



16 February 2024

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Tēnā koe

OIA request 23/24 0457 Request for information on false passports

Thank you for your Official Information Act (Act) request received by the Department of Internal Affairs (Department) on 16 December 2023.

You requested –

- 1. Please can you supply all reports/advice reviewing the extent to which authorities are detecting use/supply of false/fake New Zealand passports or drivers' licenses in New Zealand, by New Zealand citizens/residents and the increase or decrease of this practice against historic norms.*
- 2. If possible please supply information pertaining the occasions where false/fake passports or drivers' licenses will be used/supplied.*

As advised by email on 12 January 2024, the information that you requested regarding drivers' licences was transferred to the Waka Kotahi - New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) in accordance with section 14(b) of the Act. This is because the information you have requested is not held by the Department, but is believed to be held by, and more closely related to the functions of NZTA.

As per the decision letter sent to you on 2 February 2024 an answer was provided for question two and pursuant to 15A(1)(b) of the Act, we advised that we would provide the remainder of the information requested but were working to prepare it for release. This extended the timeframe for response by 10 working days, making the due date for your response to the 16 February 2024.

Your remaining request was confirmed as -

Please can you supply all reports/advice reviewing the extent to which authorities are detecting use/supply of false/fake New Zealand passports or drivers' licenses in New Zealand, by New Zealand citizens/residents and the increase or decrease of this practice against historic norms.

In response to the remainder of your request, I can provide you with the following information.

It may be helpful for me to explain that the detection of a fraudulent New Zealand passport (by the Department) is alerted to us via different channels. We can be informed internally (from our own organisation) or by various external government agencies e.g. the New Zealand police, Customs, Interpol etc, or by members of the public.

There are three definitions in which the Department defines fraudulent use of a passport -

1. Counterfeit - A document that purports to be a legitimate passport produced by the lawful authority but has in fact been entirely created by someone else.
2. Forged - A genuine passport that has been altered, for example a new photo has been improperly added to the passport.
3. False - False passport cases involve passports applied for or obtained through an individual falsely representing themselves as being someone they are not. A false passport is one where the passport has been obtained by false representation. In other words, the document issued is genuine, there have been no unauthorised alterations, but the holder is claiming to be someone they are not. As an example, a person who attempts to obtain a passport issued in the identity of a deceased person is trying to gain a false passport.

The Department collates the usage of counterfeit, forged or false New Zealand passports by New Zealand citizens or permanent residents **together** with others who are not NZ citizens. The data is not separated depending on the citizenship or residency status of the individual. However, we are not necessarily made aware of all cases of counterfeit or forged documents. In many cases the individual presenting the document is simply denied the service they are seeking (for example, they may be denied entry to a bar if presenting a clearly forged or counterfeit document).

New Zealand has the lowest fraud rate of our partner countries (Australia, Canada, United States of America, United Kingdom and Ireland). For 2023, 11 cases of fraud were detected, representing 0.0023% of the 472,872 passports issued.

I can also advise that the Department has active cases before the courts. However, the details of these cases must be withheld pursuant to section 6(c) of the Act. This is because the making available of that information would be likely to prejudice the maintenance of the law, including the prevention, investigation, and detection of offences, and the right to a fair trial.

As this information may be of interest to other members of the public, the Department has decided to proactively release a copy of this response on the DIA website. All requestor data, including your name and contact details, will be removed prior to release. The released response will be made available here: <https://www.dia.govt.nz/Official-Information-Act-Requests-2>.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'J' followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Julia Taylor
Manager Operational Policy and Official Correspondence
Service Delivery and Operations