

LIVING IN NEW ZEALAND

11. Motor Vehicles

11.1 Introduction

This section explains the procedures, requirements and special conditions relating to motor vehicles purchased/imported by privileged persons and which are eligible for Diplomatic/Consular/Official staff licensing.

NB: This section is a guideline only. Missions/posts are encouraged to consult NZ Transport Agency for information on all standard conditions and requirements relating to motor vehicle licensing, registration, importation and change of ownership. The website is www.nzta.govt.nz.

11.2 Diplomatic/Consular/Official Staff Licensing

11.2.1 Eligibility

Individual Officers

Officers with full Diplomatic status are entitled to DC licence plates. Officers with Consular status are entitled to CC licence plates. Administrative and Technical Staff are entitled to FC licence plates. Motorcycles, mopeds and trailers granted Diplomatic/Consular/Official staff licensing will be provided with DCC, CCC or FCC plates respectively.

Numbers of Vehicles to be Licensed

In the case of individual officers, the number of vehicles which may be granted Diplomatic/Consular/Official staff licensing is one vehicle for the officer and one for each officially recognised family member of the officer over the age of 16. Service Staff and Private Domestic Staff are not entitled to Diplomatic/Consular/Official staff licensing.

Official Vehicles

Missions or posts may also seek Diplomatic/Consular licensing for a reasonable number of vehicles for official use. Approval will take into account the size and requirements of the mission or post. The general guideline is one vehicle for the Head of Mission or Head of Post and one vehicle for every two privileged officers in the mission or post.

11.2.2 Applying for Diplomatic/Consular/Official Staff Licensing

Application for Diplomatic/Consular/Official staff licensing must be made to Protocol Division as follows:

- For new or used vehicles purchased in New Zealand: Form MFA 609 'Application for Diplomatic or Consular Licence Plates'.
- For new or used vehicles imported from outside New Zealand: Form MFA 610 'Application to import a Diplomatic or Consular Licensed Motor Vehicle'.

11.3 Import of a Motor Vehicle

11.3.1 Vehicles Eligible for Goods and Services Tax (GST) Exemption

New Zealand has zero import tariffs on motor vehicles but vehicles imported to New Zealand do attract GST. Exemption from GST is granted on imported vehicles eligible for Diplomatic/Consular/Official staff licensing. Application to import a vehicle under this privilege must be made to Protocol Division, using MFA 610 form.

11.3.2 Import Entitlements

Staff with Full Diplomatic or Consular Privileges

Single privileged staff may import one GST-exempt vehicle. A second GST-exempt vehicle is permitted if three years have lapsed since the first vehicle was imported, or any GST owing on the first imported vehicle has been paid.

Privileged staff with officially recognised family members who are eligible to drive may import and own up to two GST-exempt vehicles at any one time. Those vehicles may only be replaced if three years have passed since the original import, or any GST owing is paid.

The above restriction on importation applies only to GST-exempt vehicles. There is no restriction on importation of vehicles if GST is paid.

Administrative and Technical Staff and Consular Employees

Administrative and Technical Staff and Consular Employees with first arrival privileges may import one GST-exempt vehicle during their tour of duty. The vehicle must be imported within 12 months of the staff member's arrival in New Zealand to be exempt from GST.

Service Staff

Service Staff are not entitled to import GST-exempt vehicles.

11.3.3 Importation Prior to Officer's Arrival

GST-exempt motor vehicles ordered and imported prior to an officer's arrival in New Zealand may not be registered or granted Diplomatic/Consular/Official staff licensing until after the officer has actually arrived in New Zealand. In the event the officer does not take up the assignment in New Zealand, full GST is payable, unless the vehicle is re-exported or sold to another officer entitled to the privilege of GST exemption for an imported motor vehicle.

11.3.4 Import of Official Vehicles

Missions and posts are permitted to import a reasonable number of vehicles exempt from GST for official use. Approval will depend on the size and requirements of the mission or post. The general guideline is one vehicle for the Head of Mission or Head of Post and one vehicle for every two privileged officers in the mission or post.

The same procedures set out in this chapter for the import of vehicles by individual officers should be followed for the import of vehicles for official use, except the identity of the owner is established by the use of a NZ Transport Agency card or letter from NZTA advising the customer number. Established missions and posts should be in possession of a NZ Transport Agency card or letter. This card or letter enables registration and ownership transactions for official vehicles to be undertaken without the presentation of any additional identification. If the card or letter details are mislaid for any reason, NZ Transport Agency may be consulted by telephone and they will be able to confirm details for a mission or post.

New missions and posts can apply for a NZ Transport Agency customer number letter by completing an MR36 form, which is available from motor vehicle registration offices, eg New Zealand Post or AA offices or online at <http://www.nzta.govt.nz/assets/resources/customer-number-request-form/docs/form-mr36.pdf>. An MR36 form should also be accompanied by a supporting official letter of confirmation on the mission or post letterhead signed by an authorised officer and bearing the seal of the mission or post. The application form and accompanying letter should then be forwarded directly to the NZ Transport Agency, Private Bag 11-777, Palmerston North, or emailed using the interactive MR36 form on the website.

11.3.5 Standard Import Requirements

All new or used motor vehicles imported into New Zealand, including those eligible for Diplomatic/Consular/Official staff licensing, must comply with New Zealand safety standards, certification and registration requirements.

Diplomatic, Consular or Official staff wishing to import a motor vehicle (new or used) are strongly advised to familiarise themselves thoroughly with these requirements prior to purchase for importation of a particular vehicle and to ensure the vehicle they wish to import is compliant with these standards and requirements. A vehicle which does not meet the specified standards may not be registered for use in New Zealand. Information about the requirements may be obtained direct from NZ Transport Agency. Website: www.nzta.govt.nz.

Vehicles will be inspected on arrival for compliance and may also be subject to biosecurity requirements such as quarantine/cleaning.

Please note that all costs associated with these procedures must be met by the importer.

11.3.6 Local Registration and Licensing

Vehicles eligible for Diplomatic/Consular/Official staff licensing must also be registered and licensed under standard local requirements.

Registration occurs when a vehicle is added to the Motor Vehicle Register for the first time. A vehicle can only be registered after prior inspection to ensure roadworthiness (see compliance requirements above).

Vehicle licensing requires payment of an annual fee for the use of a motor vehicle/motorcycle on public roads. Vehicles eligible for Diplomatic/Consular/Official staff licensing are entitled to an exemption of a small portion of the fee which does not relate to the Accident Compensation (ACC) levy. When a vehicle is licensed, a label is issued indicating the licence's expiry date, which must be displayed on the vehicle. The law requires a vehicle to be licensed at all times.

Owners of diesel-powered vehicles are required to purchase a road user charges licence in order to operate their vehicle legally. Diesel-powered vehicles eligible for Diplomatic/Consular/Official staff licensing are exempt from the diesel road user charges.

11.3.7 Warrant of Fitness (WoF)

All motor vehicles are required to hold a valid Warrant of Fitness (WoF) at all times. This involves six-monthly or 12-monthly roadworthiness inspection or for new vehicles the first WoF is for three years. If the vehicle passes the inspection, it is issued with a WoF label valid for six or 12 months or three years (depending on the age of the vehicle), which must be displayed on the windscreen. There is no exemption for the costs of obtaining a WoF.

11.3.8 Left-hand Drive Vehicles

Only certain categories of left-hand drive (LHD) vehicles may be registered for operation on New Zealand roads. A special category has been established for vehicles owned by officers of missions or posts assigned to serve in New Zealand, provided the vehicle is re-exported at the conclusion of an assignment. This exempted category has been provided to assist officers who are transferring from a country where they have owned a LHD vehicle and who, following their assignment in New Zealand, will export the vehicle to a country where LHD vehicles are required. This exemption is only available for a vehicle owned/operated privately by an individual officer, not for a vehicle owned/operated by the mission or post for official purposes.

To register and drive a LHD vehicle in New Zealand, NZ Transport Agency will require confirmation by the mission or post that the owner has been posted to New Zealand and advice of the country from which he or she has been transferred. The owner must pay any costs involved in meeting New Zealand safety standards to register the vehicle.

If a LHD vehicle entered under this exempted category is not subsequently exported on termination of the officer's assignment, it must be converted to a right-hand drive before being sold in New Zealand.

NB: Such conversion can be expensive and in some cases may not be feasible. It is important therefore that officers are made fully aware of these conditions and encouraged to seek advice from NZ Transport Agency before a LHD vehicle is shipped to New Zealand. Specific information on LHD vehicle requirements is provided by NZ Transport Agency on Factsheet No. 12 available on website www.nzta.govt.nz.

11.4 Purchase of a Vehicle in New Zealand

11.4.1 Individual Officer

Application should be made for Diplomatic/Consular/Official staff licensing of a vehicle purchased in New Zealand using form MFA 609 and sending it to Protocol Division. It will take three working days for licence plates to be ready at Vehicle Testing NZ.

There is no Goods and Services Tax (GST) exemption on new or used vehicles purchased locally in New Zealand.

To meet local requirements, the following additional procedures must be followed:

- Ensure the vehicle has:
 - a Warrant of Fitness (WOF) that is not more than one month old;
 - a current vehicle licence (registration).
- Complete the change of ownership form MR13B and present it to an agent of NZ Transport Agency (New Zealand Post or AA Office) within seven days of buying the vehicle.
- Produce a New Zealand driver's licence or some form of identification that includes the buyer's name, signature and date of birth. (*Vehicles for official use require the NZ Transport Agency's card or letter at this point – see para 11.3.4*).
- Or you can complete an MR13B online at www.nzta.govt.nz/online-services/ if you have a New Zealand drivers licence.
- Ask the agent for a change of ownership card to prove to the seller that the ownership has changed.
- Retain the new Certificate of Registration, which will be mailed within 10 days, in a safe place.

NB: Vehicle ownership details are a matter of public record in New Zealand. Any member of the public may obtain the ownership details of any vehicle on request. For this reason MFAT recommends that individual officers use the address of the mission or post when registering their motor vehicles.

11.4.2 Official Vehicles

For the purchase of vehicles in New Zealand by missions or posts for official use, all the above procedures for individual officer should be followed, except that in place of a new owner's personal identification for the purposes of the purchase, the mission or post's NZ Transport Agency card should be used (see para 11.3.4 above for information on the card).

11.4.3 Purchase of a Motor Vehicle from Another Privileged Person

When purchasing a motor vehicle from another privileged person, form MFA 611 must be completed and sent to Protocol Division (on behalf of the seller) as well as form MFA 609 (on behalf of the purchaser). Please indicate on the form whether the same plates wish to be retained (if from the same mission or post). To complete the change of ownership details, the purchaser must complete

form MR13B “Notice by Person Acquiring a Motor Vehicle” (obtained from VTNZ or NZ Post), present identification and pay the appropriate fee at the VTNZ office.

Where an imported vehicle that has been exempt from GST is sold or the ownership is transferred to another person eligible for Diplomatic/Consular/Official staff privileges, who does not already own the maximum number of GST-exempted vehicles permitted under the provisions above, no GST will be payable unless/until the vehicle is subsequently sold or otherwise transferred to an ineligible person within three years from the original date of import. For sale/transfer to another privileged person, an MFA 611 form must be completed and sent to the Protocol Division, at the same time as the form MFA 609.

11.5 Sale, Export or Disposal of a Motor Vehicle

11.5.1 Approval

Prior approval of Protocol Division is required before a Diplomatic/Consular/Official staff licensed motor vehicle is sold or otherwise disposed of in New Zealand, or ceases to be wholly the property of the sending government while in New Zealand, or ceases to be retained solely for the personal use of the privileged person. An application to sell or export a Diplomatic/Consular/Official staff licensed motor vehicle must be made on form MFA 611.

11.5.2 Return of Licence Plates

Diplomatic/Consular/Official staff licence plates must be returned to:

- Vehicle Testing New Zealand (VTNZ) 162 Thorndon Quay, Wellington; or
- AA Technical, 419 Great South Road, Penrose, Auckland; or
- AA Technical, Corner Brougham and Buchan Streets, Christchurch.

A vehicle that is to be exported, rather than sold, must first be de-registered. After advising Protocol Division using form MFA 611, an MR15 form ‘Application to Cancel Registration of a Motor Vehicle’ should be completed. De-registration can be completed at an AA or VTNZ Centre when the Diplomatic/Consular/Official staff licence plates are returned.

11.5.3 GST Assessment on Sale of Imported Vehicles

For an imported vehicle that has been exempt from GST and is to be sold into the local market, GST payable is assessed on the depreciated value of the vehicle. A GST-exempt vehicle sold or otherwise disposed of within the first 12 months of ownership will be subject to full GST calculated on its entry value. Where a vehicle is sold or otherwise disposed of after one year, GST will be reduced by 1/24th for each complete month of ownership in excess of 12 months. After three years of ownership, no GST is payable. Any questions concerning these provisions should be referred to the New Zealand Customs Service. If an imported vehicle, that has been exempt from GST, is to be exported out of New Zealand, no GST is payable to the New Zealand Customs Service.

11.5.4 Sale of a Motor Vehicle to Another Privileged Person

Where an imported vehicle that has been exempted from GST is sold or its ownership is otherwise transferred to another person eligible for Diplomatic/Consular/Official staff privileges, who does not already own the maximum number of GST-exempt vehicles permitted under the provisions above, no GST will be payable unless/until the vehicle is subsequently sold or otherwise transferred to an ineligible person within three years from the original date of import. For sale/transfer to another privileged person, an MFA 611 form must be completed and sent to Protocol Division.

11.5.5 Local Change of Ownership Requirements

In addition to completion of the MFA 611 form for the Protocol Division, the following procedures should be followed to meet local requirements:

- Ensure the vehicle has a Warrant of Fitness (WoF) that is not more than one month old and a current vehicle licence;
- complete the tear-off bottom portion of the Certificate of Registration with the new owner's details and Post it directly to the NZ Transport Agency Registry Centre, Private Bag, Palmerston North, within seven days of selling the vehicle;
- give the remaining portion of the Certificate to the new owner;
- wait for the buyer to bring a change of ownership card, issued by an agent of the NZ Transport Agency, before handing the vehicle over. This is for the seller's protection, to ensure the change of ownership is completed;
- return the Diplomatic/Consular/Official staff licence plates to the VTNZ or AA Technical Office.

11.6 Replacement of Damaged or Stolen Vehicles

The replacement of an imported vehicle, which has been exempt from GST, either owned officially or by an individual officer, may be approved by MFAT under the following exceptional circumstances:

- If the vehicle is involved in an accident and certified by the insurance company concerned to be beyond repair;
- if the vehicle is written off in a natural disaster situation;
- if the vehicle is stolen, verified by a formal Police report.

GST is payable in respect of the depreciated value of the wrecked or stolen vehicle. Missions/posts and individual officers are advised, therefore, to insure vehicles for a market value that is GST-inclusive, against such an eventuality.

For GST purposes, the period of ownership of the replacement vehicle shall commence from the date of registration of the replacement vehicle. Protocol Division should be advised immediately should a vehicle be irreparably damaged or stolen.

11.7 Leased Vehicles

Vehicles leased by missions/posts or individual officers should be registered under the name of the mission/post or individual officer, and not the leasing company's name. Application for Diplomatic/Consular/Official staff licensing may be made at the beginning of a lease in the same way, and under the same conditions, as for the local purchase of a vehicle, using form MFA 609. Registering a vehicle in the Motor Vehicle Register under the mission/individual officer's name is not a record of legal ownership. Legal ownership is held with documents such as the sale and purchase agreement by the lease company. It is therefore possible for that leased vehicle to be registered in a diplomat's name under 'diplomatic privilege'.

Likewise, at the end of a lease, the same procedures should be followed to terminate Diplomatic/Consular/Official staff licensing as for sale or disposal of an owned vehicle (form MFA 611).

11.8 Ordinary Licence Plates

Prior approval of Protocol Division is required if any mission, post, diplomat, consular officer or family member wishes to register a motor vehicle with standard registration plates. Approval will only be granted in special circumstances. If standard plates are authorised:

- full motor vehicle registration fees must be paid;
- motor spirits refunds will not be available; and
- vehicles will not be permitted to use designated DC/CC/FC car parking.

11.9 New Zealand Drivers' Licences

It is compulsory for every person to have in his or her possession a valid driver's licence while driving.

Under the New Zealand Transport (Driver Licensing) Rule 1999, all members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps and their Private Domestic Staff arriving in New Zealand will, on application, be issued a New Zealand driver's licence, provided they hold:

- a valid driver's licence or permit issued to the person, after the person has produced proof of his/her driving competence, by an overseas authority, or an agent of that authority, authorised to issue a driver's licence or permit.

11.9.1 Application for a New Zealand Driver's Licence

Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps and Private Domestic Staff who hold a valid foreign licence and wish to drive in New Zealand should apply for a New Zealand driver's licence as soon as possible after arrival, but no later than 12 months after arrival.

Application under this special provision may be made at one of the following offices:

- Automobile Association (AA) Office, Level 1, 342 Lambton Quay, Wellington
- Automobile Association (AA) Office, 99 Albert Street, Auckland
- Automobile Association (AA) Office, 210 Hereford Street, Christchurch

All enquiries should be directed to the AA offices above, and not the AA 0800 telephone number.

The following documentation is required:

- a completed driver's licence application form;
- a valid driver's licence, as described above (translations must be provided if the foreign licence is not in English and the original must be sighted);
- diplomatic/consular or official Identity Card; and
- diplomatic/official passport (standard passport showing work visa, or an eVisa, for Private Domestic Staff);
- For Private Domestic Staff, a letter issued by Protocol Division is also required.

It is necessary to take photocopies of the documents above, otherwise a fee will be charged for photocopying.

Theory and practical tests are not required for persons who hold a valid licence as described above, but all applicants must pass the required eye test.

The New Zealand driver's licence will be issued, free of charge, for the same class or classes of vehicle authorised by the current foreign licence.

11.9.2 Expiry of a New Zealand Driver's Licence

New Zealand licences issued under special provision to staff members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps, family members and Private Domestic Staff will expire on:

- the completion of a posting, or the termination of the employment of the licence holder or relevant family member of the licence holder as a member of the staff of a mission or post or as Private Domestic Staff of such a member; or
- the expiry of four years following the date of issue of the licence; or
- the transmission of notification to the relevant mission or post through MFAT that the licence has been cancelled or revoked; or
- the making of an order disqualifying the person from holding or obtaining a driver's licence.

11.9.3 Renewal of a New Zealand Driver's Licence

If circumstances arise in which an officer of a mission or post holding a New Zealand driver's licence issued under the conditions described above will be continuing on assignment in New Zealand beyond the expiry date of that licence, the licence may be renewed until the revised end date of the assignment. The officer should follow the instructions above in paragraph 11.9.1 and take his/her identity card, with the renewed date on it, and passport (containing the extended visa label in it, or electronic visa) (including photocopies) to the AA Office for renewal of his/her licence until the revised end date of the assignment.

11.9.4 New Drivers

Those who do not hold a valid overseas driver's licence or who have never previously held a driver's licence are required to undertake written and practical driving tests to acquire a New Zealand driver's licence before driving in New Zealand. The fees for all tests, including the driver's licence fee, are payable by the applicant.

11.9.5 Temporary Assignments

Officers who come to New Zealand on temporary assignment may drive in New Zealand on a valid foreign licence or international driving permit for up to 12 months.

11.9.6 New Zealand Road Code

All members of the corps who expect to drive in New Zealand must familiarise themselves with the 'New Zealand Road Code' which can be purchased from most major bookstores, and which is available on the NZ Transport Agency's website www.nzta.govt.nz.

11.10 Parking

Refer to Chapter 19.

11.11 Motor Vehicle Insurance

Although motor vehicle insurance is not compulsory in New Zealand, MFAT strongly advises all Diplomatic/Consular/Official staff licensed motor vehicles, both official and individually owned, to be insured to cover theft, damage or accidents, including third party cover.

11.12 Refund of Motor Spirits Excise Duty

Refer to Chapter 16 for details on the refund of motor spirits excise duty.

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