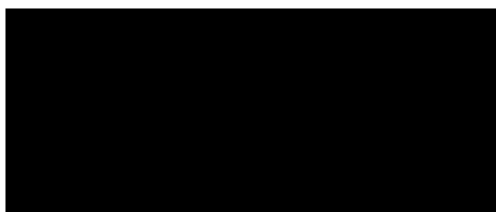



02 December 2022

C159917



Tēnā koe 

Thank you for your email of 21 October 2022 to the Department of Corrections – Ara Poutama Aotearoa, requesting information about communications relating to the management of media queries. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

As we have previously noted to you in a media query from 20 January 2022, the provision of information to media outlets regarding the administration and operations of a government department is an important aspect of public accountability, alongside the functions of monitoring agencies such as the Office of the Ombudsman and Privacy Commissioner.

Corrections works hard to provide a high degree of transparency about our work – this is particularly important given the vulnerability of the people we manage. We also take our obligations under the OIA seriously and, despite a significant increase in the number of requests received (over 50 percent from January to June 2019 compared with January to June 2021), we have maintained consistently high results for the number responded to on time, while continuing to strive to improve this further.

In line with the OIA, any request to Corrections that includes official information is defined as a request under the OIA, including those that are received as ‘media queries’ through the Media Team. Therefore, the majority of the requests received by Corrections from journalists are logged as official information requests and counted as part of our official statistics reported to the Public Service Commission. This is outlined on the Corrections [website](#), and is in line with the guidance provided by the Public Service Commission on their [website](#).

Following engagement with the Office of the Ombudsman, Corrections amended our Media Team’s practices when it comes to the refusal of information. Now, where there are grounds to withhold information in a media response, the Media team ensures a reason is provided in accordance with our obligations under the Act. When information is withheld details on how a requestor can raise concerns with the Ombudsman is included. We appreciate that journalists are often working to incredibly tight timeframes, and we aim to

do this as quickly as possible to ensure that there is limited delay in our response to media queries, which can be particularly important during operational incidents.

You requested:

Can you please forward any communications between 29 June 2021 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.

Each week Corrections' Chief Executive (CE) Jeremy Lightfoot sends a weekly update providing news and relevant information to all staff. On 17 September 2021, an email was sent to all staff which highlighted the importance of media queries. This email has been provided as Appendix One.

Although the CE met regularly with senior staff during this time including Rebecca Powell, General Manager Communications and Government Services (GM) and Nic Barkley, Manager Media and Communications (Media Manager), there were no formal meetings specifically related to the general handling of media queries. However, informal discussions took place to discuss the approach to the final opinion, relating to the report titled [OIA Compliances and practice in Ara Poutama Aotearoa Department of Corrections](#), received from the Ombudsman on 29 June 2021.

Based on staff recollection, these discussions included how media queries were generally dealt with by staff, the options available to meet the recommendations and the impact that may have on the team's approach, and the final approach agreed to by the GM and the Media Manager. This also included confirmation of certain recommendations being met such as the provision of training with the assistance of Office of the Ombudsman staff.

Information relating to the Ombudsman investigation into Corrections' OIA compliance and practice has not been included, as any correspondence or communications in relation to an investigation conducted by the Ombudsman is not subject to the OIA.

2) From the office of your relevant minister regarding how media queries are dealt with.

Procedures relating to the management of media queries is determined by Corrections. No communications between the Minister's Office and Corrections relating to the management of media queries has taken place. Therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(e) of the OIA, as the information requested does not exist.

Please note that this response may be published on Corrections' website. Typically, responses are published quarterly, or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

I trust the information provided is of assistance. I encourage you to raise any concerns about this response with Corrections. Alternatively, you are advised of your right to also

raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Contact details are: Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Ngā mihi



Richard Waggott
Deputy Chief Executive People and Capability