



24 September 2020

Erin Zheng

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File No: DOIA 2021 – 0240

Dear Erin Zheng

Thank you for your email on 30 July 2020, requesting the following information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the OIA):

- 1. May I have the numbers of SMC and WTR applications which are still waiting case officers? Please breakdown the numbers to each month based on the lodgement date from Dec 2018 to July 2020.*
- 2. According to [https://mbienz.shinyapps.io/migration\\_data\\_explorer/](https://mbienz.shinyapps.io/migration_data_explorer/) there were a total of 4992 WTR and SMC applications accepted in June 2020. Could you please let me know how many of these applications allocated to the general queue and how many of them allocated to the priority queue? And also can I have the numbers for each queue accepted in July?*
- 3. How many applications from the general queues allocated to a case officer during July 2020? How many applications from the priority queue allocated to a case officer during July 2020?*
- 4. May I have the total number of SMC and WTR applications that currently in queue waiting for a case officer?*
- 5. Will INZ consider to resume EOI before the huge backlog cleared?*

#### **Our response**

Please note that a work to residence application is a temporary entry class visa application. However, it appears that you are seeking information under the Residence from Work Category (RfW), which is the way that a person applies for a resident visa having held a work to residence temporary entry class visa. Therefore, our response includes information relating to both Skilled Migrant Category (SMC) and RfW applications.

Please also note that over the last couple of years, demand for the SMC and RfW has risen significantly. This has resulted in longer decision times for applicants. The general instructions contained in A16.1 of the Operational Manual set out the order of visa processing for both residence

and temporary entry class visa applications. For those applicants who have submitted a skilled residence application (SMC or RfW), priority is given to applicants in New Zealand and where the:

- Application includes a job offer with an hourly rate equivalent to or higher than twice the median wage (currently \$51.00 per hour or an annual salary of \$106,080 or more); or
- Applicant holds current occupational registration as required by immigration instructions

The remaining applications are processed in the order they are received.

The INZ website remains the best place for up to date information on processing times.

*1. May I have the numbers of SMC and WTR applications which are still waiting case officers? Please breakdown the numbers to each month based on the lodgement date from Dec 2018 to July 2020.*

As at 25 August 2020, there are 14,592 SMC and RfW applications in the queue which are lodged but unallocated.

Please find below the number of SMC and RfW applications in the queue which are lodged but unallocated broken down by month based on the lodgement date from Dec 2018 to July 2020, as at 25 August 2020.

Month accepted	Number of Applications
2018-12	4
2019-01	33
2019-02	327
2019-03	507
2019-04	561
2019-05	596
2019-06	582
2019-07	982
2019-08	858
2019-09	773
2019-10	890
2019-11	937
2019-12	932
2020-01	750
2020-02	1,172
2020-03	1,138
2020-04	123
2020-05	1,863
2020-06	1,313
2020-07	251

*2. According to [https://mbienz.shinyapps.io/migration\\_data\\_explorer/](https://mbienz.shinyapps.io/migration_data_explorer/) there were a total of 4992 WTR and SMC applications accepted in June 2020. Could you please let me know how many of these applications allocated to the general queue and how many of them allocated to the priority queue? And also can I have the numbers for each queue accepted in July?*

It appears that you have the incorrect information when you referred to a total of 4,992 skilled residence applications lodged in June 2020.

Please find below the SMC and RfW applications lodged in June 2020 broken down by general queue and priority queue:

Type of Queue	Number of Applications
*Allocated to Officer	164
*Decided but not completed	181
General Queue	1,865
Priority	4
Total	2214

Please find below the SMC and RfW applications lodged in July 2020 broken down by general queue and priority queue:

Type of Queue	Number of Applications
*Allocated to Officer	122
*Decided but not completed	134
General Queue	1311
Priority	0
Total	1567

\*INZ would need to manually check individual records in order to determine which queues 'Allocated to Officer' and 'Decided but not completed' were in.

Please note that:

- "Allocated to officer" means that the application is currently allocated to an immigration officer.
- "Decided but not completed" means that a decision was made through INZ's electronic system but the visa has not been issued. This may be because a quality check has to be undertaken, or passports need to be scanned.

As there are 601 applications where it is not clear if the application is in the general queue or priority queue, we are refusing this part of your request under section 18(f) of the OIA because the information requested cannot be made available without substantial collation or research.

We have considered consulting with you as required by section 18B of the OIA. However, the information you have requested is not held in a reportable format across the Ministry. To provide you with this information would require staff to manually review a large number of files which would remove ministry staff from their core duties, and therefore the greater public interest in effective and efficient administration of public service would not be served. I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your request given extra time or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in both cases, the Ministry's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

Please note that INZ can confirm that applications in the priority queue are now being allocated within two weeks of an application being put in the priority queue. While it is expected that INZ will continue to receive priority applications, the low volume of priority applications means INZ is now able to make steady and regular process through our general queue.

*3. How many applications from the general queues allocated to a case officer during July 2020? How many applications from the priority queue allocated to a case officer during July 2020?*

As at 27 July 2020, 50 applications were allocated from the general queue and 147 applications were allocated from the prioritised queue.

*4. May I have the total number of SMC and WTR applications that currently in queue waiting for a case officer?*

As provided in question 1, as at 25 August 2020, there are 14,592 SMC and RfW applications in the queue which are lodged but unallocated.

*5. Will INZ consider to resume EOI before the huge backlog cleared?*

There are currently ongoing discussions relating to the resumption of Expression of Interest selections under the SMC. I am not able to advise when a decision will be made on this matter.

You have the right to contest the decision to withhold information by seeking an investigation and review of that decision by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or freephone 0800 802 602.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of your request or this response, please contact Margaret Huang, Business Advisor, Operations Support, Immigration New Zealand at [Margaret.huang@mbie.govt.nz](mailto:Margaret.huang@mbie.govt.nz).

Yours sincerely



Steve McGill  
(Acting) General Manager – Border and Visa Operations  
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Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment