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21 November 2022

s 9(2)(a)

By email: s 9(2)(a)
Ref: H2022015245

Tēnā koe s 9(2)(a)

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) to Manatū Hauora (the Ministry of Health) on 21 October 2022 for information regarding media communications. You requested:

“Can you please forward any communications between 25 May 2022 and 19 October 2022:

- 1) Between your chief executive or other executive manager and your communications/media staff regarding how media queries are dealt with.*
 - 2) From the office of your relevant minister regarding how media queries are dealt with.*
- Please note this is a request for the entirety of any communications captured, not just any parts deemed “in scope”.
If there have been oral discussions that have not been documented, please briefly summarise what was said, and by whom.”*

Manatū Hauora has conducted a search for any information within scope of your request and has not identified any correspondence from a Minister’s office or the Director-General of Health regarding “how media queries are dealt with”. I am therefore unable to provide you with information in accordance with section 18(e) of the Act. The Manager of the Ministry’s Media Team cannot recall any specific discussions on this topic with the Director-General outside of the usual process of generating and finalising media responses.

By way of background, the Manatū Hauora Communications team handles requests from members of the media, including journalists and bloggers. Often, these requests are for the agency to generate a comment on an issue, or for an interview. Requests of this nature are not covered by the Act, as they are not for information held by the agency. Where a request includes a request for information held by the agency, although it might be responded to by the Communications team, this is an Official Information Act request and is dealt with in accordance with the provisions of the Act. For your reference, appended to this letter is a copy of the Manatū Hauora guidelines for managing media queries.

The Ministry’s Communications team, like its OIA Services team, experienced an increased volume of requests during the 2020 lockdown. In response to the high demand for information, the Ministry began a series of stand-up press conferences fronted by the Chief Executive and

Director of Public Health in order to respond to as many questions as possible, make information more accessible to the public, and help limit the demand for official information requests.

You may also be interested to know that the Office of the Ombudsman had recently completed its investigation into the Official Information Act handling processes of 12 governmental agencies, including Manatū Hauora. The published report, *Ready or Not Thematic report of the Chief Ombudsman* was completed in September 2022 and examines the policies adopted by agencies in compliance with the requirements of the Act, including systems and practices in place for information requests handled by their respective media teams:

www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/resources/oia-compliance-and-practice-ready-or-not-2022

One related amendment to the management of media queries during the period you have identified, is the inclusion of the media replies under the Act in the Ministry's formal performance reporting to Te Kawa Mataaho on Official Information Act requests. This change didn't require any direct communication between the media team and the Director-General. The change was on recommendation from the Office of the Ombudsman.

Under section 28(3) of the Act, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request. The Ombudsman may be contacted by email at:

info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or by calling 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Manatū Hauora website at: www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/responses-official-information-act-requests.

Nāku noa, nā



Megan McCoy

Acting Deputy Director-General

Government and Executive Services | Te Pou Whakatere Kāwanatanga

Appendix 1: List of documents for release

#	Date	Document details	Decision on release
1	22 September 2022	Media rules and guidelines- Intranet Manatū Hauora	Released in full

The news media have a legitimate interest in the Ministry of Health and its activities. The Ministry's approach is to be open and helpful to the media and to recognise that they are an important means of communication with the general public. Refer all media enquiries to media@health.govt.nz and follow these rules and guidelines.

Business rules

- All media enquiries are to be referred to media@health.govt.nz immediately.
- All media calls are to be acknowledged or responded to within 30 minutes by the media team.
- All Ministry spokespeople are to be media trained.
- Only designated Ministry spokespeople comment on behalf of the Ministry. This includes commenting on behalf of the Ministry on social media platforms.
- Interviews are given only by authorised Ministry spokespeople. Any staff member may be asked to brief a spokesperson on an issue prior to interview.
- All statements given to media are to be attributed to the appropriate spokesperson, who is responsible for approving written statements.
- Any complaints about the media are to be co-ordinated by the media team.
- No home numbers or mobile phone numbers are to be given to the media except mobile phone numbers of Communications staff.
- The Ministry's media team members are not designated spokespeople. This is for their protection and to ensure trained spokespeople are aware of issues in their areas of expertise.
- A summary of all media requests and responses is circulated to the Director-General, ELT and media spokespeople at the end of each day.

Guidelines

Spokespeople are expected to:

- know enough to give the media the full picture
- be fully accountable for the Government's policy approach

- be accountable for proper handling of media inquiries
- consider who else should be made aware of media comment (sector colleagues, Ministry staff etc)

Contact the media team in Communications if you get a media query, need help with a communications strategy, or to have a media release written. They are also there to help with Oped (opinion editorial) pieces, Letters to the Editor or corrections.

Released under the Official Information Act 1982