

Work Programme

1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026



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Inspector-General of Defence

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Establishment of the IGD office	3
Developing an IGD Operating Framework	3
Specific Oversight topics	4
Assessment of NZDF’s internal complaints process	4
Implementation of the recommendations from the Manawanui sinking	4
The role of the military justice system and the interface with civilian prosecutions	5
Other focus areas	4
Visit Defence sites	5
Own-motion inquiries.....	5
Investigations on request of the Minister or others	5
Reporting on the work programme	5
Other activities	5

INTRODUCTION

The office of the Inspector-General of Defence (IGD) is a statutory office, established to provide independent oversight of the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF). The office was established by the Inspector-General of Defence Act 2023 (IGD Act) which came into force on 26 January 2025.

The purpose of the Office of the IGD is to:

- provide the Minister with dedicated independent oversight of the NZDF;
- support the Minister in their responsibility to the House of representatives for the activities of the NZDF; and
- assure the public that the activities of the NZDF are subject to independent scrutiny, including in relation to the NZDF's compliance with New Zealand's obligations under international law.

To achieve the purpose of the Act, the IGD has certain functions and powers. In particular, the functions are:

- to investigate incidents that have occurred in the course of activities of the NZDF, and any subsequent acts or omissions of the NZDF in relation to those incidents;
- to assess and identify potential improvements or additions to policies and procedures governing activities of the NZDF.

The IGD may carry out any such investigation or assessment on their own initiative or at the request of the Minister, the Secretary of Defence or the Chief of Defence Force.

The Act requires me to prepare a programme of work for general oversight and review of the NZDF.

The current work programme (1 July 2025 – 30 June 2026), is the first to be made since the establishment of this office. As a new office my work programme is necessarily dependent on fully understanding the activities of the NZDF and determining where best to focus my oversight effort for the next year.

Consistent with the Inspector-General's role in assisting the Minister, I submit the work programme to the Minister for consultation. This work programme has been finalised after taking into account any comments received from the Minister.

ESTABLISHING THE IGD OFFICE

I expect to have completed recruitment and on-boarding of two investigators by the first quarter of 2025-26 and to have assisted in the appointment of a Deputy IGD. Further recruitment of investigators and an office manager will occur as investigations commence and the workload increases.

Developing an IGD Operating Framework

I will develop a set of guidelines that outline how I intend to deliver my functions, which are defined in s 8 of the IGD Act. This will provide a common understanding of processes, responsibilities, and expected outcomes. Specific tasks might include:

- Development of an incident categorisation system that guides expectations of all stakeholders about what the IGD's investigation priorities are likely to be;
- Development of a structured approach to identifying and prioritising the need for policy and procedure assessments (beyond what can be identified through incident investigations or notifications);
- Development of necessary/useful Standard Operating Procedures (for example, for undertaking an investigation);
- Development of website content and other educational resources that support stakeholders' understanding of how and when to contact the IGD, and what to expect; and
- Development of a plan for engaging with key NZDF and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) stakeholders, as well as other oversight bodies and agencies named in the IGD Act regarding the operating framework.

SPECIFIC OVERSIGHT TOPICS

During the course of my induction and briefings from the NZDF and other relevant parties I have identified three particular areas that will require input from or examination by my office and may result in the commencement of an investigation or formal assessment.

Assessment of NZDF's internal complaints process

During my induction I was informed of work being undertaken by NZDF to review and improve the NZDF's internal complaints process. Currently there is no centralised reporting function or collation of complaints, similar complaints (eg bullying) can be addressed differently depending on managers and location, and specific issues. The timeliness of resolving complaints is an acknowledged issue.

As part of my assessment function, I will be reviewing the policies, procedures and practices as they are developed, and looking for ways to improve the complaints process. I will also be considering whether there is any role for my office to play in an improved complaints process.

Implementation of the recommendations from the Manawanui sinking

The final Court of Inquiry report into the grounding and sinking of the HMNZS Manawanui made a number of specific recommendations. I intend to monitor the NZDF's implementation of these recommendations. I will also be assessing the findings of the Court of Inquiry to see whether they are applicable to other areas of the NZDF and whether broader improvements to policies and procedures can be identified.

The role of the military justice system and the interface with civilian prosecutions

During my induction, I was also informed of issues with the military justice system and, sometimes, conflicts with civilian criminal prosecutions. Some general concerns were: a potential lack of training for military police, with consequential problems for admissibility of evidence; uncertainty around whether to proceed with internal charges or to prosecute in the civilian courts; potential undue delays in the internal processes. I have not had the opportunity to assess whether there is any substance to the concerns expressed but it seems to me further inquiry is warranted. I intend to commence some preliminary investigations to ascertain whether there is in fact an issue that warrants my oversight and, if so, what the scope of an investigation or assessment might be.

OTHER FOCUS AREAS

Visit Defence sites

As part of my regular scrutiny of the activities of the NZDF, my staff and I will commence regular visits to NZDF bases and other locations to fully understand the work of the NZDF.

Own-motion inquiries

I may initiate an inquiry into any matter that relates to the NZDF. However, if the matter has been referred to a court of inquiry I cannot inquire until the court of inquiry has concluded, or I consider it has been unreasonably delayed, unless the investigation is at the request of the Minister or the Chief of the Defence Force.

I will report on the status of the current own-motion inquiries in the 2025/26 annual report or earlier if any of them are concluded before the annual report is published.

Investigations on request of the Minister or others

The Minister of Defence, the Secretary of Defence, or the Chief of Defence Force, may ask me to investigate incidents that have occurred in the course of activities of the NZDF. In addition, the Minister, the Secretary of Defence, or the Chief of Defence Force may ask me to inquire into any acts or omissions of the NZDF in relation to those incidents.

There are no current investigations requested by the Minister, the Secretary of Defence, or the Chief of Defence Force.

Reporting on the work programme

It is important that my office provides clear and up to date information on the work of the office. I will publish a report on the completion of each investigation or assessment that I undertake. Reports will be published on the IGD website. I am also required to provide an annual report to the Minister, which the Minister must in turn present to Parliament.

Other activities

As well as the functions that are prescribed by legislation, I intend to meet regularly with the Privacy Commissioner, Chief Ombudsman, Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security, and Auditor-General, each of whom has a role in oversight of the New Zealand Defence Force, to discuss areas of overlap in our responsibilities and broader issues of common interest.

I will look for opportunities for public engagement to talk about the role of the Inspector-General, with a view to shedding more light on what the NZDF does and how I oversee and review those activities.



Brendan Horsley
Inspector-General of Defence