

5 September 2025

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Thank you for your email of 4 August 2025, transferred from the New Zealand Transport Agency on 7 August 2025, in which you request the following under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA):

- "1. *Has the New Zealand Government formally sought a reciprocal driver licence exchange agreement with Italy?*
o If so, when were such requests made, and to which Italian authorities were they directed?
o Please provide copies of any relevant correspondence, diplomatic communications, meeting notes, or internal briefings.
2. *Has Italy provided any rationale or explanation for not offering reciprocal treatment to New Zealand licence holders?*
o If so, please include any relevant documentation or summaries.
3. *When was this issue last raised by New Zealand officials with their Italian counterparts?*
o Please specify the forum or context (e.g. bilateral meetings, embassy-level discussions, or ministerial contact), and include any available details or records.
4. *What role, if any, has the New Zealand Embassy in Rome played in raising or progressing this issue?*
o Are there plans for the Embassy to pursue this matter further?
5. *Has the New Zealand Government undertaken any comparative analysis of Italy's agreements with other countries such as Brazil and Morocco in relation to mutual driver licence recognition?*
o If so, I would appreciate access to any relevant reports or assessments.
6. *Are there any current or planned efforts by MFAT or other agencies to progress an agreement with Italy on driver licence reciprocity?"*

This OIA was also transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) by the Ministry of Transport on the 8 August 2025.

On 11 August 2025, MFAT contacted you to discuss the scope of your request because as it was originally framed it captured a significant volume of information. On 11 August 2025, you agreed to refine the scope of your request to be for:

provided that each answer is accompanied by any relevant supporting documents, summaries, or extracts that are readily available, rather than newly created. This should avoid unnecessary collation while still providing meaningful context.

Part one

- "1. Has the New Zealand Government formally sought a reciprocal driver licence exchange agreement with Italy?*
- 2. Has Italy provided any rationale or explanation for not offering reciprocal treatment to New Zealand licence holders?*
- 3. When was this issue last raised by New Zealand officials with their Italian counterparts?*
- 4. What role, if any, has the New Zealand Embassy in Rome played in raising or progressing this issue?*
- 5. Has the New Zealand Government undertaken any comparative analysis of Italy's agreements with other countries such as Brazil and Morocco in relation to mutual driver licence recognition?*
- 6. Are there any current or planned efforts by MFAT or other agencies to progress an agreement with Italy on driver licence reciprocity?*

Additional EU-level context and questions

I understand that Italy's position on reciprocal driver licence exchanges may be influenced by developments at the European Union level. The European Commission has reached provisional agreement on a revised Driving Licence Directive, which will introduce an implementing act establishing a list of third countries whose driver licences, when exchanged for EU licences, will be recognised across all EU Member States. Inclusion on this list could have a direct impact on New Zealand licence holders' ability to secure reciprocity with Italy and other EU Member States.

Part two

Accordingly, I also request:

- 7. What is MFAT's current understanding of the revised Driving Licence Directive and its implications for New Zealand in relation to EU-wide driver licence reciprocity?*
 - 8. What contact has the New Zealand Government made with the European Commission, other EU institutions, or relevant EU Member State representatives regarding inclusion in the implementing act's list of eligible third countries?*
 - 9. Please provide a summary of any such discussions or engagement between New Zealand officials and EU institutions, including key dates, participants, and outcomes, based on readily available records.*
 - 10. Has the New Zealand Government undertaken any internal or commissioned assessment of New Zealand's road safety framework against the EU's equivalency criteria for reciprocity? If so, please provide any relevant summaries or reports.*
 - 11. Has the possibility of coordinated advocacy with other third countries (e.g. Australia, Canada) been considered or discussed? If so, please provide any readily available documentation.*
 - 12. If no such engagement or analysis has yet occurred, are there current or planned efforts by MFAT or other agencies to pursue this matter at the EU level?*
- Additional strategic and planning-related questions*

13. *Has MFAT or NZTA conducted any gap analysis identifying specific changes New Zealand would need to make to meet the EU's "road safety framework" criteria for inclusion in the implementing act list?*

14. *Has MFAT identified any upcoming EU legislative or diplomatic timelines (e.g., finalisation of the implementing act) that present opportunities for New Zealand to engage on this issue?*

15. *Has MFAT considered leveraging existing bilateral agreements with other EU Member States (outside the EU-wide framework) as an interim step while seeking inclusion in the implementing act list?*

16. *Has MFAT or the New Zealand Embassy in Brussels developed a strategy, position paper, or advocacy plan specifically targeting EU decision-makers on driver licence reciprocity? If so, please provide any summaries that are readily available."*

The response to your request has been split into two parts, as set out above. Part one includes MFAT's response to questions 1 - 6 and part two includes MFAT's response to questions 7 -16.

Response to part one of your request

New Zealand formally requested an agreement with Italy on driver licence reciprocity in April 2016. Attached is the original tasking formal message to the New Zealand Embassy in Rome, sent in April 2016. Some information in this formal message is out of scope of this request and has been marked as such.

MFAT is not aware of any rationale or explanation for not offering reciprocal treatment to New Zealand licence holders. The issue of reciprocal driver licence recognition has been raised informally with Italy over the ensuing years with two illustrative examples provided below. Some information is withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the OIA, to protect individuals' privacy. Where the information has been withheld under section 9 of the OIA, no public interest in releasing the information has been identified that would override the reasons for withholding it.

New Zealand and Italy held Foreign Ministry Consultations on 28 October 2019 in Rome. Relevant excerpts from reporting on those consultations:

ROM/EUR [Action for New Zealand Embassy, Rome, and Europe Division] follow up on discussions on drivers' license recognition in due course (para 35).

[...]

35 HOM [Head of Mission] sought an update on the long-standing request for recognition of New Zealand Driver's Licenses in Italy, noting that Italian licenses had been accepted in New Zealand for many years, and providing further information on New Zealand's driver licensing systems to help expedite Italy's consideration, [withheld under s 9(2)(a)] committed to seeking an update from the relevant domestic authorities.

New Zealand and Italy also held Foreign Ministry Consultations on 7 October 2022 in Rome, where Driver Licence Agreement negotiations were discussed. Relevant excerpts from reporting on those consultations:

EUR/NZTA – to note the discussion of driver licence recognition (para 5)

[...]

5 Both sides noted the opportunities to strengthen relations by concluding bilateral agreements. DM EUR [Head of MFAT Europe Division] ... asked about prospects for securing recognition of New Zealand **driver licences**. Italian officials suggested this was worth pursuing, and encouraged engagement with Italy's Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport who were responsible for the issue. Officials offered to facilitate contact with the relevant diplomatic adviser (comment: a seconded career diplomat) to take this forward once the new government was formed. (Comment: Post has submitted the background information requested on New Zealand's drivers licencing system to the relevant Italian officials – our thanks to MoT for this – and are now preparing translations and will follow up as suggested with the diplomatic adviser in the coming weeks).

Italy is committed to negotiating a reciprocal driver's license agreement with New Zealand. The relevant technical agencies (led by Ministry of Transport and New Zealand Transport Agency for New Zealand) have exchanged draft texts of the proposed agreement. The most recent version of the draft agreement, with comments from the New Zealand side was provided to Italy, in April 2025 via the New Zealand Embassy in Rome. MFAT is currently awaiting a response from Italy to the latest draft. Attached is the latest email conveying draft texts to the Italian Government. Some information 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)(a): to protect individuals' privacy; and
- 9(2)(j): to avoid prejudice to negotiations.

Where the information has been withheld under section 9 of the OIA, no public interest in releasing the information has been identified that would override the reasons for withholding it.

MFAT is not aware of any comparative analysis of Italy's agreements with other countries such as Brazil and Morocco in relation to mutual driver licence recognition.

Response to part two of your request

New Zealand recognises 15 EU Member state driver licences – Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden. Of these, seven are unilateral recognition (the Member state does not recognise New Zealand licences in return – these are Belgium, Finland, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, and Sweden).

New Zealand is in discussions with the EU regarding its revision of Directive 2006/126/EC on driving licences. Our understanding is that it will provide a new opportunity for third countries to achieve mutual recognition of driver licences with all EU members at one time. New Zealand has registered interest in being a third country with the EU Delegation to New Zealand and the Directorate General for Mobility and Transport (DG MOVE) in Brussels. This has been recorded in the minutes of the EU-NZ Partnership Agreement on Relations and Cooperation Joint Committee meeting (PARC) in 2024 as follows.

Excerpt from PARC Minutes May 2024:

38 Parties discussed progress on **Driver License Agreements (DLAs)**, with the EU calling for further progress on mutual recognition of driving licences. New Zealand had mutual recognition arrangements with 6 Member States: Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Portugal, Spain; and recognized unilaterally 6 Member States: Belgium, Finland, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands and Sweden. The EU side informed about an upcoming adoption of the EU global framework for the exchange of foreign driving licenses. The EU considered that New Zealand could be a good candidate for the implementation of this new system. The EU side proposed a meeting with relevant competent authorities to discuss the basics of the new framework and the progress on the DLAs.

New Zealand held a technical meeting to learn more about the process with technical experts from DG MOVE in September 2024.

Currently, New Zealand is waiting for the European Commission to be ready to begin the process for third countries to achieve mutual recognition. First, the European Parliament and Council must formally adopt the Directive. MFAT expects this could happen by the end of the year, although this timing will depend on when technical finalisation is completed and how the file is prioritised compared with other Directives.

Both sides can then start sharing information to confirm compatibility of each other's road transport frameworks. MFAT understands this process should take around 6 months.

Once compatibility is confirmed, the final decision is adopted by the European Commission. Recognition of New Zealand driver licences will then begin in each EU Member State once they have adopted this implementing decision. The deadline for Member States to adopt the decision is 4 years from formal adoption - the same as the transposition period. If the implementing decision were to happen in June 2026, mutual recognition would commence no later than June 2030 in any EU Member State.

The New Zealand Government has not assessed the New Zealand road safety framework against the EU criteria as yet.

MFAT does not judge that conducting advocacy with other third countries would be beneficial at this time. As far as MFAT is aware, no advocacy paper exists.

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 Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade