

Afghanistan Inquiry: Progress Report No 1: 4 June 2019

We have observed the practice of other inquiries to issue 'progress reports'. From May 2019 onwards our intention is to periodically post progress reports to provide updates. These will be a substitute for the Indicative Timeline previously posted.

Completed staff interviews: Tranche 1

We completed the first tranche of agency staff interviews on 19 April 2019. The first tranche included individuals from both the NZSIS and the GCSB. It covered individuals who were operating in Wellington, as well as some staff deployed to Afghanistan during relevant events.

Cooperation with Government Inquiry into Operation Burnham

We have held regular meetings with the Government Inquiry members in relation to our respective Inquiries. This dialogue, carried out in accordance with the published MoU, has been of benefit to both inquiries and included mutual exchanges of references to inform the identification of relevant documents and witnesses.

Upcoming Interviews: Tranche 2

Over the coming weeks we are setting up the second tranche of staff interviews. These will be focused on individuals who were identified, from documentation or by interviewees in the first tranche, as highly involved in the relevant matters. We aim to have the second tranche completed by the end of June 2019. Interviews with other staff are possible, but are not currently anticipated.

Production of/access to relevant information by the intelligence and security agencies

Through our independent accesses and concerted efforts we have now been able to review the majority of relevant material held by the NZSIS and GCSB. Official records of the time, central to this Inquiry, are often in the form of staff emails, or attached to emails, and remain stored in individual staff email accounts, rather than in a central organisational record system. The IGIS's right to directly access these records was initially called into question by the agencies, but eventually resolved. Nonetheless, the challenge of accessing all relevant staff emails has remained a recurring point of difficulty.

Access to the historical mailboxes of specifically requested staff members was sought by 5 October 2018; it was provided in January 2019. It amounted to several tens of thousands of emails. The review process for these emails revealed certain anomalies in the document production process, affecting principally the GCSB. The IGIS team spent considerable time pursuing these issues. Our efforts resulted in the GCSB in May 2019 locating and producing over 115 000 additional staff emails for our review, being emails previously left out of the document production process due to an oversight. Some of these will also be relevant to the Government Inquiry. The Inquiry team has met with the Bureau to satisfy itself about the search methodology used and the technical reasons for some anomalies in the results.