

24 June 2024

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OIA 29374

I refer to your email of 16 May 2024 in which you request the following under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA):

Under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA), I request access to documents related to any diplomatic discussions between New Zealand and the Netherlands about the possibility of New Zealand drivers license holders living in the Netherlands being granted the entitlement to exchange their New Zealand drivers licenses for a Dutch one.

Specifically, I request access to the following:

- 1. records of any discussions between the MFAT and the relevant Dutch authorities about the potential establishment of a reciprocal agreement for the exchange of drivers licenses*
- 2. records of any discussions between MFAT and the Dutch government in which MFAT has advocated for New Zealand license holders to be allowed to exchange their licenses for a Dutch license - when was this discussion initiated, which Dutch government departments were involved in the discussions, and what were the outcomes*
- 3. records of any documents that identify potential barriers to the Netherlands adopting such a policy, or an explanation of why holders of Dutch licenses are permitted to exchange their Dutch licenses for a New Zealand license, but New Zealanders are not extended the same courtesy in the Netherlands*

On 14 June 2024, the timeframes for responding to your request were extended by an additional 10 working days due to the consultations necessary to make a decision on your request (section 15A(1)(b) of the OIA refers).

Parts 1 and 2 of your request are refused under section 18(e) of the OIA, as the information requested does not exist.

Regarding part 3 of your request for internal correspondence. The majority of the information in scope of this part of your request is withheld under the following sections of the OIA:

- 6(a): to avoid prejudicing the security or defence of New Zealand or the international relations of the New Zealand Government.
- 9(2)(g)(i): to protect the free and frank expression of opinions by departments.

Therefore, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (the Ministry) has decided to provide the following summary of the information in scope of this part of your request (section 16(1)(e) of the OIA refers):

Reciprocal Driver Licence Agreement with the Netherlands

- Unilateral driver licence agreements are when foreign licence holders are exempt from driver licence testing requirements in New Zealand, however New Zealand licence holders are not reciprocally exempt.
- A large number of the unilateral agreements in our legislation were established either when the Rule was established in 1999 or when the Rule was amended in 2008. The focus at this time was on processing high volumes of foreign licence holders. The process in more recent years looks to establish reciprocal agreements with foreign jurisdictions.
- We acknowledge the value reciprocal driver licence agreements provide in enabling New Zealanders to drive in other countries.
- Considerations for pursuing a reciprocal driver licence agreement include, among others, the number of New Zealanders who live in the country in question, the level of interest from the other country, and whether an agreement supports other bilateral cooperation.
- Since 2020, the Netherlands' government has taken a more restrictive policy to new reciprocal driver licence applications. It has said that this is due to the extensive resource and time involved:
(https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven_regering/detail?id=2021Z19034&did=2021D40836).
- In New Zealand, only a certain number of agreements are able to be progressed each year. While a reciprocal driver licence agreement with the Netherlands was not prioritised for the 2023-2024 work programme, establishing a reciprocal agreement with the Netherlands remains a consideration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in consultation with the Ministry of Transport, the New Zealand Transport Agency, and the Netherlands government.

Please note that it is our policy to proactively release our responses to official information requests where possible. Therefore, our response to your request (with your personal information removed) may be published on the Ministry website: www.mfat.govt.nz/en/about-us/contact-us/official-information-act-responses/

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 Acting Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade