

14 February 2023

Requesters name redacted for proactive release

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OIA 28498

Tēnā koe Requesters name redacted for
proactive release

I refer to your email of 24 January 2023 addressed to Minister Mahuta, in which you request the following under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA):

I am interested to please know if it is possible in the ministry of foreign affairs for there to be a situation where a High Commissioner or Ambassador has a spouse / partner / family member working at the same embassy or high commission as the head of administration.

Could you please advise:

- 1. If this situation is possible in the ministry of foreign affairs?*
- 2. If it is possible, how many cases are there of this in the ministry?*
- 3. If it is possible, can the audit person approve expenditure and financial transactions for their partner / family member (ie the high commissioner / ambassador)?*
- 4. If yes to 3, what audit or regulatory steps have been taken by the ministry to ensure corruption or conflict of interest doesn't occur. How are these documented and recorded?*

If there are no such situations where family members are working in administrative responsibilities, is this a deliberate policy decision by the audit department or human resources section of the ministry? If so, when was this decision made? Any material you may have background on this would be helpful to understand if / how this occurs.

On 30 January 2023, you were advised that your request was being transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (the Ministry) as your request falls within the Ministry's responsibilities.

In answer to your questions, this situation is possible within the Ministry, with one case being active. In this case, and in other situations where a personal or family relationship exists between a direct report and their manager, reporting lines are changed to prevent an actual or perceived conflict of interest arising, meaning that it is not possible for a person who approves expenditure to approve expenditure for a partner or family member.

As it is not possible for a person approving expenditure to "approve expenditure and financial transactions for their partner / family member (i.e. the high commissioner / ambassador)" your fourth question is refused under section 18(e) of the OIA, as the information requested does not exist. However, all reported conflicts of interest and the mitigations are filed in the HR only section of the individuals personnel file.

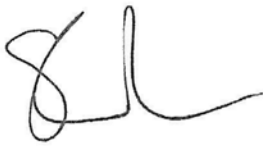
Please find linked below the Ministry's code of conduct, which includes information on our conflict of interest measures:

<https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/Aid-Prog-docs/Code-of-Conduct-2013-with-cover.pdf>

Please note that we may publish this letter (with your personal details redacted) on the Ministry's website.

If you have any questions about this decision, you can contact us by email at: DM-ESD@mfat.govt.nz. You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision by contacting www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SC', written in a cursive style.

Sarah Corbett
for Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade