

**Hon Mark Burton**  
**Minister of Veterans' Affairs**



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## **Media Statement**

### **Nuclear Test investigation completed**

An investigation has established the extent of New Zealand involvement in nuclear testing programmes during the 1950's, the Minister of Veterans' Affairs Mark Burton announced today.

"Eleven individual New Zealand observers who witnessed British or American nuclear explosions have been identified," Mark Burton said. (This is in addition to the 528 Navy personnel who participated in the British nuclear testing programme in the Pacific in 1957-58.) "A number of other New Zealanders visited nuclear test sites, but not during actual tests.

"Of the eleven observers, six are still alive and are currently aged between 71 and 87. The other five men were aged 54, 59, 67, 71 and 81 at the time of their death.

"For privacy reasons, medical details will not be made public," Mark Burton said.

"However, the Ministry of Health advises that it is extremely unlikely that any of the recorded causes of death could be linked to the observation of nuclear tests. Similarly, there is no suggestion of links with any specific existing medical conditions.

"The surviving observers have been contacted and have been offered assistance through the Office of Veterans' Affairs. In general they have expressed satisfaction with their current arrangements."

Mark Burton said that the Defence Force and Government of the time sought to have observers at the trials, so that New Zealand could, in a time when Cold War attitudes prevailed, stay up to date with the development of nuclear technology.

"Those New Zealanders who attended the tests were mostly specialist officers, with a background in either science or specialist weapons. They received briefings before and after the tests and reported their observations back to New Zealand authorities.

"Recent attention has focused on what have become known as "clothing trials", which took place at Maralinga on the 30 September 1956. The investigation has established that only two New Zealanders took part in these trials. I note that these two men have spoken publicly of their experiences.

"Further details on New Zealand's involvement are contained in the excellent report by Defence Force historian John Crawford, which I am releasing today," Mark Burton said.

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