

1. **Matthew Hooton**, who has over 30 years of experience in political and corporate communications and strategy across Australasia, Asia, Europe, and North America, including work with the National and Act parties and the Mayor of Auckland, expressed in the New Zealand Herald on Friday, 22 November 2024, that Prime Minister Luxon is out of his depth. It is a bold statement that few, including the signatories of this overview, would endorse. However, we believe Mathew Hooton's comments should be addressed to all the Ministers of Veterans who succeeded Mr Ron Mark, the former Minister of Veterans who left office in November 2020. Since Mr Mark's departure, many retirees from the New Zealand Defence Force have expressed varying levels of dissatisfaction with the services provided by Veterans Affairs New Zealand through social media channels.

- The verbatim brief below, 'Honouring And Supporting Our Veterans' from Ben Teviotdale [ben.teviotdale@parliament.govt.nz](mailto:ben.teviotdale@parliament.govt.nz) to Neal Catley [neal.catley@yahoo.com](mailto:neal.catley@yahoo.com) on Wednesday 11 October 2023 at 02.02.37 pm NZDT is on behalf of three National Ministers of Parliament.
- Office of Hon. Gerry Brownlee MP | Spokesperson for Defence and Veterans Affairs.
- Office of Andrew Bayly MP | Spokesperson for Building and Construction.
- Office of Tim van de Molen MP | Member of Parliament for Waikato Region.

## **QUOTE.**

### **Honouring And Supporting Our Veterans.**

Sadly, many returning veterans feel undervalued and overlooked. The commitment and sacrifice made by New Zealand's servicemen and women deserves gratitude and tangible support. According to a recent survey by Veterans Affairs New Zealand (VANZ), 92 per cent of respondents believe that New Zealand has a moral duty to support its service members and their families. However, only 37 per cent feel that New Zealand is living up to this obligation.

Compounding this concern is the troubling trend of increasing wait times for support through VANZ, leaving those in need without timely assistance. In response, National will take a range of steps to show our genuine appreciation for veterans and acknowledge their service and sacrifice on behalf of New

Zealanders. Our aim will be to foster a deeper sense of recognition, inclusivity, and support for veterans.

a. **Armed Forces Covenant**: In partnership with veterans, we will create a New Zealand Armed Forces Covenant, mirroring those in Australia, Canada, and the UK. This covenant will formally recognise veterans' service and outline our duty to support them.

b. **Definition of a veteran**: National will review the definition of veterans to ensure it is appropriate for modern service and establish a voluntary register to identify veterans, ensuring they receive the resources and support they deserve.

c. **Support processing target**: To expedite support for veterans, we will introduce a target for VANZ to process requests within 20 working days of receiving all necessary information, ensuring timely assistance.

**UNQUOTE.**

### **WHEREAT REPORT CARD – MID JANUARY 2025**

#### **3. Re: 2a. Armed Forces Covenant:**

The National Party is committed to supporting veterans. [sub-paragraphs 2a to 2c]. This commitment was expected to be implemented rationally and promptly. However, it should be recognised that the current Minister for Veterans' procrastination is one part of the sum not the sum of the parts. So far, the Minister has dismissed the Veterans Advisory Board (VAB) without providing clear reasons. However, the Minister has announced plans to establish a new Advisory Group with a revised focus and structure. With a strong wind and following seas, this new Group should be able to finalise the New Zealand Armed Forces Covenant and present it to the Minister. The Minister will then seek government approval for its implementation before the General Election in 2026. **Nota Bene.** The term: "The Twelfth of Never" seems an accurate assumption.

**Re: Definition of a veteran.** VANZ is currently working on defining what constitutes a New Zealand veteran, but there is no established timeline for when this will be completed.

**Re: Support processing target.** Regarding support processing targets, the veteran support processing times for claims have seen a slight reduction. Budget 2024 allocated funds to Veterans Affairs to hire additional staff to improve processing times. [Refer to Veterans Affairs Issue 46, August 2024, page 20].

The following letters, **FOR YOUR INFORMATION ONLY**, addressed to the Minister for Veterans are from Neal Catley and Frank Rands. They seek clarification and updates on the National Party's commitments to New Zealand Defence Force ex-servicemen and women. Although the Minister's Office acknowledged receipt of the letters and replied to one, it is disappointing that none thus far have been actioned.

**3 September 2024**

**Minister Chris Penk**

**Minister for Veterans**

**Subject: New Zealand Armed Forces Veterans**

**Reference: Discussion Catley/Penk November 2023**

**Dear Chris,**

From our chats at Reference, I understood you would need a few months to review your Minister for Veterans [MfV] portfolio, especially the unattended matters left to wither on the vine for many years by previous MfVs. I further understood you had hoped to be able to promulgate a few veteran quick wins. For example, 'Who is a New Zealand Defence Force Veteran' as it could be enacted under the Veterans Support Act 2014, using the same benefit and entitlement eligibility criteria as the New Zealand Operational Service Medal [NZOSM] issued 10 Nov 2021.

Also, I recently heard through the Veteran Tom-Tom system that you have dismissed the Veterans Advisory Board [VAB] and another Veterans Group, with a revised focus and structure, will be formed in due course. I have to say, if this information is correct, I am staggered! Why? The VAB work, before Ron Mark relinquished his MfV appointment in November 2020, was professionally researched, and most of the VAB recommendations seemed to be on point at

that time. It would be inappropriate of me not to assume the reason[s] the VAB work was left to flounder is because Ron Mark's successors had scant regard and little understanding of the people who had willingly attested to serve New Zealand. It is tinder box stuff. No further comment is needed.

With respect, if it is indeed your intention to dismiss the VAB and establish a new Veterans Advisory Group to stop the rumour mill from soaring out of control, it seems appropriate and as early as possible to advise all New Zealand Armed Forces serving and ex-serving people of your change of direction.

One of my sea-going Commanders, who I had the pleasure to serve with, had a saying: TO GET AHEAD—IS TO GO AHEAD.

Timely and clear communication with our veterans is key to maintaining their trust and confidence.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Neal

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**The Office of MfV's reply.**

From: Chris Penk (MIN) <[C.Penk@ministers.govt.nz](mailto:C.Penk@ministers.govt.nz)>

Sent: Friday, 6 September 2024 10:29 am

To: [neal.catley@yahoo.com](mailto:neal.catley@yahoo.com) <[neal.catley@yahoo.com](mailto:neal.catley@yahoo.com)>

Subject: RE: V-C328 New Zealand Armed Forces Veterans

Kia ora Neal,

On behalf of Hon Chris Penk, Minister for Veterans, thank you for your email.

Please be assured that this will be placed before the Minister for his consideration, and you can expect a formal response in due course.

Thank you, once again, for sharing your insights and for writing. Please take care.

Ngā mihi.

Alexandra Boac

*Private Secretary – Executive Support | Office of  
Hon Chris Penk*

**Minister for Veterans**

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**11 September 2024**

**Mr Neal Catley**

**Email: neal.catley@yahoo.com**

**Dear Neal,**

**Thank you for your email of 3 September.**

**As I said previously, there are a number of interesting issues in the portfolio. Outstanding matters such as how 'Veteran' is defined under our legislation, and how we recognise service, have not been resolved, but the reports provided by the Veterans Advisory Board remain on the table. I hope to address both matters while I am Minister for Veterans. They are important if complex issues.**

**With regard to the membership of the Veterans Advisory Board, the terms of appointment of the previous members of the Board have concluded, and I am taking the opportunity to consider the next round of appointments. Updates will be provided once I am in a position to do so. I appreciate that this is a particular issue of yours, however, and I have asked my office to provide you with links to this information once it becomes available.**

**Yours sincerely**

**Hon Chris Penk**

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**From: neal.catley@yahoo.com <neal.catley@yahoo.com>**

**Sent: Thursday, 12 September 2024 5:20 pm**

**To: 'C.Penk@ministers.govt.nz' <C.Penk@ministers.govt.nz>**

**Subject: FW: Letter to Neal Catley V-C32**

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**Hello Alexandra,**

**Although I am disappointed with the Minister's letter, thank you for replying.**

Yours sincerely,

Neal Catley, FNZIM

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From: Frank Rands <[frank@randsclan.com](mailto:frank@randsclan.com)>

Date: Tue, 29 Oct 2024 at 16:58

Subject: VETERAN ISSUES

To: <[C.Penk@ministers.govt.nz](mailto:C.Penk@ministers.govt.nz)>, <[chris.penk@parliament.govt.nz](mailto:chris.penk@parliament.govt.nz)>, <[chris.penkmp@national.org.nz](mailto:chris.penkmp@national.org.nz)>

Dear Minister,

As we pass the one-year mark in your current term, I am compelled to express growing concerns within the veteran community regarding the lack of action and communication from your office as Minister for Veterans.

I wish to outline the following points, which I am sure are familiar to you but bear repeating for the sake of clarity:

- 1. Lack of Public Engagement:** Since your appointment, there has been one joint public announcement from your office addressing veterans' issues (16 October 2024). This announcement made in your second year of government does little to provide any confidence to veterans. This continued lack of advice has left many within the community feeling overlooked and uncertain about the direction of government support. It should be remembered that more and more of our so-called 'veteran community' is not engaged with Returned Services Associations for varying reasons.
- 2. Disbanding of the Veterans Advisory Board (VAB):** The decision to disband the VAB has not been accompanied by any plans for a replacement. Nor has there been any ongoing action regarding the advice and recommendations provided by the VAB before its disbandment. This has created a significant gap in representation and advocacy for veterans' concerns.
- 3. Absence of a Defined Programme of Work:** There appears to be no visible programme or strategy that addresses the unique challenges facing New Zealand's veterans. Veterans require targeted and proactive support, and a clear plan must be articulated and pursued.

- 4. **Recognition of Veterans:** There has been no indication of how New Zealand intends to honour and acknowledge its veterans. The lack of recognition extends to the fundamental term "veteran" itself, with no official acknowledgement of who qualifies for this status and the benefits or support that should accompany it. All who have served are worthy of military veteran status. Shore-based service people are essential in supporting those in warlike conditions and should, therefore, have veteran status.

Your response of 11 September 2024 provides little substance and advises nothing of any timelines or when some action might be expected. Time is ticking, and the content of your letter reminds me of advising that 'the mail will be delivered, but we are not sure when it will arrive'.

These issues, if unaddressed, risk further disengagement and disillusionment within the veteran community. I urge your office to consider these points and to provide clarity and direction on how New Zealand will support its veterans moving forward.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to seeing meaningful actions that will demonstrate our nation's commitment to those who have served.

I have emailed this to all your email addresses, as I am now unsure which is active as some emails have bounced in the past.

Regards

Frank Rands

Whats App: +64 21 761161

Tel +64 21 761 161

Tel +61 435 375 229

[frank@randsclan.com](mailto:frank@randsclan.com)

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**The Automated Office of MfV's reply.**

From: Chris Penk <[chris.penk@parliament.govt.nz](mailto:chris.penk@parliament.govt.nz)>

Date: Tue, 29 Oct 2024 at 16:59

Subject: Automatic reply: VETERAN ISSUES

To: Frank Rands <[frank@randsclan.com](mailto:frank@randsclan.com)>

On behalf of Hon Chris Penk, thank you for your email.

While Minister Penk considers all correspondence to be important, and every message is carefully read and considered, it is not always possible to reply personally to all emails. As such, the following guidelines apply:

Invitations and meeting requests will be considered as soon as possible, and a staff member will be in contact with you in due course.

If your email message falls outside of Minister Penk's portfolio responsibilities, expresses a personal view, or is copied to multiple Members of Parliament, your correspondence will be noted and/or transferred to another office.

Thank you again for the taking the time to write.

Kind regards

Office of Hon Chris Penk

Minister for Veterans

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21 October 2024

Minister Chris Penk

Minister for Veterans

**Subject:** New Zealand Defence Force Veterans

**Reference:** Royal New Zealand Navy Communicators Association Reunion.

Dear Chris,

I trust you are in good health and your parliamentary sea legs are working well.

Last weekend, 18-20 October, I attended the Royal New Zealand Navy Communicators Association [RNZNCA] Reunion at the Novotel in New Plymouth. It was a tour de force.

Unsurprisingly, veterans' affairs were among the 'hot topics' discussed with various heartfelt colourful rejoinder comments. Notwithstanding that below are a few snippets in no order of preference, for your information:

- The MfV portfolio is near the back of National's priority list - end of story - we are stuffed!



- **As MfV is an ex-RNZN officer, we had high expectations he'd look after his ex-military people.**
- **Get a life - the only time Pollies think about vets is about six weeks before an election.**
- **Once Pollies get into government, their promises go out the window.**
- **Nothing should surprise us - the same old Pollie crap story, no money for vets.**
- **Vet stuff is Bull Manure - different amount and always smelly.**
- **Grow up, people - Pollies not listed in the top 10 are cannon fodder for their hierarchy to manipulate.**
- **Now hear this - there's no money for Veterans - get back in your box and be a good lad!**

**The RNZNCA reunion member comments are from a few hundred people. Still, reunion feedback to their respective families, friends, and thousands of extended ex-military people throughout New Zealand is huge. Note that thousands of people are not an exaggerated figure.**

**I appreciate your government portfolio workload is considerable and challenging. Nevertheless, before the general election of 2023, the National Party promised - [and I don't need to rehearse it here] - to fix most of the veteran stuff that Labour said it would do as they failed veterans miserably.**

**The next general election is now under under two years. Frank Rands and I, as RNZNCA senior members, support your MfV appointment, and, as such, we would like to think that much of the basic veteran 'quick win' work that needs your approval will happen soon.**

**I look forward to hearing from you.**

**Yours sincerely,**

**Neal Catley, FNZIM**

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# I am still waiting to receive an acknowledgment from the Minister's office even after sending a suspected duplicate copy. I also sent a separate personal note to Alexandra Boac, the Minister's Private Secretary, but I am still waiting to receive an acknowledgment from her. *Watch this space.*

11 December 2024

Hon Chris Penk

Minister for Veterans

**Subject:** New Zealand Defence Force Veterans

**Reference:** Letter of 21 October 2024 – RNZNCA Reunion 18-20 October 2024

**Attention:** Alexandra Boac, Private Secretary – Executive Support | Office of Hon Chris Penk Minister for Veterans

Dear Alexandra,

Please note at Reference that I am still awaiting an acknowledgment of my letter to Hon Chris Penk. In addition, I sent a suspected duplicate two days later. As the Minister's office acknowledged neither letter, I sent my original letter to you for the Hon Chris Penk's attention. Surprisingly, you did not acknowledge it either.

My letter to Hon Chris Penk is attached, and I would be grateful if you could bring it to his attention.

Please advise.

Yours sincerely,

Neal Catley, FNZIM

## **The Automated Office of MfV's reply.**

Chris Penk<chris.penk@parliament.govt.nz>

To:You

Tue 12/10/2024 8:23 PM

On behalf of Hon Chris Penk, thank you for your email.

While Minister Penk considers all correspondence to be important, and every message is carefully read and considered, it is not always possible to reply personally to all emails. As such, the following guidelines apply:

Invitations and meeting requests will be considered as soon as possible, and a staff member will be in contact with you in due course.

If your email message falls outside of Minister Penk's portfolio responsibilities, expresses a personal view, or is copied to multiple Members of Parliament, your correspondence will be noted and/or transferred to another office.

Thank you again for the taking the time to write.

Kind regards

Office of Hon Chris Penk

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**30 December 2024**

**Minister for Veterans, Hon Chris Penk**

**Subject: Professor Ron Paterson Report [64 recommendations] delivered to the Chief of Defence Force in March 2018.**

**References:**

**A. VANZ Website Ron Paterson Report - Final update: October 2024.**

**B. NZ Herald article NZSAS Soldier by John Fisher dated 23 December 2024.**

**Attention: Alexandra Boac, Private Secretary – MfV Executive Support**

**Dear Hon Chris Penk,**

**1. It is noted at Reference A**

**Quote.**

**Since the report was delivered, Veterans' Affairs has committed to a work programme to examine whether and how the recommendations could be implemented. That programme has now concluded.**

**Unquote.**

**2. Reference B supports the notion that the Chief of the Defence Force and the Minister for Veterans formally agreed on 15 and 20 August 2024 that 12 of the 13 Paterson Report recommendations are closed. The Final Update, however, fails to:**

**a. Identify the 12 recommendations that are closed; and,**

**b. Provide details beyond inter-department congestion as to why the 12 recommendations are closed. And why was this game changer not identified early, and appropriate corrective action taken to resolve it?**

**3. In the interest of openness, transparency and effective people management I respectfully request that the information at para 2a and 2b be made available to NZDF veterans in a timely fashion.**

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Neal Catley, FNZIM

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Minister for Veteran's Office reply is as follows.

**[PARLIAMENT STANDARD HOLDING REPLY]**

From: Chris Penk [chris.penk@parliament.govt.nz](mailto:chris.penk@parliament.govt.nz)

To: You [Neal Catley]

Mon 12/30/2024 08:37 AM

On behalf of Hon Chris Penk, thank you for your correspondence.

Please be advised that the ministerial office will reopen on 13 January 2025. Correspondence received during this period will be addressed upon our return in the New Year.

For urgent immigration matters, please direct your enquiry to Nicole Campbell at [Nicole.Campbell@parliament.govt.nz](mailto:Nicole.Campbell@parliament.govt.nz). Nicole will be back in the office on 6th January 2025.

While Minister Penk considers all correspondence to be important, and every message is carefully read and considered, it is not always possible to reply personally to all emails. As such, the following guidelines apply:

Invitations and meeting requests will be considered as soon as possible, and a staff member will be in contact with you in the New Year.

If your email message falls outside of Minister Penk's portfolio responsibilities, expresses a personal view, or is copied to multiple Members of Parliament, your correspondence will be noted and/or transferred to another office.

Wishing you a safe and restful holiday season.

Kind regards

Office of Hon Chris Penk

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6 January 2025

Minister for Veterans, Hon Chris Penk

**Subject:** Competition of Interest

**References:**

- A. MfV Email 11 September 2024 to neal.catley@yahoo.com
- B. VANZ Brief to Minister for Veterans – Enclosure 2 Submission to Minister Cover Sheet 15 August 2024.

**Attention:** Alexandra Boac, Private Secretary – Executive Support | Office of Hon Chris Penk Minister for Veterans.

*Dear Hon Chris Penk,*

Your email at Ref A was accepted in good faith, which inter alia advised.

**Quote.**

*"There are a number of interesting issues in the portfolio. Outstanding matters such as how 'Veteran' is defined under our legislation', and how we recognise service, have not been resolved, but the reports provided by the Veterans Advisory Board remain on the table. I hope to address both matters while I am Minister for Veterans. They are important if complex issues."*

**Unquote.**

Reference B confirmed that the Paterson Report was officially closed on 20 August 2024. This action encompasses the dismissed Veterans Advisory Board, reports typically associated with the Paterson Report, and the 12 recommendations that could not be satisfied.

The content of your email at Ref A is irrelevant as both the Chief of Defence Force and yourself, as mentioned in Reference B on 15 and 20 August 2024, respectively, except 'who is a New Zealand veteran,' have agreed and approved the closure of the Paterson Report.

For obvious reasons, I am both surprised and disappointed at this outcome.

Yours sincerely,

*Neal Catley, FNZIM*

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**Nota Bene. As of Wednesday 8/01/2025 no acknowledgement from Executive Support | Office of Hon Chris Penk Minister for Veterans.**