



15 APR 2024

Sam Malik  
fyi-request-26146-cad11be8@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Mr Malik

Thank you for your email of 19 March 2024 regarding New Zealand citizenship. I understand from your email that you have concerns about the presence requirement and current processing times for applications. You also requested information:

*“that outlines the reason why it’s necessary to have people wait and live as residents for 5 years before they can apply for citizenship here in NZ”.*

In response to your request I can advise that the grant of New Zealand citizenship is intended for people who wish to make a commitment to New Zealand. When the Citizenship Act 1977 (Act) was amended in 2005, Parliament considered that all applicants for a grant of citizenship should reside in New Zealand for long enough to demonstrate their commitment to the country and suitability for a grant of citizenship.

Transcripts of Parliament’s debates on the Identity (Citizenship and Travel Documents) Bill are publicly available on Parliament’s website [www.parliament.nz](http://www.parliament.nz) when ‘Identity (Citizenship and Travel Documents) Bill’ is entered in the search function. If you would like to request the Cabinet papers that supported this Bill, please contact the department directly at [OIA@dia.govt.nz](mailto:OIA@dia.govt.nz).

As the reasoning for the longer presence period is already publicly available, I am declining this part of your request under section 18(d) of the Official Information Act 1982; the information requested is or will soon be publicly available.

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](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or freephone 0800 802 602.

You also requested information on *“any changes on plate to be made”*. Any changes to the presence requirements for citizenship would require a law change. I must advise that there are currently no plans to amend the Act.

With regard to citizenship processing times, I have taken an active interest in citizenship since I became Minister. The grant of citizenship is a significant decision. Whilst I appreciate people want a decision made quickly, the legislation outlines the criteria that must be met.

The average timeframe for citizenship applications to be decided is just over six months; a significant number are decided in a short number of weeks, and a small number can take up to 18 months. This range is dictated by the applicant’s individual circumstances and all applications must meet the requirements set out in the Citizenship Act.

It is correct that some applications are processed quicker than others, which is often reflected in the comparisons people make. The Department applies a range of automated tests against the criteria to reduce processing times for all applications. Around 40% of applications can be assessed using predominantly automated checks, and in those cases the Department is able to complete assessment within two months. Applications that pass the automated checks are grouped together, and then processed based on the date they were received. The majority of staff processing citizenship applications are working on the earliest-submitted applications first and all applications must meet the requirements set out in the Citizenship Act.

A number of initiatives have been implemented over the past couple of years to improve citizenship processing, one of which is the increased use of the citizenship system's automated checking capabilities. The Department is continually refining its systems, reviewing processes, recruiting new staff and maintaining appropriate staffing levels.

Further information about current citizenship timeframes, application status, and the automated checks is available on the Department's website at [www.govt.nz](http://www.govt.nz) when 'citizenship timeframes' is entered in the search function.

I trust this information has been of assistance.

Thank you again for writing.

Yours sincerely,



Hon Brooke van Velden  
**Minister of Internal Affairs**