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BACKGROUND AND NEW ZEALAND MESSAGING

Purpose

1. s6(a), s6(b)(i)
- 2.

3. This briefing provides background on AUKUS, including interactions New Zealand officials have had with the AUKUS partners to date, and provides recommended key messages, which build on New Zealand's position to-date. This briefing will be followed by a more substantive briefing on AUKUS, in the New Year.

Executive Summary

4. AUKUS is a trilateral military technology partnership, s6(a)
5. It has two distinct "Pillars". **Pillar One** is focussed on developing an Australian conventionally-armed, nuclear-powered submarine capability. **Pillar Two** is focussed on joint development of non-nuclear advanced military technologies. Whilst Pillar One is limited to the three AUKUS partners, the AUKUS partners have expressed openness to the possibility of New Zealand (and other close security partners) participating in Pillar Two.
6. Over recent months, officials and Ministers have been engaged in multiple bilateral discussions with AUKUS partners on what participation in Pillar Two might offer or mean for New Zealand, on a no-commitments basis. These discussions are ongoing.
7. s6(a), s6(b)(i)

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s6(a), s6(b)(i)

- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]

8. The accompanying key messages set out New Zealand's position on AUKUS, and provide a basis for Ministers to provide public comment as required.

What is AUKUS?

9. Announced in September 2021, AUKUS is a trilateral military and security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US). AUKUS emerged fundamentally because of sharpening US and Australian concern about the deteriorating strategic outlook in the Indo-Pacific, [Redacted] s6(a)

10. [Redacted] s6(a)

11. The AUKUS partnership has two lines of effort:

- **Pillar One: delivering a conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarine capability to Australia** (replacing Australia's existing fleet of conventionally armed and powered submarines); and
- **Pillar Two: accelerating the joint development and application of non-nuclear advanced military technology and capabilities**, to gain and harness the strategic advantages of these transformational technologies.

12. Pillar Two has initially focussed on eight areas, the first six of which are specific areas of capability and the final two are centred on enhancing cooperation and collaboration:

- undersea capabilities;
- quantum technologies;
- artificial intelligence and autonomy;
- advanced cyber;
- hypersonic and counter-hypersonic capabilities;
- electronic warfare;
- innovation; and
- information sharing.

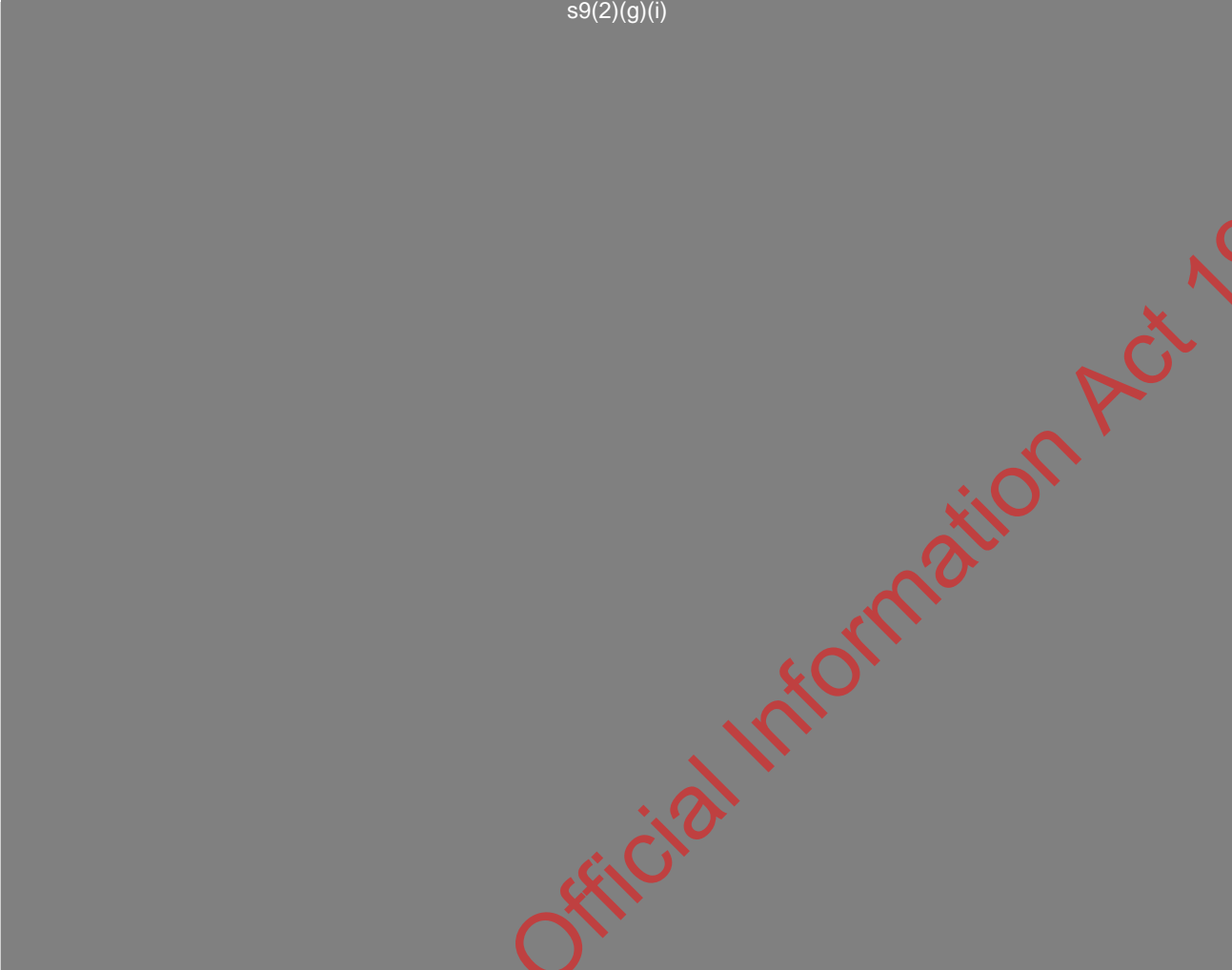
13. AUKUS engages New Zealand's national security, defence and foreign policy interests across multiple fronts, [Redacted] s6(a)

[Redacted]

s6(a), s6(b)(i)

[Redacted]

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A timeline of interaction with the AUKUS partners

16. Under bi-partisan New Zealand's nuclear free policy and legislation, New Zealand cannot participate in Pillar One, nor has there been any suggestion that New Zealand would do so.

17. The AUKUS partners have all, however, confirmed to New Zealand – and publicly – that they intend to open Pillar Two to other participants. The following sets out a timeline of relevant recent engagement with the AUKUS partners.

- In **April 2023**, Ministers gave permission to officials to engage in bilateral conversations with the AUKUS partners about what Pillar Two might offer or mean for New Zealand, on a no commitments basis.
- During his **July 2023** visit to Wellington, US Secretary of State Blinken stated publicly, in respect of Pillar Two, that “the door is very much open for New Zealand and other partners to engage as they see appropriate”.
- In **September 2023**, Defence and MFAT officials met in Washington with Kurt Campbell, US National Security Council Co-ordinator for the Indo-Pacific on potential Pillar Two participation opportunities. [redacted] s6(a)

[redacted]

[redacted] s6(a)

s6(a), s6(b)(i)

[Redacted]

18. The AUKUS partners continue to work through how other countries can join [Redacted] s6(a), s6(b)(i)

[Redacted]

19. Officials will continue to engage with the AUKUS partners to seek clarity on what participation would look like and entail, and to see where opportunities for New Zealand may lie.

Rationale behind the key messages attached

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[Redacted]

21. **The headline messages** set out that New Zealand shares the same assessment of the geostrategic outlook as the AUKUS partners and shared interests, especially with respect to ensuring a stable, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

22. **The Pillar Two messages** refer to the fact that we already have long standing co-operation with AUKUS partners in other Defence technology initiatives, that we continue to gather information about Pillar Two, and that New Zealand participation in Pillar Two remains a future decision for Ministers.

23. **The Pillar One and Treaty of Rarotonga¹ messages** set out New Zealand's clear position in respect of the nuclear dimensions of AUKUS, the central role of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the important message that the AUKUS partners are committed to robust safeguards and verification measures, and to meeting their obligations under international law (including for Australia under the Treaty of Rarotonga.)

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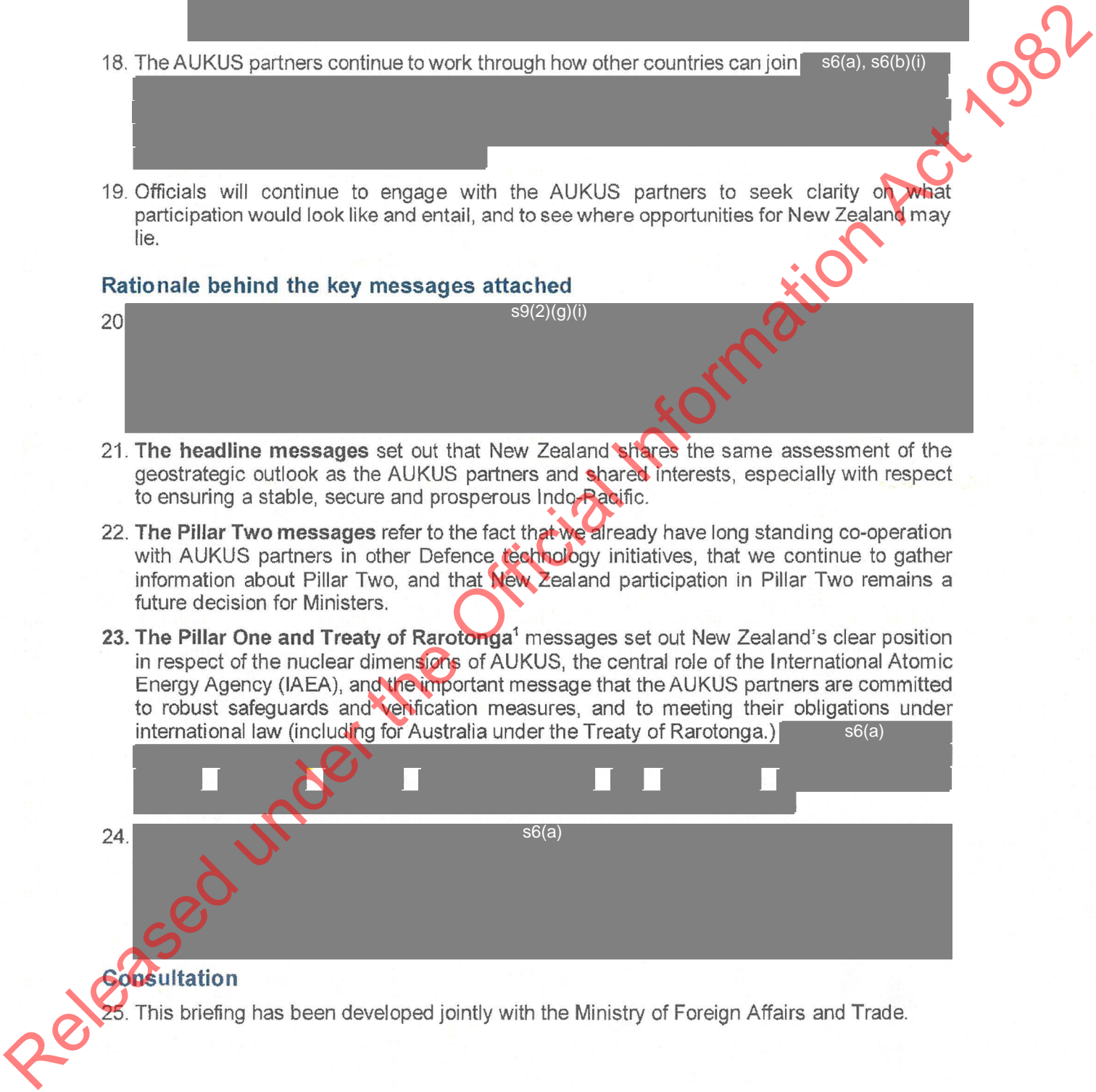
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[Redacted]

Consultation

25. This briefing has been developed jointly with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

¹ The Treaty of Rarotonga, is an international agreement which bans the use, testing and possession of nuclear weapons within the South Pacific. It does not prohibit the transit of vessels carrying nuclear weapons, explicitly leaving Parties to determine for themselves whether to allow visits, transit or navigation by foreign ships and aircraft (Article 5). The Treaty does not apply to nuclear propulsion.



Annex A: Key Messages

Headline messages

- We agree with the AUKUS partners on the common objective of a secure, stable and prosperous region, and sustaining the international rules-based system. Contributing to this objective is a priority for New Zealand.
- We understand the strategic drivers for AUKUS, given the deteriorating geostrategic outlook in the Indo-Pacific. Our own assessment of the strategic environment – as reflected in New Zealand's national security documents - aligns closely with that of our key partners.

Pillar Two

- Pillar Two of AUKUS includes cooperation on emerging security issues, including areas in which we already work closely with Australia, the US and the UK.
- Officials are engaged with the AUKUS partners to better understand the details of Pillar Two. Decisions about possible participation would be for Ministers in due course.

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Nuclear dimensions of AUKUS (Pillar One) – if raised

- We welcome the AUKUS partners' ongoing engagement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), as the relevant international authority, to ensure robust safeguards and verification measures.
- New Zealand has a long-standing and bipartisan nuclear free policy – this will not change.
- We recognise regional concerns about nuclear issues. Importantly, the AUKUS partners have reiterated their commitment to non-proliferation, and their compliance with international law.

Treaty of Rarotonga - if raised/for use with Pacific partners as required.

- Australia has been clear that AUKUS is consistent with the Treaty of Rarotonga.
- Based on what we know about AUKUS, we are confident that Australia can, and will, continue to meet its international legal obligations under the Treaty of Rarotonga.
- Australia is a trusted partner and responsible international citizen. It takes compliance with its international legal obligations seriously, and there is nothing in AUKUS which gives us reason to doubt this commitment.
- The Treaty of Rarotonga prohibits the manufacture, use, testing and possession of nuclear weapons in the South Pacific region. It does not apply to nuclear propulsion.