

Requests for firearms statistics

Legislation	Official Information Act 1982, ss 18(f), 18(g)
Agency	New Zealand Police
Ombudsman	Peter Boshier
Case number(s)	454915, 454859
Date	November 2017

Refusal under section 18(g) not justified—information held—Police could manually extract and compile statistics—where compilation involves substantial collation or research s 18(f) applies

The Police refused two requests for firearms statistics under section 18(g), and the requester complained to the Ombudsman.

Case 454915

The first request was for:

- the number of random checks of firearm endorsement holders in the last year;
- the number of crimes discovered as a result; and
- missing restricted weapons discovered as a result.

The Police explained that information on random checks is stored in its NIA database against each individual's licence in the form of free text. Therefore, it was not stored quantitatively in Police databases. Police argued they would need to analyse the qualitative data contained in the free text fields, and hard copy files, to generate new data in the form requested.

Case 454859

The second request was to know, out of the last 100 cases where a firearm was used in an assault, robbery or murder, how many were military-style semi-automatic rifles, and how many were lawfully owned by the perpetrator.

Police argued that this information would need to be created; this was not a case of searching for and pulling together existing information. Police statistics distinguished the type of firearm used, but not whether the offender lawfully owned it. To create this information, someone would be required to search three different areas of the Police database and create a tally in order to eventually arrive at a statistic.

Outcome

In both cases, the Chief Ombudsman did not accept that section 18(g) applied. While the Police could not simply run an electronic report to obtain the statistics, they could manually extract and compile them. This did not amount to the creation of information. The information was held, it was just more time-consuming to extract. In the first, but not the second, case, the Chief Ombudsman concluded that the work involved would require substantial collation or research, and the request could therefore be refused under section 18(f).

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