due course.

With regard to questions 2 and 8, the facility will be situated on the south western edge of the Whenuapai Base. Pursuant to section 6(a) of the OIA I am unable to confirm specific physical details regarding the facility at this point in time, including a map or the size of the floor area. To do so would be likely to prejudice to the security or defence of New Zealand. However, I can provide you with an architectural render image. Please find this attached.

With regard to question 3, a key requirement for the facility's location is that data stored in the centre is protected in accordance with New Zealand's requirements, namely those in the Protective Security Requirements and the New Zealand Information Security Manual. Accordingly, the facility needed to be within New Zealand, preferably on existing Crown land. Value for money was a strong factor, as was geographical diversity and resiliency. Four options for the location of the data centre were short-listed in 2019, across the North Island.

The short-listed options were evaluated against criteria relating to cost, benefit and risk. The evaluation followed Treasury guidelines for situations in which investment objectives – in this case, objectives relating to the performance, efficiency, resilience, sustainability and security of data infrastructure – cannot be monetised. The GCSB and the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (NZSIS) participated in the process, as did other key New Zealand government departments, given the need for some of their information to have additional protection against malign actors. To provide additional independent assurance, a specialist consultant was appointed to test how the options were selected and evaluated. A geotechnical consultant was appointed to provide advice on relative levels of risk for different site locations and consequential implications for the resilience of the data infrastructure.

The key finding of the evaluation process was that building at Whenuapai would provide the greatest value for money when taking account of all factors. A data centre built at this location was determined to provide equal or higher levels of resilience and security than any of the other options, and to provide sufficient levels of infrastructure performance. Further details are withheld under section 6(a) of the OIA, as outlined above. With regard to questions 4 and 5, no - the facility is a data centre; it is being built for the purposes for storing data.

With regard to question 6, the plans for this centre arose following a Strategy, Capability and Resourcing Review by the New Zealand Intelligence Community, which was considered by the Cabinet National Security Committee in March 2016. The New Zealand Intelligence Community is comprised of the GCSB, NZSIS, and the National Security Group (formerly "Security and Intelligence Group") of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. The Cabinet Committee agreed that a tagged capital contingency for the proposed new data centre would be subject to a separate business case. A detailed business case was subsequently considered by the Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee in May 2019.

With regard to question 7, the data centre is neither modelled on nor linked to an Australian centre. We did however seek to draw learnings from selected international partners about their data centres, given this is the first instance where we have built such a facility, noting we have a unique environment and different requirements than international partners. The facility has accordingly been designed to meet New Zealand's specific data storage needs.

With regard to question 9, the GCSB will be operating the data centre as the government's lead information security agency, however further details around the staff need to be withheld under section 6(a) of the OIA, as outlined above.

Review

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact information@gcsb.govt.nz.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Please note that the GCSB proactively publishes OIA responses in accordance with the expectations of Te Kawa Mataaho/the Public Service Commission. We intend to publish this letter (with your personal information removed) on the GCSB website. Publication of such responses is done on a quarterly basis.

Ngā mihi



Bridget White

Te Tumu Whakarae Rangitahi mō Te Tira Tiaki
Acting Director-General, GCSB

